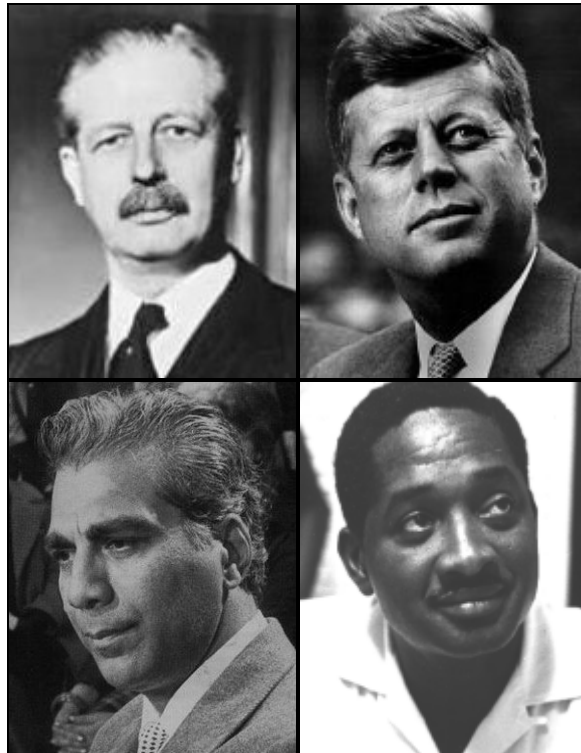


BUT NOT IN GUIANA:

*Why did the British Government support
American covert action in British Guiana from 1961-63?*



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at the London School of Economics and Political Science
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BUT NOT IN GUIANA

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Cover (Left to Right): U.K. Prime Minister Harold Macmillan; U.S. President John F. Kennedy Jr.; P.P.P. Leader Dr. Cheddi B. Jagan; P.N.C. Leader L.F.S. Burnham

Unavailable in web version of this document

Map reprinted from: Jagan, Cheddi B., *The West on Trial: My Fight for Guyana's freedom*,
(London: Michael Joseph Ltd., 1966).

BUT NOT IN GUIANA:

Why did the British Government support American covert action in British Guiana from 1961-63?

*To those new States whom we welcome to the ranks of the free, we
pledge our word that one form of colonial control shall not have
passed away merely to be replaced by a far more iron tyranny.*

U.S. President John F. Kennedy Jr., 20 January 1961¹

On 16 February 1962, trade unionists called a strike in the British Caribbean colony of Guiana. Demonstrations spread quickly throughout the capital, Georgetown, and deteriorated into deadly riots drawing world attention. In April of the following year, unions were again involved in starting a general strike, this time crippling the entire colony for 80 days.

The two disturbances were connected. Both strikes occurred within the context of a British and American fear that a local politician, Dr. Cheddi Bharat Jagan, and his People's Progressive Party (P.P.P.) would subvert the colony, if it became independent, to communist control. These fears were compounded by the reality of a volatile combination of racial hatred and nationalism. The 1962 riots provided the British imperial government, then under pressure from the United States government, with the justification it needed to delay national independence for unstable British Guiana, as well as time to moderate or replace Dr. Jagan and the P.P.P. After the 1962 crisis, American and British policy also underwent a substantial shift away from an uneasy tolerance of Jagan, towards the implementation of a joint plan to discredit and remove him. The 1963 riots provided an opportunity for British leaders to use

‘political instability’ as the excuse to force in a new electoral system which was sure to oust Jagan and the P.P.P. from power.

It has been alleged that these constitutional changes were part of an Anglo-American covert plot. Throughout the past forty years, newspapers, political organisations and historians have claimed to have reliable proof that the trade union activity critical to both the 1962 and 1963 crises was supported directly by American and British trade union leaders. They claimed that these leaders were funded by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (C.I.A.). It was believed that the C.I.A.-led missions in British Guiana received the specific assent of the President, John F. Kennedy Jr., as well as that of, unusually, the British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan.

Since the mid-1990s, when American and British documents on this period were partially declassified, historians have focused chiefly on the U.S. government documents. Their work indicated that the C.I.A., under direct orders from Kennedy, was involved in covert activities in British Guiana. This exposure of American secret plans, however, also referred to an equally intricate set of British ones. It was confirmed that British policy originally consisted of both a grudging acceptance of Cheddi Jagan and a rebuffing of American paranoia about the man. Equally important, documents from this period showed how British policy changed under American pressure to permit and support covert activity in their colony.

Historical work on this subject is sparse and exists without a strong academic community devoted to scrutinizing it. As Jane Sillery poignantly observes, this

¹ “John Fitzgerald Kennedy, Inaugural Address, From Revolution to Reconstruction a WWW project in

subject has been “dwarfed in the historiography.”² Much of what has been written, including Cary Fraser’s earlier work *Ambivalent Anti-Colonialism*, Thomas Spinner’s *A political and Social History of Guyana*, the Latin American Bureau’s *Guyana: Fraudulent Revolution* and Cheddi Jagan’s *The West on Trial* was produced before the most relevant documents were declassified. Some of these works are clearly partisan or rely heavily on unverifiable newspaper sources. Even though much of the evidence in this previous research has since been validated, as historical documents these works lacked, at their time of publication, concreteness with respect to diplomatic relations. Of the later research which has been based on declassified government documents, including Cary Fraser’s recent study *The ‘New Frontier’ of Empire in the Caribbean*, Stephen Rabe’s *The most dangerous area in the world*, Victor Parekh’s *Subversion in British Guiana*, Jane Sillery’s *Salvaging Democracy* and Gordon Oliver Daniels’ *A great injustice to Cheddi Jagan* – all revealing and useful studies – the emphasis has been upon American decision-making, thus maintaining the need for more work on the British side.

The following essay thus seeks to confirm and explain suggestions about British decision-making, primarily through the use of British government documents. The purpose of this exercise is to show that British government officials were involved in creating this conspiracy, that it exemplified the changing post-Suez crisis Anglo-American ‘special relationship’, that it included overt and covert political action and that it served to unseat Cheddi Jagan and the P.P.P. These connections will be demonstrated by comparing specific Foreign Office, Cabinet Office, Colonial Office

collective writing” Available, Online: <http://odur.let.rug.nl/~usa/P/jk35/speeches/jfk.htm>, 10 September 2001.

² Sillery, Jane L., “Salvaging Democracy? The United States and Britain in British Guiana 1961-1964”, Dissertation presented for the Doctor of Philosophy degree at the University of Oxford, 1996.

and Prime Minister's Office files with the corresponding American files and the historical research derived from them. These documents have been obtained principally from the Public Records Office in London and the U.S. State Department's publication of manuscripts, *Foreign Relations of the United States*. Documents have also been obtained from the Cheddi Jagan Research Centre in Georgetown, The British Library, The Royal Institute for International Affairs, The British Library of Political and Economic Science and The Institute for Commonwealth Studies Library in London and the Black Watch Regimental Archives in Perth. Where relevant, these comparisons have been validated by personal interviews, newspaper reports, and academic work from the surrounding fields.

