

Paramilitary Forces and Special Units In Guyana

Mr Sheldon A. Britton (SN, 8th Dec., 2005) wanted to know where is the account for the Guyana National Service and the Guyana People's Militia. The US Library of Congress, Jan, 1992, document states:

(<http://reference.allrefer.com/country-guide-study/guyana/guyana126.html>)

"In 1973 a paramilitary organization, the Guyana National Service (GNS), was created. Generally used as a manpower source for public works and services, it also had a limited military potential. The government envisioned the GNS as an organization that would produce "cadres" sufficiently skilled to depart the populated coast and relocate to the underdeveloped interior. According to the GNS's enabling document, the Guyana National Service State Paper, this program would prepare Guyanese to use their time and energies profitably and productively; equip them with the knowledge and experience to open up, develop, and live on the rich lands available in the hinterland. It would mobilize and motivate support for the Guyanese people's effort to "feed, clothe, and house" themselves; inculcate the skills and attitudes necessary for nation-building and national development; and transform individuals accustomed to depending upon external aid into self-reliant and productive citizens. The GNS was to encourage the physical and mental discipline necessary for development and to ensure cohesion and unity among the various ethnic, religious, social, and economic groups in Guyana.

The 1,500-person GNS was divided into various corps for young people from ages eight to twenty-five, and was integrated into public education. Associated with the Afro-Guyanese dominated PNC, it was almost exclusively composed of young Afro-Guyanese. The program evolved from an earlier voluntary service group called the Guyana Youth Corps. This organization, whose mission had been to populate the hinterland, failed because of a lack of public support.

The government requirement that University of Guyana students and government scholarship students perform one year of service with the GNS in the republic's interior posed problems for young Indo-Guyanese women. It is customary in Guyana for single women of all ethnic groups to live at home with their parents. When away from home, single women live with relatives or board with families. The Indo-Guyanese were particularly concerned that the GNS program was a scheme to foster interracial relationships. Many women refused to enter the GNS and, as a result, did not graduate from the university. It became common practice among Indo-Guyanese to attend college overseas to avoid the GNS program.

GNS teaching was highly ideological. Although membership was optional at the elementary and secondary levels, students who did not participate were not provided the results of their high school placement examinations. Elementary school students who did participate were organized into "Young Brigades" and taught to march and chant party slogans. Later, as high school juniors, students were encouraged to join the Guyana National Service Cadet Corps. The corps was similar to Cuba's Young Pioneers, with the Guyanese cadets going to field camps for political indoctrination.

The People's Militia was created in 1976 during a period of heightened tension along the Guyana-Venezuela border. Proposed by opposition leader Cheddi Jagan, the militia was envisioned as a more ethnically diverse force than the GDF, which it would replace. Jagan saw the militia as a popular organization that would have branches on every city block and in every village. The government agreed to form the People's Militia, but only as a supplemental security force. Militia members were to engage in their normal occupation until war broke out, at which point they would defend their communities and assist the regular forces.

The government intended the militia units to be autonomous and flexible enough to be self-supporting during emergencies. The militia's force level was set at 2,000. The government's stated goal was to make the militia a broad-based volunteer force. It was initially well-received, and both Afro-Guyanese and Indo-Guyanese volunteered. However, preferential treatment of Afro-Guyanese led to an exodus of Indo-Guyanese volunteers. Heavy

recruitment in PNC strongholds and sustained political indoctrination ensured that the People's Militia would be loyal to the PNC. ...”

From the above account, one has to agree that the Mr. Desmond Hoyte did the right thing in stopping the unpopular and costly militarization of the nation (We were resembling North Korea). The economics determined that even the GDF had to be pruned.

Yours Sincerely,

Seelochan Beharry