



Vol, 2 No. 7 May 2015 ISSN 2055-7035

Barbados PM sends Reparations letter to Britain for Caricom

The 15-member Caribbean Community (Caricom) countries have sent a formal letter complaint to Britain seeking reparation for slavery. The letter, which was written by Barbados Prime Minister Freundel Stuart and sent to the British Foreign Office, calls on London to formally acknowledge the region's demands for payment for the transatlantic slave trade. Caricom has said it will not release the contents of the letter, until there is a reply by the British Prime Minister David Cameron. But Caricom has warned that it is prepared, as its next option, to take the matter to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in The Netherlands for a ruling, but that it prefers a negotiated settlement.

Last October, on an official visit to Jamaica, Prime Minister Cameron acknowledged the "wounds of slavery run very deep" but avoided speaking on the issue of reparations as he addressed a joint sitting of the Parliament, instead offering £25 million to build a prison for Jamaicans currently serving sentences in the UK. The British government has a long history of such contempt for the victims of slavery and the ongoing consequences to the descendants of people enslaved under the British Empire despite or, perhaps, because of the vast wealth that British capitalists extracted from the Caribbean during the 17th, 18th and early 19th century. The preferred narrative congratulates the United Kingdom for being the first nation to abolish the slave trade.

Move on

His only comment on slavery was "*I do hope that we can move on from this painful legacy and continue to build for the future*".

Last month, Sir Hilary Beckles, who chairs the Caricom Reparations Commission, said that a suggestion by European countries that "*they have now moved on... sorry it is a closed chapter there is nothing to discuss*" does not negate the call for compensation.

The Caribbean countries say they will allow "*a two-year period to elapse*" before formally taking the matter to the International Court of Justice for adjudication. However, a Downing Street spokeswoman said: "*We don't think reparations are the right approach. The PM's point will be, he wants to focus on the future. We are talking about issues that are centuries old and taken under a different government when he was not even born.*" This would seem

to imply that Caricom will wait a very long time before it gets any response from the British Foreign Office.

Reservations

While Caribbean Labour Solidarity welcomes the fact that Caricom has raised the issue, we have serious reservations about the approach they are taking. Firstly, the International Court of Justice has no power to enforce its rulings, even if it finds against the United Kingdom. "Compulsory" jurisdiction is limited to cases where both parties have agreed to submit to its decision. There is no entity that could force the states to comply with ICJ decisions. Therefore, the absence of binding force means that the 193 member states of the ICJ do not necessarily have to accept its rulings. Moreover, membership in the UN and ICJ does not give the court automatic jurisdiction over the member states, but it is the consent of each state to accept adjudication that matters.

Secondly, the very fact of waiting two years before proceeding shows a pussyfooting approach which will just be seen as a sign of weakness by the hard-nosed British government.

But, most tellingly, by keeping the contents of the letter secret, the Caricom governments are clearly showing that they do not want any popular involvement in the campaign for reparations.

We believe that only a widespread campaign of militant activity will force the British and other European governments to face up to their responsibilities and pay up.

Justice for Walter Rodney committee calls again on President to release CoI report

The Justice for Walter Rodney Committee said in February that now that Guayana President David Granger has commented on the findings of the Commission of Inquiry (CoI) report into the death of Walter Rodney it was incumbent upon him to release it to the public. yet, we are now in the middle of April and we have only seen leaked extracts of the report, as the government makes increasingly less plausible excuses for not releasing it in full.

It appears that the report states that historian Dr Walter Rodney was the victim of a State-organised assassination on June 13th, 1980 and this could only have been possible with the knowledge of then PNC Prime Minister Forbes Burnham. The three-person inquiry, headed by Barbadian QC Sir Richard Cheltenham, also found that the late soldier Gregory Smith carried out the killing and he was then spirited out of the country to French Guiana in an elaborate operation spearheaded by the Guyana Police Force (GPF) and the Guyana Defence Force (GDF).



Extract from the Statement to the Media and Public by the Justice for Walter Rodney Committee

Yesterday, February 24, President David Granger, in person, let the world know that he considered the Report of the Walter Rodney Presidential Commission of Inquiry established by his predecessor and continued by him to be “deeply flawed” and does not reflect “the truth.” Announcing that copies of the Report had been circulated but that he was unable to obtain the views of Cabinet as he had been traveling, the President indicated that he would challenge the report’s findings and “the circumstances under which that Report was conducted.”

