

Human Rights Violations By Paramilitary Groups during The Burnham/PNC Regime.

We have seen the active involvement of the Security forces (Police and GDF) in Human Rights violations against Guyanese Citizens during the Burnham/PNC regime (S. Beharry, KN 27th Dec., 2005; SN-). In that letter, I promised that next time we shall look at Paramilitary Groups and their involvement in human rights violations of Guyanese.

Let us see what the US Library of Congress has to say about this matter, since prominent PNC officials were denying these allegations, in the same way that they still continue to deny any wrong doings in the Rupununi Uprising. (Google - Library of Congress, Search -Guyana) The Jan, 1992 US documents states:

“Informal Paramilitary Groups: House of Israel

During the 1970s and 1980s, a religious group known as the House of Israel became an informal part of the PNC's security apparatus and engaged in actions such as strikebreaking, pro-government demonstrations, political intimidation, and murder (see [Cults](#), ch. 2). The House of Israel was led by an ardent PNC supporter, David Hill, locally known as Rabbi Washington. Hill was an American fugitive wanted for blackmail, larceny, and tax evasion. Despite its name, the House of Israel was neither Israeli nor Jewish-oriented. It was, instead, a black supremacist cult claiming that Afro-Guyanese were the original Hebrews. Cult adherents further believed that modern-day Jews were, in fact, descendants of other non-Jewish biblical peoples and were in Israel illegally. Serving as a paramilitary force for the PNC, the House of Israel had 8,000 members, including a 300-member guard force known as the "royal cadets."

A 1979 incident illustrates the House of Israel's close relationship with the Burnham administration. A member of the cult, Bilal Ato, murdered a reporter working for an opposition newspaper on July 14, 1979. The reporter had been taking photographs of an antigovernment demonstration when he was stabbed to death. Although, the entire incident was filmed by other journalists, the government took three years to bring the case to trial. A former state prosecutor defended Ato. The judge reduced Ato's charge to manslaughter and sentenced him to eight years in prison.

Later in 1979, as well as during the early and mid-1980s, the government used the House of Israel to break strikes and to disrupt public meetings of any group that the government felt might oppose its policies. Observers claimed that House of Israel members were accompanied by police and sometimes wore police uniforms during these incidents. In 1985 House of Israel members allegedly prevented delegates from entering the annual general meeting of the Guyana Council of Churches in Georgetown.”

Some ask how could such distasteful events happen in Hitler’s Germany, we should now ask how could such things happen in Burnham’s Guyana. The parallels are striking between the two situations (Nazism and Cooperative Socialism). There are always men and women ready to serve if the price is right – yes, even in Guyana.

Mr. Rakesh Rampertab wrote (2001) about the House of Israel, see detailed accounts at

<http://www.guyanaundersiege.com/Historical/houseofisrael.htm> . The quoted sections vividly demonstrate the tactics and brutality of their methods (Nazi tactics) on “enemies of the state”:

“Scab Labor and Terrorism:... But a greater connection can be made through the terrorist nature of House members in favour of the Burnham (Rabbi Aaron) government, beating up on opposition political activists and providing scab labour. While Father Darke’s murder is the most famous of the crimes committed by House members, there were other cases. Mike James (also from Catholic Standard) and Gordon Yearwood, who was a fierce, well-known critic of Burnham were also beaten and stabbed respectively that fateful day. The police, instead of seeking to apprehend those responsible, set up guard at the House of Israel premise to prevent angry members of the public from retaliating.”

“... The arrival of Dr. Walter Rodney not only breathed new and energetic fuel into the Opposition’s turbine, it brought the single most dangerous threat to Burnham. The WPA became the chief target for the House of Israel. “

“Below is Eusi Kwayana’s account of one such WPA rally that was broken up by Rabbi’s men at Delph Street and Campbell Avenue in Georgetown on August 22, 1979.”

“After being dispersed, Moses Bhagwan who hid among some livestock in a nearby yard was found, dragged out, beaten, and left with a broken arm, while Rodney who ran and was able to escape uninjured, became the subject of a Burnham joke. Burnham said that he would send Rodney to the Olympics because of Rodney’s athletic prowess. Below is an account of the meeting by Eusi Kwayana (see Walter Rodney. Kwayana E, Georgetown: Working People’s Alliance, 1988, 15);

“A Squad of uniformed policemen, including Rabbi Washington’s men dressed in police uniform and carrying no regulation numbers, attacked the meeting which they claimed was illegal. It was a total assault with batons on the crowd of peaceful citizens by a crowd of well armed policemen of the Tactical Service Unit (Riot Squad)...Scores of people were beaten by the police. They were on fire with venom not noticed before. This was due to the House of Israel.”

One month earlier, in July of 1979, the building, which housed the office of the General Secretary of the PNC and the Ministry of National Development, was burned down. (Analogous to the burning of the Reichstag and blaming and arresting political opponents.) Despite eyewitnesses’ claims of seeing men in army uniforms, leading WPA leaders/political activists including Drs. Rodney, Roopnarine, and Omawale were arrested. While thousands protested at their trial outside the court house, news photographer for the Catholic Standard, Father Bernard Darke was stabbed to death in the presence of onlookers (police included). Those who did the stabbing were members of the House of Israel. Despite all of this, chief PNC member Kit Nascimento, one week after the crime, referred to the House of Israel as a “religious group that lives in a cloistered, communal atmosphere. The members have declared their support for the government and they haven’t committed any crimes. There is no reason why we should be concerned” (Toronto Star, July 22, 1979).

It would be curious to hear what Mr Kit Nascimento has to say now — to the US Embassy concerning their assessment of the House of Israel.

Mr Eusi Kwayana, The New York Times, Oct. 21, 1979 said: "The House of Israel is a pseudo-religious cult that has little to do with religions. It's merely a pseudo-military arm of the ruling party."

If the Burnham/PNC Govt. can lie so blatantly about events that were so public, how can any rational person trust their version of events in the Rupununi Uprising?

Here again we see whom were the people getting the attention of Burnham's (Rabbi Aaron) wrath. It is the WPA and its leadership that became the real threat to the Burnham/PNC Govt. It is also disgusting that some are now trying to sanitize Burnham (Rabbi Aaron) and present him as a benevolent leader. I guess even Hitler has his devoted supporters (especially those who have profited handsomely and those who miss the good times at the trough and the trampling others) - despite evidence of so many abuses, both on the coast and in the interior of Guyana.

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