As with many covert activities of the C.I.A., documents related to this subject matter have been carefully 'sanitized', viz. either destroyed or reclassified, by both the British and American governments.³ However, an analysis of the available texts has provided sufficient direct and indirect evidence to demonstrate why, when and partially how the British were involved. At the local level, this study, whilst careful not to rely on partisan sources, focuses on the People's Progressive Party, as it was this party around which British and American policy was primarily formed, and as it is these policies which makes this crisis one concerning international, rather than local or regional, history. In a wider context, the crises over Cheddi Jagan in British Guiana took place within a tumultuous time in world history, and in many ways reflect key historical themes of the period. Such themes will be drawn out and compared, showing that British Guiana in the early 1960s is an important case study in historical research generally and Cold War and Third World politics, specifically.

The first section deals with the appearance of Cheddi Jagan on British and American foreign policy ‘radar screens’, as well as the beginnings of Jagan’s political life. This section discusses some of the historical background of the time and region, as well as introduces the changing relationship between Britain and the United States, with respect to colonial issues. The second section examines the assumption that both British and American governments attempted to reconcile with the possibility of an independent British Guiana under Jagan. This section illustrates the emergence of a covert plan and shows further the challenges of documentary evidence in the case at hand. Finally, the third section brings together the themes and patterns of the events leading up to April 1963, and exposes the Anglo-American decision to remove Jagan, in its completeness. Whilst the critical component of covert support for protracted violence is examined, the core component of the Anglo-American decision making procedure is also discussed. It will be concluded that these plans made an exceptional case out of British Guiana, breaking British and American public promises to replace colonialism with self-determination. ‘Fairness’ and ‘Freedom’ were international slogans for the two great powers, but not in Guiana.

³ Rabe, Stephen G., *The most dangerous area in the world: John F. Kennedy Confronts Communist Revolution in Latin America*, (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999), p.19.

I. Bad first impressions: Britain, the United States and the Jagans

Soviet pressure against the free institutions of the Western world is something that can be contained by the adroit and vigilant application of counter-force...which cannot be charmed or talked out of existence.
‘X’, July 1947⁴

The personal biases and relationships that so deeply influenced the events of 1961-1963 had interesting beginnings and as will be shown, were characterized by bad first impressions. Cheddi Jagan, the son of an estate driver, left British Guiana in 1936 to study dentistry in the United States. Jagan completed both his dental training at Howard University and a course in the social sciences at a Chicago Y.M.C.A. Like many educated colonial subjects who returned home to form a “united front against the imperial regime,”⁵ Cheddi Jagan developed a special appreciation for the teachings of Marx, Lenin and other socialist theorists, in that theirs and others’ writings on imperialism had direct applications to the forced resource economy of his homeland.⁶

Also whilst studying in Chicago, Jagan met and married Janet Rosenberg, an attractive Jewish-American student. Sources vary greatly on the significance of Jagan and Rosenberg’s leftist student associations. Some go so far as to suggest Janet Rosenberg was a card-carrying communist. Others, like Rosenberg (now the Rt. Hon. Mrs. Janet Jagan) herself, deny this early connection, or any influence at all on Cheddi Jagan’s political development in the U.S.⁷ Jagan and Rosenberg chose to marry and leave the United States in 1943 when Jagan was drafted into the U.S. army.

⁴ X [Kennan, George F.], “The Sources of Soviet Conduct”, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol.25. No.4 (July, 1947), pp.566-582; Interview with Mrs. Janet Jagan.

⁵ Newman, Peter, *British Guiana: Problems of Cohesion in an Immigrant Society*, (Institute of Race Relations, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964), p.77.

⁶ Jagan, Cheddi B., *The West on Trial*, (London: Michael Joseph Ltd., 1966), pp.44-54.

The young dentist had become disenchanted with the American professional system, which, because of his nationality, refused him the qualification he had trained for.⁸ He was a conscientious objector to the U.S. war effort, and chose to leave the country rather than fight in Europe. The Jagans' hasty departure later became significant. Although news of their leaving was unlikely to have reached the level of federal government officials in 1943, the Jagans' time in the U.S. was to be held against them later. American and British intelligence assessments, government briefings and records of foreign policy decisions all contained within them conclusions of suspicion drawn from Jagan and Rosenberg's time in the United States.

The Jagans returned to find British Guiana in a terrible state, an event also congruent with the patterns of other third world nationalists returning home from abroad during this period. The country's plight in the 1940s was directly related to its colonial heritage. On his quest for *El Dorado*, the Englishman Sir Walter Raleigh was the first European to discover the territory of Guiana, in 1596.⁹ A period of competition between the Dutch, French and British colonial powers then ensued. By the early 1800s, the British acquired their 216,000 km² section, later called British Guiana (now Guyana), which encompassed the Demerara, Essequibo and Berbice river valleys and bordered Venezuela, Brazil and Dutch Guyana (now Suriname). The British government developed British Guiana – the only English-speaking territory on the South American mainland – into an important colony, but also ensured that it remained strictly a 'plantation society'. No less than 95% of British Guiana's economic output derived solely from sugar production, which provided at times more

⁷ Colonial Office, *British Guiana: Suspension of the Constitution*, (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, October 1953), p.10.

⁸ *The West on Trial*, p. 62

⁹ Clapp, Henry, *With Raleigh to British Guiana*, (London: Fredrik Muller Ltd, 1965), p.18.

than half of all of Britain's fine sugar requirements.¹⁰ Of that great industry, very little was ever realized as profit for Guianese citizens.¹¹ Sugar proceeds were, instead, the corporate profits of Booker Sugar Estates, Ltd. of London, which controlled 80% of all sugar exports for much of the colony's history and until the 1960s paid virtually no tax to the local government.¹²

Sugar was originally produced by 60,000 African slaves, most of whom were taken to Guiana in the early 1800s for that purpose. The Africans were Christianized during their period of enslavement; in that process they lost their African culture, including their African names. By 1838, the British government abolished slavery and replaced that labour supply with Indian indentured workers. The indenture system tempted many to leave British India with the promise of free land after several years of work. Many went to East or South Africa, however between 1838 and 1917, 240,000 indentured Indian labourers settled in British Guiana.¹³ Because of the absence of real wages or wage negotiations for the indentured labourers, the indenture system effectively undercut the higher wage demands of the recently freed African slave labour force. Whilst Indians settled in the rural areas in which they were indentured and later given land, unemployed Africans began their move to Georgetown. The Indian migrants, who were able to preserve their Hindu and Muslim religions, culture and names, set up very different rural communities than the Christianized and urbanized Africans. Throughout the colony's history, British merchant ships also brought Chinese, Portuguese and various others to live and work in British Guiana.

¹⁰ Beaumont, Joseph, *The New Slavery: an account of the Indian and Chinese Immigrants in British Guiana*, (London: Ridgeway, 1871), p.8.

¹¹ Beaumont, p.9.

¹² Barclays Bank D.C.O., *British Guiana and British Honduras: an economic survey*, (Bridgetown, Barbados: Barclays Bank Local Head Office: May 1960), p.7.

¹³ Rabe, p.80.

All ethnic communities condemned intermarriage, and the British did little to promote any change therein. Geographic patterns of ethnic divide thus went beyond simply the Indian/African, rural/urban split – a divide that was to be enhanced and dominate the country's political future.

