

Message Text

SECRET

PAGE 01 GEORGE 05493 01 OF 03 191125Z
ACTION ARA-15

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FM AMEMBASSY GEORGETOWN
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1245
INFO AMEMBASSY PARAMARIBO
AMEMBASSY BRIDGETOWN
AMEMBASSY KINGSTON
AMEMBASSY PORT OF SPAIN
AMCONSUL MARTINIQUE
USINT HAVANA

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 3 GEORGETOWN 5493

E.O. 12065: GDS 12/13/79 (ADKINS, JAMES L) OR-P
TAGS: PINT, GY
SUBJ: INTERVIEW WITH GUYANESE OPPOSITION LEADER DR.
WALTER RODNEY

1. (S-ENTIRE TEXT)

2. SUMMARY: OPPOSITION WORKING PEOPLE'S ALLIANCE (WPA)
LEADER DR. WALTER RODNEY ASKED FOR A MEETING WITH EMBOFF TO
OFFER HIS INTERPRETATION OF RECENT EVENTS. RODNEY SAID THAT
GUYANESE GOVERNMENT (GOG) REPRESSION HAD FORCED THE WPA
INTO A CLANDESTINE MODE AD THAT THE WPA HAD CONCLUDED THAT
THE LOCAL POLITICAL SCENE WOULD DETERIORATE INTO VIOLENCE
WITHIN THE NEXT YEAR. WHEREAS HE ABHORRED TERRORISM, THE
WPA MAY BE FORCED TO RESORT TO IT. TURNING TO GRENADA, HE
SAID THAT MAURICE BISHOP WAS A POLITICAL AND IDEOLOGICAL
EMBARRASSMENT. THUS FAR, THE WPA HAD RECEIVED NO HELP AND
WOULD SEEK NO HELP FROM CUBA. RODNEY SAID THAT HE AND OTHER
WPA LEADERS DID NOT CONSIDER THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT
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SECRET

PAGE 02 GEORGE 05493 01 OF 03 191125Z

(USG) "THE ENEMY" AND INSISTATED THAT A WPA-LED GOVERNMENT
IN GUYANA WOULD POSE NO THREAT TO U.S. SECURITY. ATTEMPTS
BY THE WPA TO ORGANIZE OPPOSITION GROUPS INTO A COHESIVE
MOVEMENT HAD RESULTED IN CONSENSUS IN THE POLITICAL SPHERE
BUT DISAGREEMENT OVER AN ECONOMIC PROGRAM. END SUMMARY

3. OPPOSITION WPA LEADER DR. WALTER RODNEY SENT WORD TO

EMBOFF WHOM HE HAD MET INFORMALLY BEFORE, THAT HE DESIRED TO MEET DISCREETLY AGAIN. THE MEETING TOOK PLACE ON DECEMBER 5, 1979. RODNEY EXPLAINED DURING THE MEETING THAT THE WPA RECENTLY HAD BEEN MAKING A SPECIAL EFFORT TO PROVIDE THE EMBASSY WITH COPIES OF PAMPHLETS AND STATEMENTS THAT WERE BEING PUBLISHED BY THE WPA. THIS WAS LARGELY DONE AT THE INITIATIVE OF DR. CLIVE THOMAS, A PROFESSOR OF ECONOMICS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF GUYANA, WHO LIKE RODNEY, WAS A MEMBER OF THE WPA'S PROVISIONAL EXECUTIVE.

