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Guyana invites Canadian students over for non-academic research

by Roger deWinter

Every year, the World University Service of Canada (WUSC) organizes a seminar of four to six week's duration in a Third World country. The purpose of these seminar/study tours is to confront Canadian students with the real situation in these countries, as opposed to a 'textbook' interpretation of Third World development. It is hoped this kind of experience will provide students with a better understanding of other cultures and motivate them to share such new understanding with his or her home community upon returning.



Last summer, the government of Guyana (formerly British Guiana) invited WUSC to send thirty Canadian university students to this small country on the northeast coast of South America. The students were selected from campuses across the country, and I was fortunate enough to be chosen from among the applicants.

We left Canada at the beginning of July, each of us with his own research project to carry out. My project was to investigate the land development taking place both on the Atlantic coast and in the country's interior.

Our flight from Toronto stopped in Antigua, Barbados and Trinidad before landing at Georgetown, the capital of Guyana. We received a warm welcome from Guyanese students and were directed to our hotel for some badly-needed sleep. The hotel was plain but perfectly suited to our needs.

I spent the next few days just becoming accustomed to the hot, humid, tropical climate that is typical only seven degrees north of the equator.

During the first two weeks, I spent most of my time in Georgetown with the rest of the group. There, I met with various government officials, visited in and around Georgetown, and toured Linden, Guyana's bauxite centre which is located 60 miles inland from the Atlantic. Bauxite earns about sixty per cent of Guyana's foreign exchange, but leaves behind the hideous scars of open-pit mining that is the result of extracting bauxite from depths that reach 300 feet.

While in Linden, we were lodged in the elegant houses formerly occupied by the Canadian staff of Alcan, the former owners of Guyana Bauxite Company.

The presence of six different groups makes Guyana a unique country. Two major groups, Indo-Guyanese and Guyanese, co-exist without sharing a common culture. I was able to see movies from India, eat in an East Indian restaurant, listen to a steel band of African descent. These racial groups seldom co-operate in cultural affairs.

The Amerindians (the native American peoples) live on reserves, similar to those in Canada, and are not integrated into either the economy or the social/cultural life of Guyana. The government is actively trying to break down these inter-cultural barriers, but the integrative process is a long one. A national slogan coined by Comrade Burnham (Guyanese prime minister) is "one people, one nation, one destiny," but we



a great deal of careful practical application before becoming reality.

Great inequality still exists in the housing. Though some of the Guyanese who work in Linden live in the sumptuous houses of former Canadians, other still reside in rough shacks that formerly housed African slaves or indentured laborers brought to India to work the sugar plantations.

During the last three weeks of the seminar, I visited most of the agricultural development projects. The projects are mostly located on the coast since ninety per cent of the population lives in this area. The work done thus far is very impressive. The fertile coastal land is four to six feet above sea level and a 270-mile sea wall protects these precious farm lands against flooding. I was also fortunate enough to visit the interior Rupununi area, most of which is virgin forest and savannahs. Inhabited by Amerindians and diamond prospectors. Lack of land and transportation makes the interior difficult to penetrate. It took me a full day to travel forty miles from Georgetown to the Tapakuma agricultural scheme.

The Guyana seminar gave me an excellent opportunity to confront directly the political, economic and social problems of this Third World country. In an effort to share some of our experiences with other students, the two WUSC members from my university who travelled to Guyana are preparing a Guyanese Night scheduled for Saturday, Nov. 6. There will be a slide show, two Guyanese speakers and Guyanese food at \$1.50 per plate. Admission is free and the event will be held in room 142 of SUB at 10:00 on Nov. 6. We would like to share with you the warmth of the Guyanese people and the excitement of this marvellous country.

If you wish to view or buy articles prepared by co-operatives and self-help groups in Third World countries, I must remind you of the WUSC Caravan, now in the SUB Gallery from 10 am to 10 pm, Nov. 1-5.

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