There was, however, the promise of overcoming this ethnic polarization within an anti-colonial nationalist movement. Similarly to other instances of post-war nationalism in the third world, anti-colonialism in British Guiana was supported from below by soldiers and support staff involved in the War in Europe, as well as students returning from study abroad, who went home and sought democracy in their own land.¹⁴ In 1950, a London-educated Afro-Guianese lawyer, Lynden Forbes Sampson Burnham, joined a party founded in 1946 by a group of four, including both Jagans, called the Political Affairs Committee (P.A.C.). Within a remarkable cross-race coalition, the Burnham-Jagan group turned the P.A.C. into the People's Progressive Party in January.

Both Burnham and Jagan were graduates of the top British school in the colony, Queen's College, and in many ways represented the educated elite of African- and Indian-descended Guianese. The P.P.P. leaders also had personal characteristics that lent well towards forming a multi-racial, pro-independence party.¹⁵ The Burnham-Jagan team won a landslide victory in the first general election under universal

¹⁴ Green, Hamilton, *From Pain to Peace: Guyana 1953-1964*, (Georgetown: Tropical Airways Inc., 1987).

¹⁵ *The West on Trial*, p.30.

suffrage in 1953, and the British knew that with such results their legitimacy in dictating policy would be further reduced.¹⁶

At the same time, fissures in the delicate P.P.P. coalition appeared. The Jagans and their followers had taken a strong position on the value of socialism and connection with the communist world. The British government was at that time threatened by what they perceived as the communist world, including not only the Soviet Bloc and China, but also socialist or communist factions in India, Malaya, Ghana and Rhodesia. For the British, the P.P.P.'s stance was thus an unsettling one. Similarly, the American government under President Eisenhower and swept up by the anti-communism of Senator McCarthy and others, immediately began a campaign against the Jaganites within the Anglo-American framework. Burnhamites, on the other hand, realized early that such insensitivity to British and American fear of communism would not be in the party's best interests. Burnham and Jagan thus continued to wrestle for control over the P.P.P., however the ideological bent of Guianese government would be decided by a third party.

That third party was the British government, whose fear of international communist takeover was irrepressible and led to the suspension of the constitution and Jagan's premiership, in 1953. The British army was used to execute the changeover, and throughout the colony there was fear of being caught with leftist literature, or worse, plotting with communists.¹⁷ Dr. Jagan later claimed the main cause of the suspension

¹⁶ Colonial Office, *British Guiana: Suspension of the Constitution*, (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, October 1953), p.3

¹⁷ Interviews with Ranjit Singh; Interview with Mungo Walker.

was American pressure, however neither he nor historians since have proved conclusively that this was the case.¹⁸

It was more likely, and demonstrable, that Jagan and his politically inexperienced party leaders had gone too far in assuming their realistic chances of being able to both flirt with the communist bloc and take over a country on the underbelly of the United States. Their visits with Cuba's Fidel Castro, speeches on Prague radio, visits to Soviet Berlin and open affinities for Lenin and Marx were not moderated with the kind of provisos that would have been necessary to allay British and American fears.¹⁹ Leaders Grantley Adams of Barbados, Alexander Bustamante and Norman Manley of Jamaica and Rita Hinden of the British Labour Party all condemned Jagan's actions and supported the suspension of the constitution.²⁰ Immoral as it may have been, the Western tendency towards anti-communist intervention in Third World was well known. P.P.P. leaders, however, even as high as Jagan's second-in-command, Brindley H. Benn, later admitted that neither in 1953 nor well into the early 1960s did they ever take seriously the chance of that trend affecting them.²¹ Considering their colonial status and geographic location, the Jaganite P.P.P. did not by 1953 have the real political power to be so provocative. Irrespective of what was surely American opposition to Jagan at that time, enough anti-Jagan argumentation exists in British documents to suggest that the decision to suspend the constitution was primarily a British one.

¹⁸ Jagan, Cheddi, B., *My Fight for Guyana's freedom: With reflections on My Father by Nadira Jagan-Brancier*, (Milton, Canada: Harpy, 1998), p.78.

¹⁹ Colonial Office, *British Guiana: Suspension of the Constitution*, (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, October 1953), p.13.

²⁰ *My fight for Guyana's freedom*, p.74.

²¹ Interview with Brindley Benn.

The British proceeded to create a damning report which blamed suspension of the constitution primarily on the Indian ethnic group. Although Cheddi Jagan was himself Indo-Guyanese, at that time the P.P.P. was not sufficiently divided by race to have warranted the British conclusion. That is, although the Jaganite P.P.P. was the protagonist of overt communist verbiage, that faction also included several prominent Afro-Guyanese leaders. Conversely, many well respected Indo-Guyanese were leaders in the Burnham camp.²² The damage, however, was already done. Two years after the suspension, and after lengthy negotiations and alliance making, Burnham left the P.P.P. and formed the People's National Congress (P.N.C.). The trend towards one party for Indians, the P.P.P., and one for Blacks, the P.N.C., had begun and soon became "an undisputed fact of political life."²³

²² Interview with Hamilton Green.

²³ *Ambivalent anti-colonialism*, p.178.

II. Elections and ‘intelligence gathering’ (1957-1962)

Only the Prime Minister himself can judge...how far it would be prudent to ‘rib’ the President over the paradox of the United States, of all countries, attempting to bring pressure on the U.K. to deny or delay self-government to a British colony on the American continent!

- Brief by the Colonial Office, 29 March 1961²⁴

By 1957 the P.P.P. had moderated its tone, apologized for its extremism and was re-elected. The British government resolved to accommodate Jagan, contemplated granting independence to the P.P.P. and began to convince their American counterparts that such was the appropriate course of action. In a characteristic middle stage of decolonisation, powers for full internal self-government were devolved to the new P.P.P. government whilst Britain maintained authority only over external affairs and defence.²⁵ The P.P.P. advanced several pieces of legislation during this period, including controversial budgetary, education and land reform bills. Several other smaller political lobbies were also developed at this time, however most important was that which became the third party in Guianese politics: the United Force (U.F.), founded in 1961 by a wealthy local businessman of Portuguese extraction named Peter D’Aguiar. D’Aguiar, who was also against Jagan’s version of socialism, was similarly averse to co-operation with the P.N.C. All three parties ran in the general elections of August 1961, with the P.P.P. claiming victory with 20 seats and 42.6% of the votes cast. The P.N.C., by comparison, claimed a very close 41% of total votes, yet won only 11 seats. The U.F., in a more even result, won 16.2% of votes and 4 seats. These results, it must be noted, supported both the U.F. and P.N.C.’s

²⁴ Brief by the Colonial Office, 29 March 1961, CAB133/244.

²⁵ Cf. *Ambivalent Anti-Colonialism*, p. 125

opposition to the first-past-the-post system, in favour of the system of proportional representation which was to become so important later.²⁶

The P.P.P., P.N.C. and U.F. all contested the results of the elections for various reasons, but a larger underlying trend affected global perception of that same contest.

The Cuban Revolution had already caused American anti-communism to be intensified dramatically. The specific American response to that revolution, to attempt to rally anti-Castro Cubans against the new regime, resulted in one of the worst catastrophe's for Kennedy's C.I.A. and its interventionist mission. With a P.P.P. win only several months after its April 1961 humiliation at the Bay of Pigs, the C.I.A. saw the Jagan election through jaded eyes. Several authors suggest that the secretive agency began developing a covert plan against Cheddi Jagan, in order to provide an opportunity to 'prove itself' after the 'Bay of Pigs' failure.²⁷

These plans were developed and presented to the new Kennedy government throughout 1961. Kennedy's advisory team, including Dean Rusk, Arthur Schlesinger Jr., Walt Rostow and McGeorge Bundy, all contributed to Kennedy's new approach of assimilating behaviouralism and other social sciences into American foreign policy.²⁸ As Rostow asked his audience at Purdue University in March 1961, "what are these fundamental forces which we confront and which we must shape?"²⁹ Contrary to the military and battle-oriented foreign policy advisors of his wartime

²⁶ Green, p.84; p.59; Newman, p.91.