4. RODNEY ADDED THAT HE WANTED TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE CONTACT THAT HAD BEEN ESTABLISHED BETWEEN HIMSELF AND EMOBOFF TO RELAY HIS INTERPRETATION OF RECENT EVENTS TO THE USG. HE NOTED THAT THE BRITISH HAD TAKEN ACTION RECENTLY THAT WAS HELPFUL TO THE WPA CAUSE: WITHDRAWAL OF ALL BUT MINIMUM SUPPORT TO THE BURNHAM GOVERNMENT. IN THAT REGARD, HE SAID THAT USG POLICY WAS LESS HELPFUL IN THAT THE BURNHAM GOVERNMENT WAS STILL RECEIVING ASSISTANCE FROM THE USG. EMBOFF EXPLAINED THAT ASSISTANCE AT LENGTH, THE MAIN POINTS BEING THAT THE USG MAINTAINED PROPER RELATIONS WITH THE BURNHAM GOVERNMENT AND THAT OUR AID WAS DIRECTED AT THE POOREST ELEMENTS IN GUYANESE SOCIETY IN AN EFFORT TO IMPROVE THEIR SITUATION. RODNEY DID NOT TAKE ISSUE WITH THE EXPLANATION.

5. RODNEY SAID THAT THE WPA HAD SEIZED UPON WHAT LITTLE
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SECRET

PAGE 03 GEORGE 05493 01 OF 03 191125Z

POSSIBILITY THAT HAD EXISTED TO ESTABLISH ITSELF AS A POLITICAL PARTY AND OPERATE WITHIN THE LIMITED DEMOCRATIC FRAMEWORK THAT HAD PREVAILED WHEN THE PARTY WAS FIRST ORGANIZED IN 1974. HE NOTED THAT AS THE PARTY HAD ACQUIRED MORE ADHERENTS AND PRESENTED MORE OF A THREAT TO THE BURNHAM REGIME, A CONSISTENT POLICY OF REPRESSION BEGAN TO BE MOUNTED AGAINST THEM. PEOPLE WHO WERE IDENTIFIED AS MERELY BEING PRESENT AT WPA POLITICAL RALLIES WERE VICTIMIZED, I.E., THEY LOST THEIR JOBS, WERE TRANSFERRED TO REMOTE VILLAGES, SUFFERED DISCRIMINATION, EXPERIENCED ARREST AND TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS, ETC. THIS WAS ALSO TRUE OF LONG-TIME FRIENDS OF HIS WHO MERELY SPOKE TO HIM ON THE STREET. EVEN THOUGH THEY WERE NOT POLITICALLY INVOLVED WITH THE WPA, THOSE FRIENDS WHO STILL HAD THE COURAGE TO SPEAK TO HIM SUFFERED FROM VICTIMIZATION. THIS WAS NOT TO MENTION THE WELL-DOCUMENTED PHYSICAL ATTACKS ON HIS PERSON AND ON THE PERSON OF OTHER WPA ACTIVISTS SUCH AS DR. RUPERT ROOPNARINE AND MOSES BAGHWAN, NOR THE RECENT ATTACK BY HOUSE OF ISRAEL THUGS THROWING BOTTLES FILLED WITH FORMALIN AT ATTENDEES TO A WPA RALLY IN CAMPBELLVILLE. HE WENT ON TO MENTION THE JULY 14 FATHER DARKE KILLING, AND THE BEATING OF "CATHOLIC STANDARD" JOURNALIST MIKE JAMES, THE CLAUDE BOVELL KILLING

(A WPA ACTIVIST SHOT BY POLICE FOR ALLEGEDLY RESISTING ARREST), THE ROUGHING UP OF STRIKING WORKERS AT GUYANA STORES IN AUGUST, AND OTHER BEATINGS ADMINISTERED BY POLICE AND HOUSE OF ISRAEL THUGS AT WPA RALLIES.

