

Questions Raised on Guyanese

By Charles A. Krause

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GEORGETOWN, Guyana, Dec. 23—Late in the afternoon of Nov. 20, a small, twin-engine Guyanese Air Force plane loaded with treasure lifted off from the Port Kaituma airstrip where Rep. Leo J. Ryan (D-Calif.) and four other members of his party had been killed only two days before.

On the plane were Ptolemy Reid, Guyana's deputy prime minister, and Viola Burnham, whose husband, L. Forbes Burnham, has ruled his country as prime minister for almost 15 years.

Reid and Mrs. Burnham had spent the afternoon of Nov. 20 viewing the carnage that had then just been discovered at Jonestown.

Few people in Guyana know that Reid and Mrs. Burnham personally brought more than \$1 million in currency, gold and jewelry uncovered among the ruins of the Peoples Temple back to government headquarters in Georgetown.

Fewer still know where the valuables are now, five weeks later, although police officials—who confirmed that the cache was aboard the plane—assure foreigners who ask that the fortune is still intact.

Despite assurances such as these, opponents of the Burnham government have begun to ask embarrassing questions about the relationship that existed between the Guyanese government and the Peoples Temple and have begun calling for an independent investigation into all aspects of the Jonestown affair.

Late last week, for example, the head of the Catholic Church in Guyana, Bishop Benedict Singh, sent an open letter to President Arthur Chung, this country's ceremonial head of state, asking that such an investigation be held.

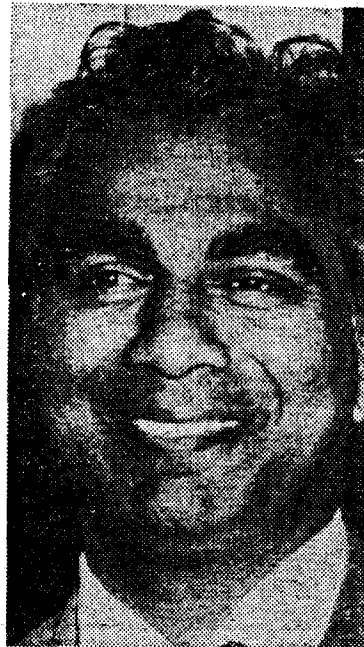
"The tragic events of Jonestown in which over 900 persons were murdered or committed suicide have raised serious questions which still remain unanswered," the bishop said. "The integrity of many public figures and institutions is being questioned."

"In order to restore public confidence, there is urgent need to set up an independent commission to investigate the foundation of the settlement at Jonestown and the causes that led to the final disaster," Bishop Singh said. So far, Chung has not replied.

The Burnham government has attempted to ignore questions from its domestic opponents about the Peoples Temple, questions that have to do with why the group was allowed to settle in Guyana in the first place, the extent of access and privilege the Temple achieved in its dealings with the government and the group's involvement in local political affairs.

Underlying these questions is the widespread belief, at least among the opposition, that the Rev. Jim Jones and his lieutenants used illicit money and sex to obtain from Guyanese authorities the protection they sought from scrutiny by both the United States and Guyana.

While there is as yet no proof that any Guyanese officials were bribed by



CHEDDI JAGAN

Ruling party let cultists attend rallies, members of the Peoples Temple, it is known that large quantities of cash were always available both at Jonestown and at the Temple's headquarters here in Georgetown.

And while there is as yet no proof that Jones attempted to gain favor

Government's Ties to Cult



FORBES BURNHAM

opposition says it rejected advances.

with local officials by encouraging his female followers to seduce top Guyanese government officials, Paula Adams, one of Jones' most trusted aides, has said publicly that she carried on an affair for several years with a prominent Guyanese diplomat.

It is also widely known that the Peoples Temple made overtures to both of Guyana's major political parties, Burnham's Peoples National Congress, and Cheddi Jagan's Peoples Progressive Party, offering help and assistance.

Jagan's party declined the offer and did not encourage further contact, according to sources in the party, while members of the Peoples Temple did attend various rallies and were visible at events sponsored by the Peoples National Congress.

While the government has not answered its domestic critics nor indicated any enthusiasm for an independent inquiry, government ministers have occasionally agreed to interviews with foreign correspondents over the past month to discuss the charges that have been leveled.

Today, Shirley Field-Ridley, the Burnham government's minister of information, discussed the Jonestown affair and its implications both for the government and the country as a whole in a two-hour interview.

She said that many people, both at home and abroad, are in her view looking for scapegoats and have decided that "Guyana, as a political entity, must somehow be responsible" for not preventing the Jonestown tragedy.

"It's not a rational thing (to blame Guyana) because it could have happened anywhere," she said. Suggestions that the Peoples Temple had a special relationship to the government, which allowed Jones to operate

without proper scrutiny are "ridiculous," Field-Ridley said.

While not denying that representatives of the Peoples Temple did have direct access to some government ministers, she contended that "our style of government is very people-oriented. People who have problems come to ministers. It is not unusual in Guyana."

As for any support the Peoples Temple gave to the ruling Peoples National Congress, Field-Ridley said there had been an offer by Jones to involve his followers in a recent referendum campaign and to have them cast their votes for the government.

"They were told very clearly and unequivocally that they could in no way participate because they did not have the qualifications" of citizenship, she said. But, she said, "there was nothing wrong" with allowing Temple representatives to attend party functions.

Field-Ridley also said that it was difficult for the Guyanese government to properly police and inspect Jonestown because of its isolation and because of cultural differences between Americans and Guyanese.

Nonetheless, she said, government officials visited Jonestown fairly often and did their best to see that the community adhered to Guyanese laws and regulations.

She said that, as far as she knew, no Guyanese official had been corrupted by the Peoples Temple.