²⁷ Parekh, Hector J., "Subversion in British Guiana: Why and How the Kennedy Administration got ride of a democratic government", *Monthly Review*, Vol 51 Issue 5, October 1999; Fraser, Cary, "The 'New Frontier' of Empire in the Caribbean: The Transfer of Power in British Guiana, 1961-1964, *International History Review*, September 2000, Vol.22 No.3, p.585.

²⁸ Freedman, Lawrence, *Kennedy's Wars: Berlin, Cuba, Laos and Viet Nam*, (New York and Oxford: OUP, 2000).

²⁹ Copy of speech by Walt Rostow to Purdue University, 15 March 1962, [Public Records Office] FO371/162587.

predecessors, Kennedy's confidants were academics who believed that the Third World should be guided and manipulated through the post-war era.³⁰

In the case of British Guiana, however, the Kennedy team realized that they had also to convince the British of their interventionist plans. The primary British response, however, was to protect their sovereignty in British Guiana and deflect American attempts to intervene there. Several meetings took place amongst officials as high as Kennedy and Macmillan, yet by 5 August 1961, the State Department recorded that the "British have not been willing to undertake any operation or permit us undertake operation to prevent Jagan victory."³¹ This stance did not mean British support for Cheddi Jagan. Although the Jagans and the P.P.P. had cooled down their leftist rhetoric, they were known to still be in contact with the communist world, most notably with Cuba.

In April 1960, Jagan, although not yet in charge of foreign or defence policy, organized an official visit to Cuba without British consent. The mission was described as one of trade, and as trade fell within Jagan's devolved jurisdiction, the Colonial Office was reluctant to interfere. In an interesting diplomatic conundrum, the British Ambassador in Havana asked the London government whether or not he should attend a party thrown by the Cuban government in Jagan's honour.³² The Colonial Office responded that he should go, and accordingly he did, noting interestingly that the Jagan itinerary was similar to that of "the Algerian F.L.N.

³⁰ Schlesinger, Arthur M. Jr., *The Vital Center: The Politics of Freedom*, Review author[s]: W. M. Brewer *Journal of Negro History*, Vol.35, No.1. (Jan., 1950), pp.81-84

³¹ State to Rusk, 5 August 1961, United States Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963*, vol.XII American Republics, (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1996) [FRUS].

³² Telegram No.98 April 1 1960, FO371/148310.

representative.”³³ Jagan negotiated several partnerships, including an exchange program for Guianese students to learn of the “Cuban Revolution and Agrarian Reform.”³⁴ Jagan was treading on thin ice, with respect to both American and British security concerns regarding Castro’s communism. Although later Colonial Office deliberations would support Jagan’s connections with Cuba, records of his 1960 trip there demonstrated the peculiar type of power sharing that existed between Jagan and the British.³⁵

Throughout the next year, British policy towards British Guiana consisted of an increasing level of responsiveness to American pressure. In a telegram on 18 August from Foreign Office Secretary Lord Alec Home to Secretary of State Dean Rusk, Home acknowledged that the British might prefer to be rid of Jagan, but that the U.S.-recommended methods, “of taking action to influence the results of the election” were not practicable.³⁶ Whilst British support for a covert plan was not yet secured, the State Department continued its preparations, with the expectation that such support would soon come. Less than two weeks after Home’s hesitant letter, one of Kennedy’s special advisors, Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., wrote to the President outlining the basis of a covert program. He informed the President that the State Department was recommending, “[a] covert program to develop information about, expose and destroy Communists in British Guiana...” including “the creation of anti-Communist clandestine capabilities.”³⁷ Importantly, however, Schlesinger reminded Kennedy that “[t]his program depends in large part upon British cooperation.”³⁸

³³ British Embassy Havana to FO, April 14 1960, FO371/148310.

³⁴ Cheddi Jagan’s interviews with Cuban Officials and Press, FO371/148310.

³⁵ Grey to Sandys, 20 July 1962, FO371/162023

³⁶ Home to Rusk, 18 August, 1961, *FRUS*

³⁷ Schlesinger to Kennedy, 30 August 1961, *FRUS*.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

Although it appeared the British government was alone in stalling this amorphous plan, it is also clear that there were doubts within American policymaking circles. As part of their wider strategy, which included both covert monitoring and political action, the U.S. was still in August 1961 considering the option of befriending Jagan. The State Department informed the British that, “it is our judgment that an across-the-board effort to 'salvage' Jagan is worth attempting.”³⁹ This may have been the public American policy, however one month later, the C.I.A. indicated secret plans were otherwise. They informed the Secretary of State that, “we should plan for the possibility that we will have no reasonable alternative but to work for Jagan's political downfall.”⁴⁰ Rusk agreed, and in that spirit instructed his ambassador in London to “pla[y] up [to the British] the intelligence gathering aspect of covert activity” and “play down covert political action program.”⁴¹ Similarly, Schlesinger concluded that “[t]his means that the covert program must be handled with the utmost discretion and probably confined at the start to intelligence collection.”⁴²

Part of this American plan was successfully pressed upon the British and an agreement on covert intelligence gathering was made in September 1961. In the minutes of an Anglo-American meeting in Washington in April 1962, the Cabinet Office referred to “the Anglo-American agreement of September, 1961, concerning American intelligence activities in British Guiana.”⁴³ The record noted that the U.S. had so far “scrupulously abided” by the agreement and that “their operations had so far aroused no suspicion.” There was an American consulate in Georgetown, and the

³⁹ State to the Embassy in the United Kingdom, 4 September 1961, *FRUS*.

⁴⁰ Hilsman to Johnson, 17 October 1961, *FRUS*.

⁴¹ State to the Embassy in the United Kingdom, 5 September 1961, *FRUS*.

⁴² Schlesinger to Kennedy, 30 August 1961, *FRUS*.

United States Information Service (U.S.I.S.), not intelligence services, was known to be operating from there. If the record referred to the normal operations of either of these two bodies, however, the phrase “aroused no suspicion” would have been unnecessary. The passage is ambiguous, and is alone in the documentary evidence and thus difficult to cross-reference. In one declassified American document, for example, discussion is recorded of the American two-part policy of first trying to befriend Jagan and second, taking covert action. In this document, discussion of the second option is still classified, yet it is noted that “[a]greement was reached with the British in September on a coordinated program in accord with this policy.”⁴⁴

Whatever the precise agreement was, the U.S. also made it known in April that they felt “that the terms of the agreement were now too restrictive” and that they would now “like to have British consent to the covert collection of intelligence by the United States.”⁴⁵

Whereas the U.S. was already leaning toward the covert option in their policy plan, British policy towards Guiana still allowed for independence under the P.P.P. British officials arranged a Kennedy-Jagan meeting on 25 October, in which Jagan was to demonstrate his commitment to parliamentary democracy and look for U.S. development aid. The discussion turned colder when Jagan told Kennedy, as reported by the State Department that, “he didn’t appreciate U.S.I.S. playing anti-Castro videos on street corners during the last BG elections.”⁴⁶ Indeed the U.S.I.S. had been active in spreading such propaganda. In at least two cases, British Information Services (B.I.S.) had also helped them to do so. Colonial Office records show that the British

⁴³ Washington Talks, 28th April, 1962, at 5:15p.m, CAB133/246.