6. RODNEY SAID THAT HE WAS COMPLETELY FORBIDDEN TO TRAVEL OUTSIDE GOEROGTOWN, BECAUSE EVERY TIME HE WAS DISCOVERED IN ANOTHER AREA, HE WAS PICKED UP BY POLICE AND HELD FOR 24 OR MORE HOURS. MOREOVER, THE WPA NOW HAD INFORMATION THAT WORD HAD COME FROM THE PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE THAT FUTURE CONFRONTATIONS WITH THE WPA "WERE TO BE FATAL". THESE TACTICS BY THE GOG HAD FORCED THE WPA TO GO UNDERGROUND. FOR THE PROTECTION OF ALL INVOLVED, IT WAS NOW NECESSARY TO USE CLANDESTINE METHODS FOR CONDUCTING EVEN
SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 04 GEORGE 05493 01 OF 03 191125Z

ROUTINE MEETINGS ON SUCH TOPICS AS HOW A POLITICAL PARTY SHOULD BE ORGANIZED, DISCUSSION OF PARTY FINANCES, AND POLITICAL STRATEGY, LET ALONE MEETINGS HELD TO DISCUSS ARMS AND REVOLUTION.

7. AS A RESULT OF ALL THIS, RODNEY SAID THAT WPA HAD RELUCTANTLY COME TO THE CONCLUSION THAT THE LOCAL POLITICAL SCENE WOULD DETERIORATE INTO VIOLENCE WITHIN THE NEXT YEAR. HE DID NOT YET KNOW WHAT FORM THAT VIOLENCE WOULD TAKE

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PAGE 01 GEORGE 05493 02 OF 03 191126Z
ACTION ARA-15

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AMCONSUL MARTINIQUE
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S E C R E T SECTION 2 OF 3 GEORGETOWN 5493

BECAUSE THE BALANCE OF FORCE WAS OVERWHELMINGLY ON THE SIDE OF THE GOVERNMENT. AS FOR HIMSELF, ONE WOULD BE SURPRISED HOW MUCH TIME AND EFFORT HE HAD EXHAUSTED IN TRYING TO AVERT RETALIATION FROM YOUNG WPA ACTIVISTS WHO WERE TIRED OF BEING PUSHED AROUND BY GOVERNMENT THUGS. PERHAPS THE TIME HAD COME TO DEFEND THEMSELVES. HE, FOR ONE, INTENDED TO DEFEND HIMSELF.

8. RODNEY SAID THAT HE DID NOT WANT EVEN TO CONSIDER TERRORISM AS AN ALTERNATIVE BECAUSE HE PERSONALLY FOUND TERRORISM REPUGNANT. THE VICTIMS OF TERRORISM WERE ALWAYS THE ONES WITH THE LEAST STAKE IN GOVERNMENT: LOW-LEVEL POLICE OFFICERS WHO WERE ASSASSINATED AT RANDOM, CLERKS IN GOVERNMENT OFFICES WHO WERE KILLED OR WOUNDED BY EXPLODING BOMBS, AND INNOCENT BYSTANDERS WHO JUST HAPPENED TO BE IN THE VICINITY OF A TERRORIST ACT. HE DID NOT KNOW FOR SURE WHETHER THE WPA WOULD EMPLOY TERRORIST TACTICS; THERE HAD BEEN NO DECISION AS YET. BUT SOME FORM OF VIOLENT RETALIATION BY THE WPA WOULD RESULT WITHIN THE NEXT YEAR;

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SECRET

PAGE 02 GEORGE 05493 02 OF 03 191126Z

HE WAS SURE OF THAT. ALL LEGITIMATE AVENUES OF POLITICAL EXPRESSION HAD BEEN SYSTEMATICALLY CLOSED TO THE OPPOSITION IN GUYANA; THUS THERE WAS NO OTHER ALTERNATIVE BUT VIOLENCE.