The Justice for Walter Rodney Committee notes that the President is commenting on a Report that is yet to be released to the public. We wish to repeat our call on the President to release the Report to Dr. Rodney’s family, the lawyers representing all parties at the Inquiry and to the media. Indeed, now that the President has publicly pronounced on the Report, it is incumbent on him to release it to the public. Years from now new generations may find it strange that a government had hindered persons in search of information vital to them and the health of the society.

The President made reference to the fact that former Crime Chief “Skip” Roberts was not allowed to testify and former Army Head Norman

McLean did not complete his testimony. We wish to remind President Granger that it was he who, despite the strenuous pleas of lawyers and the parties represented at the Commission, brought the Commission of Inquiry to an abrupt end. The President cannot have it both ways: he cannot stop the Inquiry and later, when the findings are adverse to his interest, lament the absence of their testimony.

President Granger, in claiming that the Commission did not give the “Guyana people what they deserve, that is to say what were the circumstances under which Dr. Rodney acquired a certain device and how that device came to be detonated” not only attempts to rewrite the Commission’s Terms of Reference but completely overlooks the expert evidence by a witness whose credibility and evidence were not affected even after extensive cross-examination by the team of attorneys representing his Party.

It is regrettable that the President has once again raised the issue of the cost of the Commission. Our Committee is on record as being sensitive to the instances of wastage surrounding the Inquiry, but we find it highly improper for the entire Inquiry to be measured in dollars and cents. We are moved to repeat the old saying – “Justice is more precious than gold.”

Alliance For Change (AFC) calls for release of Rodney Report

The party, which forms part of the coalition government said the Report should be released to the slain leader’s family and the party supported its early release to the public.

“The AFC is of the view that the Report affords the country an opportunity to address a difficult period of its history and hopes that it forms the basis for national healing and reconciliation.”

Why Is Guyana’s President Hiding Walter Rodney’s Murder Report? More on the Rodney CoI on our website:

<http://cls-uk.org.uk/rodney-coi.html>

Update from the Tivoli Committee

The West Kingston Commission of Enquiry completed its year-long enquiry into the 2010 Tivoli Gardens security forces massacre in February 2016. Its report is expected to be completed and released by the end of April this year.

The Commissioners have since sent out notices to residents of Tivoli Gardens who testified that they intend to make “adverse” comments in their reports. The Tivoli Committee has seen some of these “adverse comments” and it confirms our initial observation and experience of the absolute bias with which the Commission and particularly the Commission Chairman has treated the Tivoli Committee which represented residents who were victims of the massacre. The Commission views the Tivoli Committee as anathema because of its implicit attempt to protect the security forces and to white-wash their actions.

"Adverse Comments"

The Tivoli Committee is in the process of responding to a few of these “adverse” comments because in one case it is a clear attempt to protect a Major of the Jamaica Defence Force who facilitated the murder. The Tivoli Committee is now in the process of further organizing the victims to demand Compensation: Apology: Reparations: and Ratification of the Statutes of the International Criminal Court into Jamaican law.

The Terms of Reference of the Enquiry provided for no specific action or recommendation where compensation and reparations are concerned. The Commissioners have said as much and so there is a political need for the residents to organize themselves so that negotiations can begin with the government so that the principle of compensation is agreed upon as well as the criteria to be used.

"Recommendations"

The Commission has indicated that it intends to make “recommendations” to the government in terms of how it might be possible to prevent another such massacre from happening in the future. The Tivoli Committee has organized a petition-like letter to the Commissioners demanding that they recommend that Jamaica does go forward and ratify the Rome Statutes of the International Criminal Court into Jamaican law as the best way to prevent another Tivoli Gardens-type massacre from happening in

the future.

The truth is that there is a de facto state policy of impunity for police extrajudicial killings which has been in effect for decades. Unless there is the legal and political will to go after the commanders who according to international law are responsible and must be held accountable for the actions of those whom they command there is nothing to stop extrajudicial killings from continuing to be the norm in Jamaica.

Campaign

The Tivoli Committee is therefore in the process of preparing to launch a local and international campaign for:

- (1) Compensation: Apology: Reparations: Ratification;
- (2) Referral of the matter (using aspects of the expected Report) to the International Criminal Court; and
- (3) an attempt locally to use the Private Prosecution approach (which is possible under Jamaican law but rarely used) to bring criminal charges against the main commanders of the massacre.

We will be exploring this matter in keeping with the fact that is unlikely that the Commission Report will recommend criminal charges for the superior commanders: former Prime Minister Bruce Golding; former head of the Jamaica Defence Force Major General Stewart Saunders; and former head of the Jamaica Constabulary Force Owen Ellington. These were the superior commanders and the evidence adduced at the Enquiry demonstrates that there is no doubt that they organized and/or condoned the massacre.