⁴⁴ Tyler to Rusk, 18 February 1962, *FRUS*.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Memorandum of Conversation, 25 October 1961, *FRUS*.

supplied 1000 copies of the anti-Castro booklet *Cuban Agriculture under Castro* to the U.S.I.S.⁴⁷ The B.I.S. later admitted to waging a secret “anti-Communist campaign” in which “a good deal of material [was] placed in the press.”⁴⁸ The B.I.S. acknowledged that this material was disguised as domestic editorial articles in publications such as the *Guiana Graphic*, and discussed the severe consequences of such activities ever being discovered. The effect of this propaganda, beginning in 1961, was to provide indirect support to the U.F. and P.N.C. by allowing them to use the U.S.I.S. denouncement of Jagan’s Cuban associations within their own campaigns. Alongside Kennedy’s underlying hesitations about Jagan, this Anglo-American propagandizing tainted Kennedy and Jagan’s first meeting and decreased the chances of an aid agreement being reached.

With Jagan-Kennedy relations as they were, the P.P.P. looked elsewhere for help in the international community. Jagan’s Minister of Natural Resources, Brindley H. Benn, travelled to Europe to seek funding. As one example of his success, the West German government informed the British that Jagan’s politicians “seemed quite capable of running their own affairs.”⁴⁹ During this time, however, the Foreign Office made it clear that foreign policy for British Guiana was still within U.K. jurisdiction and not under the control of the P.P.P. The ‘rub’ was that Jagan was developing support within the U.N. General Assembly for a motion calling on Britain to release Guiana into independence immediately. The Foreign Office reacted strongly, instructing its ambassador at the U.N. that “we should make it clear that the United

⁴⁷ Noakes to Barclay, 2 January 1964, CO1027/735.

⁴⁸ BIS, British Guiana: Annual Report for 1964, CO1027/746.

⁴⁹ Chevallier to FO, 11 January 1962, FO371/161946; Interview with Brindley Benn.

Nations has no right to intervene in our territories nor to hear petitioners from them and that such discussion is therefore *ultra vires*. ”⁵⁰

This policy towards the United Nations and British Guiana met with widespread approval within the British government; yet on Anglo-American relations, the different departments responsible were more divided. The Foreign Office, responsible for relations with non-colonial foreign territories, was growing in relative (internal) importance due to the decline of Britain as a colonial power. The Colonial Office, conversely, was responsible only for the colonial territories, yet in cases like British Guiana, where responsibility would soon pass from the Colonial Office to the Foreign Office, jurisdiction was unclear. Throughout negotiations concerning British Guiana, it was clear that the Colonial Office dealt with the Governor in Georgetown, the Foreign Office dealt with the United States, and that the two conflicted in attempts to form a coherent British policy. In a 1960 meeting between the Foreign and Colonial Offices, the former poignantly recorded that, “we shall have to play our usual awkward role between [the U.S.] and the Colonial Office.”⁵¹ Similarly, the Colonial Office expressed reservations about the Foreign Office, evidenced in their objection to a new Foreign Office-dominated Anglo-American working party concerning British Guiana. The Colonial Office was “suspicious” that any decisions made by such a group would “hamper” preparations for the Colonial Office’s constitutional conference.⁵² Furthermore, the Prime Minister and his office were in a middle position. It was clear, and will be shown further below, that the Prime

⁵⁰ FO to UK Mission to the United Nations, 9 January 1962, FO371/161947; Cf. *The West on Trial*, p.251

⁵¹ Colonial Office Ministers’ meeting, 20 February 1960, FO371/161948.

⁵² Piper to FO, 9 March 1962, FO371/161949.

Minister was heavily involved in decisions over British Guiana. That being the case, Prime Minister Macmillan trod daintily between both of his overseas departments.

Irrespective of the difficulties of both American and British policymaking, the U.S. government maintained its momentum in British Guiana. On 12 January 1962, Kennedy wrote to the Agency for International Development (A.I.D.), requesting “immediate action to intensify our observations of political developments in British Guiana and by this and other means extend our program of reinsurance in case the situation should show signs of going sour.”⁵³ And it did go sour. Whether or not American intelligence agents were responsible for the riots that occurred just over one month after Kennedy’s order, is unclear. Ostensibly, the cause of ‘disturbances’ was a P.N.C./U.F. protest against a new Jagan budget drafted by the Cambridge economist Nicholas Kaldor. Jaganites believed that the C.I.A. trained and funded the American trade unionists who supported the anti-Jagan rioters. The Soviet state-run newspaper *Pravda* reported on 28 February, supposedly without direct information from the P.P.P.⁵⁴, that North American and British imperialists were conspiring to cause fires in Georgetown.⁵⁵ The State Department, on the other hand, later admitted that although “private American citizens”⁵⁶ were involved, there was no U.S. government connection. Whether or not these private citizens were tied to the C.I.A. at that point remains unclear; the pattern for international trade union involvement in destabilizing riots, however, was plain to see.⁵⁷

⁵³ Kennedy to Hamilton, 12 January 1962, *FRUS*.

⁵⁴ Interview with Janet Jagan.

⁵⁵ British Embassy Moscow to FO, 28 February 1962, FO371/161948.

⁵⁶ Paper Prepared in the Department of State, 15 March 1962, *FRUS*.

⁵⁷ Colonial Office, Cmnd. 344, *Report of a Commission of Inquiry into Disturbances in British Guiana in February 1962*, (London: Her Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1962), pp.22-50.

Causes and likely causes aside, the effects of the February disturbances were manifold. Three days after the riots began, Dean Rusk wrote a shockingly direct letter to his opposite number. Rusk told Home, “it is not possible for us to put up with an independent British Guiana under Jagan...[it] is mandatory that we concert on remedial steps...I hope we can agree that Jagan should not accede to power again.”⁵⁸ Several days later, the State Department summoned British diplomats in Washington, including the Ambassador Sir David Ormsby Gore, to discuss the crisis. Gore reported that State Department official William Burdett “asked us a number of leading questions, which suggested that he did not believe that the violence was racially inspired, but was a spontaneous outburst of democratic opinion, a la Hungary, against Jagan.”⁵⁹ From this description, it could be inferred that Gore suspected American involvement in the February riots, and that Burdett was then trying to ‘spin’ the British analysis. Burdett attempted to pressure Gore to “provide...some off the cuff reflections there and then,” but Gore refused, recording wittily that “in this, we had to disoblige them.”⁶⁰

State Department pressure in February 1962 was not successful in achieving an endorsement of the covert political action plan. Internally, American opposition was one force against stepping up U.S. involvement in British Guiana. On 26 February, U.S. Representative at the United Nations, Adlai E. Stevenson, warned Secretary Rusk that, “US involvement [in British Guiana] would...undermine our carefully nurtured position of anti-colonialism among the new nations of Asia and Africa.”⁶¹ Stevenson represented a school of thought amongst American policymakers, which

⁵⁸ State to the Embassy in the United Kingdom, 19 February 1962, *FRUS*.

