

featurette

BRITISH GUIANA: BACKWARD, POOR, RACIST

by John J. Barr

JJB is a third-year political science student at the University of Alberta. He is founder and president of the Young Canadians for Freedom, and premier of the 43rd session of the Tuxis Parliament of Alberta.

He is a Canadian correspondent of the Georgetown, British Guiana, Daily Chronicle. He travelled to B.G. during August and September of this year. Ed.

During the War, foreign servicemen on leave from British Guiana used to remark, in half-seriousness, that there was nothing there "but itches, ditches, and bitches." This is no longer true, if it ever was. And oft-ignored little "B.G." is being brought to the public attention more and more every day, largely because it has become the latest in a long line

of "new frontiers", along which the forces of Communism and Western Democracy are clashing.

The political implications of what is presently going on in British Guiana are sobering. I will examine them at length in the second installment of this article. For the present, I want to briefly describe the exotic and

unstable Guianese atmosphere, which must be understood before the political situation can be comprehended.

British Guiana is a backward country, situated on the Northeast coast of South America, sandwiched between Dutch Guiana (Surinam), and Venezuela. The usual problems faced by underdeveloped nations happen to also be present in British Guiana—with plenty of unusual, unique, problems thrown in. To name a few:

DUTCH-STYLE

In addition to being short of resources, literacy, capital, and technology, much of the inhabited region of Guiana—the narrow coastal strip along which sugar and rice are

grown— happens to lie slightly below sea-level. The sea is held back, Dutch-style, by a complex of breakwaters, sea-walls, sluice-gates and drainage ditches, the networks of which lace the country.

Frequently, I am told, during the rainy season, when the drainage ditches have been filled to overflowing with flood waters, the Guianese are forced to raise the sluice-gates in the sea-wall, to drain off the dangerous surplus of water; frequently they discover, when opening the sluice-gates, that it is high tide! In rushes the sea across the flat and featureless land, and away is swept the fruits of the labor of many hard-working people. Drainage and reclamation of the ruined land takes

months, often years.

It is bad enough for Guiana that she has an insufficiency of developable resources, a high rate of illiteracy (though not the highest in the region, by any means), and—as I shall explore later—an incompetent, Communist-leaning Government. In addition to all these obstacles to development, which are staggering, Guiana is confronted with a challenge more imminent and dangerous than the rest in sum: the problem of racial tension.

Guiana is a land of six races: East Indian, Native Indian, African (Negro), Chinese, White (Portuguese), and—and I quote—"mixed."

Alas, Guiana is not blessed with the racial tolerance and cosmopolitan character of her equally polyglot Caribbean neighbors; the proliferation of races in Guiana has multiplied, not divided, the racial conflicts and tensions; at present the solution of the "race problem" ranks first on the agenda of those who wish to bring Guiana into the community of modern nations.

The East Indians, brought to Guiana around the turn of the century as indentured plantation workers, form the largest ethnic group, constituting 48% of the population. The Africans come next, with 37% of the population. The Whites, Native Indians, Chinese, and "mixed" make up less than 15% of the population all together.

The Whites form the clerical and the large part of the professional classes, the Africans form the urban working class, the East Indians the rural farming class.

Flare-ups between them are frequent, and are aggravated by the machinations of the respective leaders of the racial groups. In February of this year, bloody looting and rioting erupted in Georgetown, the Capital, and racial hatreds constituted a large part of the instigation.

AMERICAN STYLE

What wealth there is in Guiana, aside from the meager, questionable assets in rice and sugar (which are not in great demand), has been brought in by foreign capital. North American Aluminum companies have developed the Bauxite reserves at MacKenzie, where the native workers now have the highest wages and living standards, and best living quarters in the country.

Professional critics of the evils of "economic imperialism" might well look at the beneficial aspects of foreign capitalism in Guiana, where, but for the wealth that North American free enterprise has imported, all the Guianese would still be dwelling in deplorable poverty and insecurity.

Confronted with inadequate economic development, social problems of considerable weight, imminent and premature independence from British rule, and the lurking spectre of Communist domination, Guiana is truly a nation in crisis. Will this embryonic state be still-born? In the concluding installment of this examination, I hope to turn the light of political analysis upon the aforementioned problem.

NICKEL IN WORLD MARKETS...JOBS FOR CANADIANS



How Canadian Nickel helps make seawater drinkable in Kuwait

It wasn't so long ago that Kuwait's drinking water had to be imported in goatskin bags; the natural sources of water being particularly foul and brackish. Today, however, the world's largest seawater evaporation plant supplies six million gallons of fresh water daily. Nickel alloys helped make this plant possible, just as they help in similar ways in other countries. Why nickel? Because nickel alloys can best withstand the punishing effects of corrosive salt water. The growth of nickel markets at home and abroad helps strengthen Canada's economy and helps provide more jobs for Canadians.

THE INTERNATIONAL NICKEL COMPANY OF CANADA, LIMITED
55 YONGE STREET, TORONTO

Dr. James D. Tchir

Optometrist

•

401 Tegler Building

Telephone GA 2-2856