Railway Workers call for Boycott of the Dominican Republic

from RMT News

At the last RMT Annual General Meeting, there was condemnation of appalling racism and ethnic cleansing in the Dominican Republic in the Caribbean resulting in an overwhelming vote in support of a boycott.

Delegate Glenroy Watson said that the Dominican Republic had stripped citizenship from tens of thousands of its residents because their roots are in neighbouring Haiti, though they were born in the Dominican Republic. The two countries are a single land mass on one island. But people of Haitian descent are to be ethnically cleansed – sent to a country they have never seen – people whose parents or grandparents came to the Dominican Republic to work on its sugar plantations decades ago.

Mr Watson told conference how in 1937 20,000 Haitian men, women and children were rounded up, attacked, beaten and many murdered in an outburst of racism and xenophobia.

Delegate Richard Burns, a Virgin West Coast train manager, said that he had holidayed in the Dominican Republic. He had witnessed the treatment of Haitian sugar plantation workers. *“I have not been back since, I am boycotting the Dominican Republic”* he said.

The resolution was passed at the AGM and taken to the TUC’S Black Workers Conference where it was passed unanimously despite reservation expressed by the TUC because the resolution called for a boycott of D.R. goods.

“It is scandalous that the Dominican court has chooses to commemorate the 76th anniversary of the 1937 massacre by stripping Dominican-born men, women and children of Haitian descent of their citizenship, rendering them stateless therefore unable to attend school or make a living, consequently becoming even more vulnerable to all kinds of hostilities including, increasingly, physical violence”.



RMT Black and Ethnic Minority Advisory Committee

Opponent of Xolobeni titanium mine assassinated

Opponents of the plan to mine titanium in the Xolobeni area in the Eastern Cape fear for their lives after the chairman of the Amadiba Crisis Committee, Sikhosiphi Bazooka Rhadebe, was assassinated last night.

Rhadebe was shot eight times outside his house in Lurholweni township at Mbizana.



Crisis Committee member Nonhle Mbuthuma said the hitmen had come in a white Polo with a rotating blue lamp on the roof. Two men had knocked at the door saying they were police officers. Rhadebe had died defending his young son, who had witnessed the murder. His son and his wife were hospitalised.

The Xolobeni community opposes plans by mining company TEM, a subsidiary of Australian mining company MRC, to mine titanium on their land. Community members say the mine will mean the removal of people from the land and the destruction of their livelihoods.

The Amadiba Crisis Committee accuses MRC and its local partners and allies of using violence to intimidate the community into accepting the mine. The committee says police in the area are on the side of the mining company.

In the statement Mbuthuma describes months of violence against opponents to the mine, including armed attacks against community members in May and December last year, threats and attacks against the headwoman, Cynthia Baleni, who opposes the titanium mine, and raids by police against opponents to the mine. Several people have been injured, some seriously. For a year, she says, the police has refused to cooperate with the traditional authorities to stop the violence. *“We have tried to call for help from the police. But there has been nothing.”*

On 26th March, the Marikana Miners Solidarity Campaign picketed the South African Embassy to condemn this outrage

Haiti: '15 minutes to leave'

Denial of the right to adequate housing in post-quake Haiti

Five years after the devastating earthquake in Haiti, durable housing solutions remain out of reach for hundreds of thousands of displaced people. Although forced evictions from displacement camps decreased in 2014, forced evictions in the context of reconstruction and infrastructure development projects, for which the Haitian authorities are directly responsible, are increasing. This report calls on the Haitian authorities and on the international community to take much more decisive action to make the right to adequate housing a reality for all in Haiti.

More than 200 families were forcibly evicted between 7-10 December 2013 from Mozayik, a sector of an informal settlement known as Canaan, located on the outskirts of Port-au-Prince. A justice of peace (juge de paix) from the municipality of Croix-des-Bouquets carried out the eviction, accompanied by police officers and a group of armed men. They used excessive force, as the police reportedly used tear gas grenades and fired shots into the air to intimidate residents who tried to resist the operation. A dozen people were assaulted, including a woman who was four months pregnant. The eviction reportedly occurred in execution of a court order issued in June. However, residents stated that they were never notified the order nor received notice for the eviction.

The land where the settlements of Mozayik, Village Grâce de Dieu and Village des Pêcheurs are located is reported to have been identified by local entrepreneurs for the construction of a gas terminal.