⁵⁹ Hennings to FO, 22 February 1962, FO371/161952.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ Stevenson to Rusk, 26 February 1962, *FRUS*.

saw anti-colonialism as an end in itself. As a key mouthpiece for that American stance, Stevenson surely had his personal integrity in mind when writing to Washington. Stevenson was assured by the State Department several weeks later that the “CIA...was in no way involved in the recent disturbances in Georgetown.”⁶² That renunciation, interestingly, was repeated in an internal State Department memo, which maintained that the C.I.A. was not responsible, but did acknowledge that private American citizens were involved.⁶³ On the other side of the coin, and as historian Cary Fraser notes, the majority of American policymakers saw anti-colonialism not as an independent policy goal, but rather as a means to achieving the wider objective of containment.⁶⁴ The State Department’s hasty conclusion that more riots in Georgetown meant more reason to remove Jagan was therefore met with both practical and ideological opposition. Even more important, however, was opposition expressed by the British.

Home responded to Rusk’s letter in what was perhaps the coldest language used throughout the crises over British Guiana. He told Rusk, “*We* are studying what best to do now to discharge our responsibilities and when *we* have decided, we shall be glad to see in a more official way what can be done to concert *our* action and yours” (emphasis added).⁶⁵ Home’s response to Rusk’s request for co-operation thus began by referring to unilateral British action with only minimal American input. Home struck hard, continuing,

Now it was your historic role to have been for long years the first crusader and the prime mover in urging colonial emancipation. The communists are now in the van. Why? Amongst other things because

⁶² Cleveland to Stevenson, 9 March 1962, *FRUS*.

⁶³ Paper Prepared in the Department of State, 15 March 1962, *FRUS*.

⁶⁴ Fraser, Cary, *Ambivalent anti-colonialism: the United States and the genesis of West Indian independence, 1940-1964*, (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1994), p.15.

⁶⁵ Home to Rusk, 26 February 1962, *FRUS*.

premature independence is a gift for them. What I do not think possible is to beat them by cancelling the ticket for independence and particularly if this is only to be done in the single instance of British Guiana. You say that it is not possible for you 'to put up with an independent British Guiana under Jagan' and that 'Jagan should not accede to power again'. How would you suggest that this can be done in a democracy? And even if a device could be found, it would almost certainly be transparent.⁶⁶

Home also sought to use Rusk's willingness to make an exception in Guiana to his wider advantage. With reference to East Africa and British Honduras, the Foreign Secretary told Rusk tongue-in-cheek, "I take comfort from your letter to think that you will be ready to understand and support us in solving these problems."⁶⁷ Home thrust in the dagger by accusing the U.S. of installing a new government in Guatemala which was "reminiscent of Hitler" and which was now the biggest cause of British troubles in Honduras.⁶⁸ Whilst American intelligence 'gathering' in British Guiana had now for several months been supported, Home's letter suggests clearly that the U.S. covert action plan was not given British ascent at that time.

The suggestion, however, may be merely that. Two days after Home's letter, J.D. Hennings of the British Embassy in Washington told the Foreign Office that Americans in British Guiana were "fumbling and stumbling with the implementation of the policy it had been agreed we should jointly attempt, and, in the process causing us and the Governor rather greater headaches."⁶⁹ What was this joint policy? Was this simply benign intelligence gathering? Much of the letter remains classified. It is possible that such descriptions referred to some kind of involvement with either the opposition parties or the Guianese public. If it were intelligence *gathering*, then to

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Hennings to FO, 28 February 1962, FO371/161948.

warrant such description the gathering must have been done at very deep levels, likely within the P.P.P. and P.N.C. Mrs. Janet Jagan later denied, when interviewed, any such infiltration in the P.P.P. By comparison, however, then-P.N.C. General Secretary Hamilton Green described several instances of such attempts within that party.⁷⁰ On this issue, Ambassador Hennings did reveal more though, when he concluded,

If we do concede this, I would suggest that we do not lose the opportunity to extract the maximum return from the Americans in exchange for our continuing to shoulder a burden in the interests of the political health of the hemisphere, which is more nearly their concern than it is ours.⁷¹

Hennings' reference to a concession must by deduction have referred to something not previously conceded. It may have been an indication that he was referring to action with a more interventionist tone. Although this conclusion is difficult, Henning's reference to hemispheric responsibilities is not.

Hennings' view that British Guiana would soon be an American responsibility was widely held amongst British policymakers. Even the protective Colonial Office was willing to take this position. On 27 February, Colonial Secretary Reginald Maudling said pithily to his American counterparts, "if you Americans care so much about British Guiana why don't you take it over? Nothing would please us more."⁷²

Macmillan later echoed this theme, telling Kennedy "when these territories become independent...they may well be of more direct concern to you than to us."⁷³ In terms of action to support this developing policy, the British deployed undersecretary Hugh Fraser at the Colonial Office on a mission to British Guiana to inquire into the

⁷⁰ Interview with Janet Jagan; Interview with Hamilton Green.

⁷¹ Hennings to FO, 28 February 1962, FO371/161948.

⁷² Schlesinger to Bruce, 27 February 1962, *FRUS*.

political situation there. The mission, however, had another purpose. The British by that time were suspicious of increased Cuban support for the P.P.P; they reported that on 24 February a Cuban ship had left for Georgetown, “with cargo arms.”⁷⁴

Macmillan’s instructions were telling when he told the Maudling, “[Fraser’s] first job is to get the troops out. This is becoming quite a serious commitment.”⁷⁵

Due both to a change in British mood and a more forceful American attitude, U.S. policy took a definite turn by March 1962. As Schlesinger reminded Kennedy on 8 March, “a firm decision has been taken to get rid of the Jagan government.”⁷⁶ In addition to the mounting pressure from the State Department and U.S. intelligence services, American public and congressional opposition to Jagan was also influential.⁷⁷ More than 2,400 letters were received by the State Department, expressing criticism for American public willingness to meet or co-operate with Jagan. A group of American women went as far as to send a telegram to the Queen, writing, “we represent hundreds of women who fear communist domination British Guiana praying England denies independence.”⁷⁸ With American sights set even more intently on the Jagan government, again British objections appeared the stumbling block.

It was at the 13 April meeting between Home and Rusk in Geneva where the tone of British objections changed. With reference to the American covert plan, Rusk reported that “Home does not want to go down that trail until overt possibilities of

⁷³ State to the Embassy in the United Kingdom, 7 June 1962, *FRUS*.

⁷⁴ British Joint H.Q. British Guiana to FO, 24 February 1962, FO371/161948.

⁷⁵ Macmillan to Maudling, 3 March 1962, FO371/161949

⁷⁶ Schlesinger to Kennedy, 8 March 1962, *FRUS*.

⁷⁷ Paper Prepared in the Department of State, 15 March 1962, *FRUS*.

