

Suspension of Democracy in Guyana

We are deeply concerned about the suspension of the Democratic process in Guyana as this sets a dangerous precedent in the Caribbean Region. Since Independence was granted to most of the British West Indies, Parliamentary democracy has been the cornerstone of our political culture in the Caribbean and for the Guyana Government to suspend this process, with no clear date as to when it will be restored, is unacceptable and sets a dangerous precedent.

A PPP government should understand more than most the dangers of such a move. We would like to remind them that the suspension of parliament is the very action the British Government under Winston Churchill took in 1953 to frustrate the democratic aspirations of the masses in Guyana, when they suspended the constitution and then proceeded to manipulate the political and electoral process in an attempt to arrive at a Government of their liking.

Recall Parliament

We urge President Donald Ramotar to urgently recall parliament and restore a functioning democracy without delay, least they be seen as attempting to deny the Guyanese masses a voice and trying to manipulate the electoral process. The proroguing of parliament since November 10th coming on top of not holding local government

elections for 20 years can only give the impression that the Guyana Government is less concerned with democracy and more concerned with centralising power in the hands of the President, an action more reminiscent of previous dictators. That the Guyana constitution provides for the proroguing of Parliament -a situation which surely cannot be justified in an era of more rather than less dialogue- is no excuse to call an end to discussions in parliament especially with the difficulties presently facing Guyana.

We urge the Government, least they be viewed as irresponsible and reckless at this time, to listen to the call of the National and International community to recall parliament immediately so that those elected to represent the people of Guyana can have a voice.

Anti-government protests in Haiti

Thousands of anti-government protesters have clashed with police in Haiti's capital Port-au-Prince. They burned tyres and threw stones at police who responded with tear gas and bullets. The protesters want President Michel Martelly to resign and long-overdue elections to be held. The protests have forced the prime minister to resign. Encouraged by this success, the demonstrators are demanding the resignation of the President and proper democratic elections with *Fanmi Lavalas*, the party of ex-President Aristide, allowed to stand.

Read an in-depth analysis in the latest edition of the Haiti Support Group's Briefing entitled "*Who needs elections?*"

Download it from <http://www.haitisupportgroup.org>



Marikana Massacre Commission Update

We're almost at the end.

The Commission is over, the legal teams' submissions are in, the families have gone home. On 31 March 2015 Judge Farlam will complete his report and give it to the President.

As a word of caution on the outcome: on the last day, the very, very last day, Judge Farlam said: *No one argues that the workers were shot because they were on strike.* Dali Mpofu, advocate for the injured and arrested miners, reminded the judge that General Mpombo, the North West province Commissioner of Police, announced on the morning of the massacre: *"Today this strike will end."* It's a piece of evidence that has been in front of the Commission and central to it for two whole years.

Cover-up

We know the outcome will be less than we want. But some significant gains have been made. First, the families were there and continued to come for two years. Second, the police are known to have lied to the Commission - it's always the cover-up that comes back to bite you. Third, it's accepted by the evidence leaders, and it's clear from the video evidence, there was no charge by the miners on the police. Fourth, the killings at scene two, at the small koppie, what we call the killing koppie, cannot be explained away by the police. And no one is blaming AMCU any longer (except perhaps the NUM).

AMCU has grown into a significant union with upwards of 130,000 members. The five-month long platinum strike earlier this year was won, despite the united attempts of the three big mining houses to break the union.

The word Marikana echoes around South Africa. The name has entered the language of the country. It represents all that is wrong in South Africa – and a lot that is right and hopeful.



Police Violence in the USA (and the UK)

Protests as another policeman faces no charges after killing an African-American man

Following a second grand jury decision that a white cop was within his rights to choke a black man to death, there have been demonstrations all over the USA, which have persisted despite facing police beatings and tear gas. Striking fast food workers, many of whom are black or latino, have added the names of these recent victims of police brutality to their placards as they fight for a living wage of \$15 an hour. They have been joined on the streets by students from the University of California at Berkley who chanted *"I can't breathe"*, Eric Garner's last words.

London

There were demonstrations in London as well, as angry crowds gathered outside the US Embassy in Grosvenor Square on hearing the news that Eric Garner's killer was to get off scot free. There have also been protests in London in solidarity with the demonstrators in Ferguson, where police shot dead unarmed teenager Michael Brown.

Remember Mark Duggan

Many demonstrators made the link between the situation in the USA and the killing of Mark Duggan. Carole Duggan, Mark's aunt, said *"Mark Duggan was murdered by the police. The inquest found he was unarmed. Because the state is so racist and corrupt, they came back with a verdict of lawful killing. That is why we have to stand up in solidarity with the people of Ferguson"*.

Marcia Rigg, sister of Sean Rigg who was killed in police custody in 2008, spoke about the number of black people who have died at the hands of the police. She said: *"Not one police officer has been made accountable for any of these deaths. Shame on them!"*

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Tivoli Massacre Rally and the Start of the Commission of Enquiry

A rally was called by the Tivoli Committee to highlight once again the need for justice to be served to those who suffered bodily, emotionally and materially when the Jamaican security forces invaded and then besieged Tivoli Gardens and adjoining communities for three long days in May 2010, committing murder and mayhem that has shocked both local and international communities. That is now over four years ago, a very long wait for the Commission of Enquiry which has now started

Young men especially were killed indiscriminately, officially 73 in number but by common agreement more likely 200. Hundreds more suffered personal injury, or serious damage to their property, the security forces acting without restraint under cover of a State of Emergency called by Prime Minister Bruce Golding on 23 May. The Public Defender's report, which took over three years to appear, suggests strongly that at least 40 of the killings were extra-judicial and that much of the material damage was wanton.