No running water

Canaan, an informal settlement several kilometres away on the northern outskirts of Port-au-Prince, has no running water or sanitation and continues to grow as more victims of forced evictions arrive. It is located on an extensive tract of land that former president René Préval declared for “public use” two months after the January 2010 earthquake. But in 2012 a second decree was issued by the government of president Michel Martelly which reduced the area declared for public use. Therefore, the status of the land remains unclear and the families resettled there do not have any security of tenure. Many, including residents of Camp Mozayik, were forcibly evicted from an internally-displaced persons (IDP) camp or moved out of an under threat camp in order to seek a more secure place to live. Many residents of Canaan face forced eviction from people claiming ownership of the land, including residents of Lanmè Frape (for further information please visit

www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AMR36/020/2013/en).

Four years after the devastating January 2010 earthquake, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) estimate that 146,573 individuals are still living in makeshift camps. A third of them are under risk of forced eviction. However, this figure does not include 52,926 residents of Canaan which the IOM removed from its list of IDPs in September 2013, due to the fact that the Haitian government believes the area to be “new neighbourhoods needing urban planning with a long term view” and not IDP sites.

Cholera

The destruction of the community’s water source is of particular concern given the ongoing cholera epidemic. The latest available figures from Haiti’s Ministry of Public Health and Population from 17 January show that there have been 363,117 cases of cholera and 8,539 deaths since the outbreak started in October 2010. According to the World Health Organization “[p]rovision of safe water and sanitation is critical in reducing the impact of cholera and other waterborne diseases.



The Haiti Briefing is published by the Haiti Support Group. It provides analysis of Haiti’s development issues, reflected through the voices of popular organisations on the ground.
<http://haitisupportgroup.org>

ANC stalwart Kathrada urges Zuma to step down

One of the Rivonia defendants who was sentenced along with Nelson Mandela to life imprisonment on Robben Island, Ahmed Kathrada, has urged President Jacob Zuma to step down.

“I know that if I were in the President’s shoes, I would step down with immediate effect. I believe that is what would help the country to find its way out of a path that it never imagined it would be on, but one that it must move out of soon.

“To paraphrase the famous MK slogan of the time, ‘There comes a time in the life of every nation when it must chose to submit or fight’. Today I appeal to our President to submit to the will of the people and resign,”

“I have always maintained a position of not speaking out publicly about any differences I may harbour against my leaders and my organisation, the ANC. I would only have done so when I thought that some important organisational matters compel me to raise my concerns. Today I have decided to break with that tradition. “The position of President is one that must at all times unite this country behind a vision and programme that seeks to make tomorrow a better day than today for all South Africans. It is a position that requires the respect of all South Africans, which of course must be earned at all times,”

Under the influence of the Guptas

“I did not speak out against Nkandla although I thought it wrong to have spent public money for any President’s private comfort. I did not speak out though I felt it grossly insulting when my President is called a ‘thief’ or a ‘rapist’; or when he is accused of being ‘under the influence of the Guptas’. I believed that the NEC would have dealt with this as the collective leadership of the ANC.

“When I learnt of the dismissal of Minister Nene and the speculated reasons for this I became very worried. I’m fully aware, it is accepted practice that the appointment and dismissal of Ministers is the prerogative of the President. This might be technically correct but in my view it is against the best traditions of our movement. My concern was amplified when it emerged that the Deputy Finance Minister reported that he was offered the Finance Minister post by members of the Gupta family. The people’s interest must at all times remain supreme. In this instance it was clearly not the case. The resultant crisis that the country was plunged into was clearly an indication that the removal of the Minister was not about the interests of the people.

“The unanimous ruling of the Constitutional Court on the Nkandla matter has placed me in an introspective mode and I had to ask myself some very serious and difficult questions. Now that the court has found that the President failed to uphold, defend and respect the Constitution as the supreme law, how should I relate to my President?

“If we are to continue to be guided by growing public opinion and the need to do the right thing, would he not seriously consider stepping down?

Crisis of confidence

“I am not a political analyst, but I am now driven to ask: ‘Dear Comrade President, don’t you think your continued stay as President will only serve to deepen the crisis of confidence in the government of the country?’

“And bluntly, if not arrogantly; in the face of such persistently widespread criticism, condemnation and demand, is it asking too much to express the hope that you will choose the correct way that is gaining momentum, to consider stepping down?

“If not, Comrade President, are you aware that your outstanding contribution to the liberation struggle stands to be severely tarnished if the remainder of your term as President continues to be dogged by crises and a growing public loss of confidence in the ANC and government as a whole.”



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