⁷⁸ Lynch to H.M. the Queen, 26 October 1962, FO371/161959.

delay are fully exploited.”⁷⁹ That Home was now discussing something other than ‘overt’ activity was a substantial shift from the position illustrated in his February letter. Several weeks later, British language changed further still. In a meeting at the White House on 28 April, British representative Sir Norman Brook assured McGeorge Bundy that American requests for “greater intelligence gathering facilities in British Guiana” would be “promptly and sympathetically considered.”⁸⁰ Brook went on to claim that “British Guiana could be considered as a special case.”⁸¹

Kennedy, for his part, responded to the British desire that concessions in British Guiana would mean support for British policy elsewhere. In a meeting between Kennedy and Macmillan that same day, the Cabinet Office recorded that,

President Kennedy said that he was not aware that the United States Administration had been critical of British Colonial policy. He would be interested to hear of any recent expression of responsible American opinion which had embarrassed the United Kingdom Government in the discharge of their Colonial responsibilities.⁸²

The President, even so, was playing lip service to the Prime Minister and his advisors; secretly, he was going ahead with covert plans in British Guiana, still without British permission. In early April, a U.S. national intelligence estimate concluded that a Jagan government would likely remain non-aligned in its international relations, but that it would “probably lean in the Soviet direction” and be “highly opportunistic.”⁸³ The C.I.A. correspondingly pressed their plan ahead again, but that plan still met with internal American opposition. Bundy advised Kennedy that “it is unproven that CIA knows how to manipulate an election in British Guiana without a backfire.” Yet

⁷⁹ Rusk to the Department of State Geneva, 13 March 1962, *FRUS*.

⁸⁰ Record of a meeting held at the White House on Saturday, 28th April 1962, at 5:15 p.m., CAB133/300

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² Record of a meeting held at the White House on Saturday, 28th April 1962, at 3:30 p.m., CAB133/300.

Bundy's was merely a hesitant objection, indicated when he continued, "I do not think the Secretary of State should go to the British Ambassador with the proposed talking paper until we are a little more sure of our own capabilities and intentions."⁸⁴

Bundy's acceptance that the C.I.A. plan merely needed fine-tuning, and the certainty with which he referred to a future meeting with the British to confirm the plan, also indicates the American assessment that the British were very close to agreeing with them.

Although it would seem the C.I.A. plan was delayed, it is again useful to compare American with British documents, which suggest that whilst Bundy protested, the plan may have been going ahead. The British High Commission in Venezuela reported on 12 July that "McLennan, CIO/AFL representative, recently passed through Caracas en route to Georgetown and told the Ambassador he was going to try to prevent Jagan taking over the Sugar Workers Union."⁸⁵ McLennan, who will be discussed further below, operated under several names including McKay and McCabe and may indeed have been the C.I.A. agent who delivered U.S. funds to Guianese trade unions. Against the conclusion of timing, however, is that not until August was Kennedy recorded as summoning C.I.A. officers to come and discuss the precise covert policy.⁸⁶ Kennedy described the meeting as one that "will permit him and the Prime Minister to come to a clear understanding on which action can be based,"⁸⁷ not one to discuss an operation already under way.⁸⁸ Whether or not McLennan/McCabe represented the beginning of the covert plan, it was clear in April and August that

⁸³ Special National Intelligence Estimate 11 April 1962, *FRUS*.

⁸⁴ Bundy to Kennedy, 13 July 1962, *FRUS*

⁸⁵ British High Commission in Caracas to FO, 12 July 1962, FO371/161955.

⁸⁶ Bundy to Helms, 6 August 1962, *FRUS*.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ Brubeck to Bundy, 8 August 1962, *FRUS*.

Kennedy, Bundy and others had accepted the C.I.A. plan in concept and were preparing to promote it to the British.

III. A clear covert plan (1962-1963)

The Americans to be informed in the strictest of confidence of this plan, so that they may give such support as they think fit to Burnham.
- Colonial Secretary Duncan Sandys, 10 September 1962⁸⁹

By September 1962, the British were convinced of the need to remove Jagan.

Although they may still not have approved of the American covert plan, the British plan for what the subsequent Prime Minister Harold Wilson termed constitutional ‘fiddling’ was, for the P.P.P. government, lethal on its own.⁹⁰ In a letter on 10

September to Macmillan from the Colonial Secretary Duncan Sandys, it was proposed that the constitutional conference required for British Guiana independence would be delayed further until October 1962. The conference had been delayed already due to the February riots, and further delay served to appease the Kennedy government and demoralize that of the P.P.P. Sandys proposed that a suggestion by Forbes Burnham, to implement a system of proportional representation, would be “allowed” to “break down” the conference.⁹¹ It would be “allowed” because in previous British Guiana constitutional conferences, discussion of a P.R. system had been thrown out due to its propensity to promote factionalisation. It would “break down” because the P.N.C. would insist on the system due to its near certainty of providing a P.N.C. victory; the P.P.P. would refuse the system for that same reason.

Regrettably, few historians acknowledge the point that Burnham’s P.R. system may indeed have been fairer in terms of representative democracy than the first-past-the-post, single member, simple majority system that the British preferred. Whilst P.N.C.

⁸⁹ Sandys to Macmillan, 10 September 1962, FO371/161957.

⁹⁰ Cf. Stacpole to Mitchell, 2 April 1965, PREM13/137.

⁹¹ Sandys to Macmillan, 10 September 1962, FO371/161957.

and U.F. supporters pressed that argument, the P.P.P. insisted that new elections had only just been held in 1961, and thus a 1963 pre-independence election was uncalled for. All this aside, though, if it were fairness the British sought, they would not have made the exception for British Guiana alone. It is clear from the relevant British documents that the imposition of the P.R. system was intended solely to force Jagan out of power.

Sandys' plan included not only the breakdown of the conference, but also a forced imposition of the P.R. system. Sandys told Macmillan that once the conference was stalled, he would adjourn it and hold a referendum on P.R. in Guiana. If the referendum went against P.R., the British would reconvene the conference and try again. If the referendum went for P.R., as Sandys believed was more likely, then the British would hold new elections and the P.N.C./U.F. would win. If there was any doubt of Sandys' intentions, his concluding remarks betrayed all. He told Macmillan the Americans could safely begin making plans with Burnham's P.N.C., as they were now guaranteed to form the next government.⁹²

With British opposition for Jagan thus established, American attitudes also hardened. On 14 March 1963, the American Consul-General in Georgetown informed the State Department that Jagan, if ousted, might cause even more violence, but not to worry as "appropriate common criminal action can always be initiated [by the U.S.]."⁹³ The American government proceeded to arrange a secret meeting with the British at Macmillan's private residence, Birch Grove House, Sussex, on 30 June 1963. In preparations for the meeting, Kennedy notified Macmillan that he felt "British

⁹² Ibid.

Guiana [was] the most important topic he has to discuss with the Prime Minister.”⁹⁴ Important as it was, before the meeting both British and American officials denied publicly that a meeting would take place; after the meeting, a lengthy press release was produced, yet it made no mention of Guiana.⁹⁵ According to all historians with access to declassified documents from this period, Birch Grove was to be the final negotiating place for the covert plan in British Guiana.

Kennedy went to Birch Grove prepared to cite evidence of the P.P.P.’s continuing flirtation with the communist bloc. His aides provided speeches in which Janet Jagan allegedly promised to “establish closer relations with Russia and Cuba when it becomes independent” and that the British Guiana government was “deeply grateful” to Fidel Castro's Cuba for “helping us out when we were stuck.”⁹⁶ Declassified American documents revealed the complexity of American policy in the region, when Kennedy was recorded as warning Macmillan that “the effect of having a Communist state in British Guiana in addition to Cuba in 1964, would be to create irresistible pressures in the United States to strike militarily against Cuba.”⁹⁷ Kennedy’s pressure was successful; Macmillan responded to this much different and new American tactic in a more passive tone than had been previously used by the British. The Prime Minister asked, “whether or not it was worthwhile going on with the present strike

⁹³ Consulate General in Georgetown to State, 14 March 1963, *FRUS*.

