

CONFERENCE OF INTELLECTUALS FOR THE SOVEREIGNTY OF THE PEOPLES  
OF OUR AMERICA

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Speech of Richard Hart

My homeland is Jamaica, but the matters I propose to discuss relate also to other English-speaking countries in the Caribbean area, in which I include Guyana. I have been unable to draw a clear line of demarcation between the themes numbered 1.1, 1.2, 3.1 and 3.2 on the list of themes for the Conference and must ask you to forgive me if some of my remarks would be more appropriate for one of the other sessions.

All the English-speaking countries in the Caribbean area were at one time colonies of Britain. In the late 1930s their struggle for self-determination, for sovereignty, began to assume its modern organisational form. With a few unimportant exceptions they now have achieved, or are about to achieve political independence. The formal process of decolonisation is almost completed. But so penetrating and pervasive are the controls and influences exercised by imperialism, particularly U.S. imperialism, that this political independence has, more often than not, proved to be only nominal.

Prior to World War II, British imperialism had shown a determination to perpetuate the colonial status of these territories. The colonial relationship provided a cloak of legality under which:

- (i) British armed forces could suppress any working class unrest which threatened the profitability of British capital investments in the production of primary products;
- (ii) British legislative and administrative controls could be used to prevent or discourage the development of local industries which would compete with goods manufactured in and exported from metropolitan Britain; and
- (iii) these same controls could be used to discourage penetration of the colonies by rival imperialists - investors and manufacturers.

Equally important was the control by the British imperialists of the educational system, which made it easier, by conditioning our minds, to govern us by consent and therefore more cheaply and effectively.

In the post-War period the British imperialists emerged from the War very much weakened. In the first place, they were no longer able frontally to resist the growing nationalistic upsurge that was occurring in all parts of their empire, as the numerous local struggles for self-determination developed. They therefore had no alternative but to make concessions. In the second place, they were so financially dependent on the U.S.A. that they could no longer discourage penetration of the British empire by U.S. investors and manufacturers. The U.S. Government was also pressing for a policy of decolonisation because they reckoned, based on their experience in Latin America, that they would be able to dominate the English-speaking countries of the Caribbean area once Britain's legal and constitutional controls had been abolished. British imperialism had no choice but to institute a policy of decolonisation.

The British were well aware of the danger that their U.S. rivals would replace them as the principal exploiters of the peoples and resources of the English-speaking Caribbean area. But they appear to have acted on the principle that to have half a loaf of bread is better than to have no bread at all. They therefore worked out what was, from their point of view, the most satisfactory solution for preserving the interests of imperialism in general, if not the interests of British imperialism in particular. They offered to political leaders in their colonies an agreement whereby they would transfer the reins of government to native hands and cease opposing the establishment of local industries which would compete with metropolitan manufactures. In return they asked for a commitment from the local political leaders that they would:

- (i) re-align themselves politically with what is known as "the West"; and
- (ii) adopt a favourable attitude towards the direct investment in their countries of foreign capital.

I have used the term "direct investment" to mean ownership by the foreign investor of the enterprise which that capital is used to create or expand. So-called "aid" of this type in the

industrialisation of an under-developed country is to be distinguished from the type of genuine assistance which, for example, Cuba obtained in establishing its deep-sea fishing industry. In the latter case, although a considerable part of the capital goods required were obtained from external sources, there was never any question of the ownership of the industry being other than Cuban. In the case of the English-speaking Caribbean countries, however, what the imperialist asked for was not a favourable attitude towards the employment of foreign capital in general, on whatever terms they might consider most beneficial. The assurance they wanted from the local political leaders was a favourable attitude towards the direct investment of foreign capital, involving foreign ownership of their countries' most valuable resources. And that is the assurance they got, from politicians who were tired of being harrassed and obstructed and who were only too happy to be able to achieve political independence without further struggle.

The period which began in the 1950s, with the conclusion of such arrangements between the imperialists and the political leaders of the English-speaking countries in the Caribbean area, is sometimes referred to as "neo-colonialism". It is a period during which many former nationalist leaders revised their nationalism so as to rid it of its anti-imperialist content. These gentlemen continued to pursue their anti-colonial political objective until political independence was granted, but in the broader politico-economic sphere they abandoned their former opposition to the ownership of the resources of their countries by foreign capitalist. They ceased, in fact, to be anti-imperialists. Indeed, those politicians who were in office very soon adopted policies of encouraging the direct investment of foreign capital by offering tax holidays and other incentives to foreign, particularly U.S., investors.

This new policy of collaboration with imperialist interests was fully in operation in Jamaica and Trinidad, the two most populous of the English-speaking countries in the region, by the mid-1950s. Both these countries were accordingly advanced, without further opposition from the British Government, to the status of politically independent states in 1962. But it is interesting to note that independence for Guyana was delayed at that time because there was an anti-imperialist government office there under the leadership of Cheddi Jagan. The U.S. Government therefore insisted that independence for Guyana be delayed until

a formula could be found to remove Jagan's Government from office. This was achieved in 1964 when the British Government illegally altered the Guyanese electoral system. The prime minister who was then installed, Forbes Burnham, was initially willing to accept the rules laid down by the imperialists and accordingly Guyana became independent in 1966. Meanwhile Barbados, which had a compliant government, had been granted independence in 1964.

The social basis of support for neo-colonialist policies is to be found in the fact that there did not exist, in any of these countries, strong, manufacturing based, bourgeoisie. The workers, for their parts, were so strongly influenced by vacillating petty bourgeois elements allied to the major political parties, that they had been unable to develop political organisations of their own. During this period, therefore, national sovereignty was willingly sacrificed on the altars of opportunism and collaboration with imperialism.