Poets

Those attending, about 35 in number, were then treated to powerful renditions from a range of conscious poets, including Michael Abrahams and Mutabaruka.

Five Tivoli residents also spoke, painting all too painfully the trauma suffered by them and their loved ones. Adina Derby was shot through her abdomen as she ran from her house in search of help for her son who had just been shot. As Adina crawled up the road hoping for assistance, she was further abused by members of the security forces. Another resident from nearby Matthews Lane attended with her wheel-chair-bound son, now crippled and brain damaged after being shot by soldiers or police.

In his comments, Lloyd D'Aguilar put the events in May 2010 in the wider context of state suppression as a reaction to the challenges posed by those not willing to accept the injustice and inhumanity of their impoverished or dis-empowered situation.

Report from the Commission

(1) Several credible witnesses have testified to the terroristic or counterinsurgency tactics of the Security Forces.

(2) Security Forces entered homes and made decisions as to who should live or die; in one case two young men were taken upstairs to a room and

killed; one woman saw her nephew being lead away and then saw fire coming out of the nozzle of a policeman's gun -- the nephew's body was later retrieved at the morgue;

(3) Property was criminally destroyed on pretext of searching for weapons; there was looting of cash;

(4) Men and women were physically and verbally abused by the Security Forces; one woman was punched in the face; one elderly woman said she was told to lie in mud where there was a lot of ants; one man described an army vehicle being used to run over his wrist; a group of men at UP Park Army Camp were forced to kneel in a row so close behind each that their faces would touch the rear of the person before him;

(5) At least two witnesses described disappearances of male relatives;

(6) The tactic of the lawyers for the Army and Police was to suggest to witnesses that they were lying; to exploit discrepancies in statements given over a period of time; or to create confusion around the language used but which most Jamaicans understood;

(7) The cross examination strategy of the army/police lawyers suggests that the Security Forces viewed the entire Community as participants in a war against them -- either as lookouts or giving tacit support to Dudes' army. This suggests a counterinsurgency approach where no distinction is made between unarmed residents and armed combatants;

(8) Witnesses described hearing "bombs" and seeing houses on fire.

(9) It appears as if Witness statements have not yet been submitted by Security Forces members; a deadline has been given;

(10) It should be noted that only a subpoena can compel any witness to testify and protection against self-incrimination would have to be respected; The Commissioners have given no indication as yet that they intend to subpoena anyone.

(11) The Enquiry continues February 9.

There is widespread disgust with the aggressive tactics of the government lawyers in trying to discredit witnesses. There is a feeling of class solidarity around this. Media houses are now busy discussing the language issue in Jamaica.

40 Years of Caribbean Labour Solidarity

It is hard to believe that it is Forty Years since our founding members started a campaign in support of the working people of the Caribbean. We applaud their vision and commitment to the people of the region and are committed to staying with their vision of a society that affords respect, liberty, justice and a socialist outlook in all things.

With the passage of time we have lost many of the founding members including three of our outstanding Presidents. A little respect is due to Lionel Jeffrey who died in 31st October 1993, then Cleston Taylor in March 20th 2010 and most recently our Honorary President Richard Hart On 21st December 2013. Nevertheless the work of CLS continues and it is not only a good time for us to reflect on some of the achievements of CLS but also to look ahead to the challenges before us. It is hard to measure some of the gains as the outcomes were not so clear cut but fought we have on behalf of the Caribbean peoples and are committed to continue fighting. I will mention a few of the things we have been involved in over the years.

Grenada

Top of our list must be our support for the revolution in Grenada. We applauded and supported the revolution of Maurice Bishop and the New Jewel Movement from day one and indeed the late Richard Hart was made Attorney-General in 1983 the year of the American Invasion. Richard narrowly escaped arrest by the Americans and returned to London where he helped mobilise and provide support for the 'Grenada 17'. CLS took a position that was not always popular but we strongly felt that the problems were for the Grenadian people and their friends in the region to solve and deplored the American invasion as yet another attempt to stamp their authority in their 'back yard'. We fought for the release of the prisoners who had been sentenced to death by a kangaroo court. They were subsequently released after some served up to 27 years in jail.

Guyana

We campaigned for fair and free elections in Guyana at the time of the notorious rigging of elections under Forbes Burnham. We supported the Campaign against Waste Dumping in Guyana and celebrated a victory when the Guyana Government retreated from importing American rubbish to be

incinerated in Guyana. This was a rare victory against the regime in Guyana at the time.

We fought Eugenia Charles when she instituted a shoot rasta on sight policy for the police in Dominica.

We continue to build and strengthen links with the Latin American countries. We celebrate their victories and take inspiration from the way they are transforming the lives of their people. We pay special tribute to the Cuban Revolution as we respect the gains of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

Police Brutality

We campaign against police brutality in the region and supported calls for an independent international enquiry into the police shooting and killing of Bauxite workers and their families who were campaigning against electricity hikes in Linden, Guyana. We also support the Tivoli Gardens Committee's demands for an International Enquiry into the Tivoli Gardens massacre in which at least 73 residents lost their lives at the hands of the state security services in Kingston, Jamaica in 2010.

We have deplored the actions of the Dominican Republic in denying its citizens of Afro-Caribbean descent a passport and will continue to agitate until their rights are restored.

Federation

The Caribbean is in crisis economically, socially and politically and we believe the way forward is for a Federation of the West Indies and we will continue to agitate for that.

We have engaged with the fight for Reparations for Slavery and Native genocide and have made this one of our priorities for the future.

We will of course continue to take up issues as they arise in defense of the working people of the Caribbean and look forward to your continued support.

Luke Daniels.

Caribbean Labour Solidarity meets on the first Sunday in the month at 12 noon at Islington Pensioners Forum
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