⁹⁴ Memorandum, 21 June 1963, *FRUS*; Cf. Telegram from Gore to Home, 26 June 1963, PREM11/4586.

⁹⁵ UK Parliamentary Debates (Hansard), 21 May 1963, p.185, FO371/173293; Gore to FO, 26 May 1963, FO371/173293.

⁹⁶ Memorandum, 21 June 1963, *FRUS*; Cf. Cheddi Jagan to Cuban Minister of Foreign Trade Alberto Mora, 11 June 1963, *Articles by Cheddi Jagan 1961-1964*, Cheddi Jagan Research Centre, Georgetown.

⁹⁷ Memorandum of Conversation, 30 June 1963, *FRUS*.

pressure,”⁹⁸ and in doing so clearly and directly admitted his knowledge of American covert political action.

Unfortunately, nothing uncovered in either American or British government documents confirms what the precise machinery of that pressure was. As previous historians have noted, this evidence may have been destroyed and as such the best alternative evidence was anonymous or hidden contributors to newspaper reports, particularly to the *Sunday Times* and the *New York Times*. The *Sunday Times*, as one example, reported on 16 April 1967 that the British trade union Public Service International (P.S.I.) hired Howard McCabe to pay out nearly £250,000 over the strike period to support three months of living costs for striking and violent Guyanese civil service union workers.⁹⁹ Unions such as the P.S.I. and the American Federation of Labour (AFL/CIO) were known to be allied with the P.N.C., although, as then P.N.C. General Secretary Hamilton Green later claimed in an interview, the PNC may not have had direct control over them. Several newspaper sources also allege that the PSI was funded by its American affiliate, the Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, run by Dr. Arnold Zander. Zander’s union reported incomes of approximately £600/month, yet officials from that union later showed that enough money (£250,000) to sustain Guyanese strikers for 80 days was pushed through his union’s accounts.¹⁰⁰

Stories since the late 1960s have claimed that this money was donated by the New York Gotham Foundation and finally, that this group was a “CIA front.”¹⁰¹ These

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Insight Team, “How the CIA got rid of Jagan”, *Sunday Times*, 16 April 1967.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

reports have all been confirmed through subsequent research such as that of Stephen Rabe, Gordon Daniels and Jane Sillery, which used personal interviews with intelligence, government and trade union officials. All interviews conducted in the present study confirmed that striking unionists did receive American union funding. Unfortunately, no reference to Zander, the P.S.I., the A.F.L./C.I.O., or the funding amounts remain in British or American documents. The surrounding evidence from the period after the Birch Grove meetings, however, is still revealing.

From July to September 1963, Macmillan and Kennedy took part in intense correspondence regarding British Guiana. The Prime Minister wrote fondly to the President, describing their relationship as one of “intimacy” comparable to the “Churchill-Roosevelt relationship.”¹⁰² On 18 July, Macmillan issued his most important interventionist decision. He told Kennedy, “[w]e have come to the conclusion that the right thing to do is to impose a system of proportional representation without a referendum...[t]his will virtually mean the defeat of Jagan...”¹⁰³ Although the decision was made, Macmillan also agreed to Sandys’ proposal to delay the next constitutional conference several more months for “presentational reasons.”¹⁰⁴ In a truly damning passage, Macmillan admitted to Kennedy that

“I think the only thing which could cause our plan to go seriously awry would be if Jagan and Burnham were in the next few weeks to reach some sort of agreement...I assume, however, that your people will be doing what they can to discourage any joint moves.”¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² Macmillan to Kennedy, 4 July 1963, PREM11/4593.

¹⁰³ Draft telegram from Macmillan to Kennedy, 18 July 1963, PREM11/4593.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Macmillan to Kennedy, 28 September 1963, PREM11/4593.

Macmillan's admission of American capabilities in Guiana is the passage closest to a 'smoking gun' in the British documents revealed in this study. This passage reveals unquestionably the British electoral systems plot, but also the connection between that plot and American covert agents operating at top Guianese party levels. From this point onwards, British policy planned exclusively around a "PNC/UF victory,"¹⁰⁶ indicating clearly that both covert and overt Anglo-American activity had ensured that future.

British Guianese leaders travelled to the constitutional conference in London in late November 1963, and the aforementioned 'breakdown' over proportional representation did occur. Jagan argued exhaustively against the plan, citing evidence from the 1954 Robertson Constitutional Commission, Conservative MP Edward Gardner and the British newspapers as all being against the P.R. for causing splinter parties in British Guiana.¹⁰⁷ Dr. Jagan's arguments were sound, but fell on deaf ears.

¹⁰⁶ British Guiana: Anglo-U.S. Consultations, July 1964, FO371/173553.

¹⁰⁷ Jagan to Macmillan, 7 November 1963, FO371/167689.

Conclusion

We've been on the run ever since the constitution was fiddled.

- Prime Minister Harold Wilson, 2 April 1965¹⁰⁸

After his election in 1964, the Labour Prime Minister Harold Wilson inherited the decolonisation process for British Guiana, but was not willing to reverse the sins of his predecessor. Wilson, as with other senior British politicians, knew that Cheddi Jagan had been ousted from power, but not precisely how.¹⁰⁹ Macmillan, Sandys and only very few other top-level British officials, between 1961 and 1963, co-operated with the U.S. in a covert plan and overt operation to discredit the P.P.P. and force in an electoral system sure to prevent its re-ascension. As compared to other Cold War interventions in the Third World, the policy of funding violent Guianese trade unions was a relatively simple and elegant one. Cheddi Jagan had already incriminated himself in the eyes of his domestic opponents and the anti-communists of the West; all that was left was to prove that he was unable to govern, unable to maintain order.

The plot over British Guiana indicated the growing power of the United States in dictating the foreign policy of the non-communist countries. The exposure of these plans has illustrated Britain's inability to exit gracefully from its colonial responsibilities. The Co-operative Republic of Guyana, ruled by L.F.S. Burnham for 27 consecutive years after its 1966 independence, bears not only scars, but still-open wounds, from the British and American divide-and-rule tactics described herein. The mass exodus of educated Guyanese caused by habitual racial rioting and consequent political instability has chronically stunted the economic growth of what is by any measure the wealthiest resource base in the Caribbean. The race-based political

¹⁰⁸ Stacpole to Mitchell, 2 April 1965, PREM13/137.

divisions dictated by the 1954 British report and reinforced by the covert activities of the 1960s remain, nearly 50 years later, as the virulent P.P.P./P.N.C., Indian/African split.

The choice of Cold War policymakers to covertly support certain political factions in certain foreign lands may still be having global consequences. The case of British Guiana is but one where a simplistic foreign plan was superimposed on a complex domestic society to produce a lasting and potentially irreparable effect. As access to documents on, and research from, the Cold War period improves exponentially, little-known cases like that of this peculiar colony will continue to contribute importantly to our human history.

¹⁰⁹ Poynton to Luyt, 7 January 1966, PREM13/137.

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