It is to the credit of Michael Manley, who became Primer Minister of Jamaica in 1972, that he clearly saw the impossibility of regaining national sovereignty unless Jamaica could diversify its political and economic relations. He saw the necessity to find alternative sources of capital goods and credit and alternative markets for the country's exports which could replace, if needs be, the traditional supply, credit and market connections with the imperialist countries which had existed for a long time. This explains his courageous decision, though his own ideas are by no means Marxist nor, indeed, very far to the 'left', to defy the wishes of the U.S. Government and establish diplomatic and commercial relations with Cuba. And he persuaded the prime ministers of the other three countries I have mentioned to join him in so doing.

The establishment of relations with Cuba was the gateway through which, given time and if what was started had been resolutely pursued, Jamaica would have been able to find alternative sources of capital goods and markets. Such connections could have been sought not only in the socialist countries but also in Scandinava and Latin America, thus facilitating an escape from the U.S. stranglehold on the Jamaican economy. Manley's problem was that he relied heavily on support internally from sections of the local bourgeoisie, which took alarm when the U.S. Government's hostility towards these policies became so violent. The policies were not, therefore, resolutely pursued and the people were not mobilised to struggle against manifestations of economic destabilization by

imperialist interests and their local collaborators. The consequence was that, as economic difficulties grew more acute due to a shortage of foreign exchange with which to pay for essential imports, large numbers of people, having no adequate understanding of the causes of their distress, were persuaded that their suffering would be reduced by a change of government.

The elections held in October 1980 brought back into office in Jamaica a government of collaboration with, and subservience to, the interests of U.S. imperialism. But it would be wrong to take a pessimistic view of the future. It is difficult to see how the course chosen by the new government, a course dictated by the International Monetary Fund, can result in any substantial improvement in the level of employment or improve the economic situation generally. As the new government obtained the support of a large part of the working class by creating illusions of early prosperity, working class unrest is likely to rise sharply in the not too distant future. Also, the recent abolition of the protective legislation introduced by the Manley Government, and the unrestricted importation of articles which are produced locally, is likely to antagonise sections of the national bourgeoisie which had supported a change of government. Another important factor is the steady growth in strength and influence of a new independent working class party.

In Guyana the situation is somewhat different. For some time it appeared that the Burnham Government, having come to office under the patronage of the British Government and with considerable help from the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, was biting the hand that had fed it. The foreign-owned bauxite and sugar industries were nationalised, and although the compensation agreed with the former owners was too generous, the nationalisations appeared to be a step in the right direction. However, the workers in these industries have never been involved democratically in their operation and management and, so far as they are concerned, the only change has been that the managing bureaucracy has been expanded to provide jobs for supporters of the ruling party. Meanwhile the oppressive policies of the government have led to its increasing isolation from the masses of the people. It is, in fact, perpetuating itself in office by a combination of electoral frauds, increasing reliance on the armed forces and unscrupulous use of thugs provided by a fanatical religious sect of U.S. origin.

Guyana will not be the first country in which nationalisations have served, not as a foundation for an advance to socialism, or at least a non-capitalist path of development, but as a means of accelerating the growth of a bureaucratic bourgeoisie. There are also indications that this new bureaucratic bourgeoisie in Guyana, which the Burnham Government represents, having so-to-speak won the first round in a contest for hegemony with the imperialists, is now beginning to move into a more exclusively U.S. orbit of economic control. It is worthy of notice that the International Monetary Fund, which made its terms for renewed financing for Jamaica so oppressive that the Manley Government had to reject them, has had no difficulty in concluding arrangements for loans to Guyana.

There is no need to say much about the situation in Trinidad & Tobago because there there has been no change. Despite the fact that the Trinidad Government went along with Michael Manley on the recognition of Cuba, there was never any deviation from the neo-colonialist policies initiated in the 1950s. Nor is the situation any different in Barbados. The government there has been actively seeking appointment as the gendarme of U.S. imperialism in the Lesser Antilles of the Caribbean.

Upon the basis of these background comments about the four most populous of the English-speaking countries in the Caribbean area, I would now like to make some suggestions as to the conclusions that can be drawn within the scope of the themes for discussion at this conference. The first conclusion, which is suggested particularly by the Jamaican experience, is that it is idle and unrealistic to hope to disengage one's country from imperialist domination and achieve genuine national sovereignty with the consent, or even the acquiescence, of the U.S. Government and the imperialist interests it represents. The imperialists will not willingly relinquish their domination. They will seek to reinforce it by economic pressure, political influence and black-mail, alliances of convenience with elements within the society, bribery and corruption and internally generated force and violence. Possibly also, depending upon a number of factors including the balance of forces in the area and in the world as a whole, the possible effect in other parts of the world, the determination of the people of the country to resist and their capacity to do so, the imperialists will resort to intervention of their own armed forces.

From that basic conclusion, certain subsidiary or consequential conclusions follow:

- (i) Sovereignty and national fulfilment can only be achieved as a result of a triumph over imperialism.
- (ii) To achieve this triumph the masses of the people must be made fully aware of and understand the issues involved, and inspired to the necessity of waging a struggle against imperialism, whether or not this involves the endurance of hardship and a temporary decline in their standard of living.
- (iii) The anti-imperialist struggle cannot be fought by the people of any country in isolation from the world struggle against imperialism, for the pursuance of which international alliances, of both a political and economic nature and, if possible, a military nature, must be forged.

These are conclusions which were not drawn in time by the progressive forces as a whole in Jamaica. They were, however, clearly understood from the start by those who inspired the people of Cuba in their revolution. Events are proving that these conclusions are also being drawn today by the peoples of Grenada, Nicaragua, Guatemala and El Salvador.