9. TURNING TO GRENADA, RODNEY REFLECTED DR. CLIVE THOMAS' EARLIER STATEMENT TO EMBOFF THAT MAURIE BISHOP HAD BOTCHED THINGS SINCE HIS TAKEOVER LAST MARCH. RODNEY GUESSED THAT BISHOP MAY HAVE BEEN FORCED INTO A POSITION OF CONTENTION WITH THE UNITED STATES OWING TO THE HIGH-HANDED MANNER IN WHICH HE WAS TREATED BY U.S. OFFICIALS SHORTLY AFTER THE TAKEOVER. EMBOFF STOPPED RODNEY AT THIS POINT AND GAVE HIM THE U.S. SIDE OF THE CONTROVERSY: THAT BISHOP HAD MISREPRESENTED TO THE MEDIA THE TONE OF HIS MEETINGS WITH USG OFFICIALS. MOREOVER, EVEN IF ONE SHOULD ACCEPT BISHOP'S VERSION, EMBOFF CONTINUED, THERE HAD SINCE BEEN A CONSISTENT PATTERN OF MISREPRESENTATION AND POSTURING ON THE PART OF PEOPLE'S REVOLUTIONARY GOVERNMENT (PRG) OFFICIALS WHICH BROUGHT THEIR SINCERITY SERIOUSLY INTO QUESTION.

10. RODNEY FOUND THESE OBSERVATIONS ON GRENADA INTERESTING AND WENT ON TO SAY THAT THE WPA CONSIDERED BISHOP A POLITICAL AND IDEOLOGICAL EMBARRASSMENT. THE HOSTILITY THAT HE WAS CREATING WITH THE USG AND NEIGHBORING CARIBBEAN STATES

THROUGH HIS GAIRY-LIKE METHODS OF GOVERNING WOULD CAUSE SERIOUS PROBLEMS FOR OTHER REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENTS IN THE CARIBBEAN, E.G. THE WPA.

11. RODNEY WANTED TO MAKE IT KNOWN THAT HE AND OTHER WPA LEADERS DID NOT SEE THAT UNITED STATES AS AN EENEMY. IN FACT, HE HAD DONE AT LEAST HALF OF HIS TEACHING IN THE UNITED STATES AND ENJOYED HIS EXPERIENCES THERE IMMENSELY. HE WAS NOT JUST REFERRING TO HIS GIVE-AND-TAKE WITH YOUNG REVOLUTIONARIES; HE WAS ALSO INCLUDING HIS DISCUSSIONS WITH SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 03 GEORGE 05493 02 OF 03 191126Z

OLDER AND MORE CONSERVATIVE MEMBERS OF THE ESTABLISHMENT. THE DEMOCRATIC ATMOSPHERE IN WHICH THESE DEBATES TOOK PLACE WAS SOMETHING TO BE ADMIRERD AND EMULATED. ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS HE HAD SAID TO THESE AUDIENCES THAT SOME DAY, THROUGH NORMAL POLITICAL EVOLUTION, THE UNITED STATES MAY TURN OUT TO BE THE MOST SUCCESSFUL OF ALL SOCIALIST STATES. (THERE WERE SOME FRIENDLY DIFFERENCES OVER THAT STATEMENT.)

12. RODNEY ADMITTED A CERTAIN ADMIRATION THAT HE AND HIS WPA COHORTS HAD FOR CUBA. BUT THAT WAS NOT TO SAY THAT THE WPA WOULD HITCH ITS WAGON TO ANY FOREIGN STATE WHICH PLAYED SUCH A LARGE ROLE ON THE WORLD STAGE. CUBA HAD NOT HELPED THE WPA THUS FAR, AND THE WPA WOULD BE EXTREMELY WARY OF ACCEPTING HELP FROM ANYONE WHO WOULD SEEK TO PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN SHAPING THEIR FUTURE GOVERNMENT. ON THE OTHER HAND, THE USG COULD EXPECT THAT A WPA-LED GOVERNMENT OF RECONSTRUCTION WOULD BE COMING TO THE USG WITH REQUESTS FOR SUBSTANTIAL AID. THERE WOULD SURELY BE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THEM OVER THE ROLE OF MULTINATIONAL CORPORATIONS IN GUYANA, FOR EXAMPLE. BUT THAT DID NOT MEAN THAT A WPA GOVERNMENT WOULD VIEW THE USG IN AN UNFRIENDLY LIGHT OR IN ANY WAY POSE A THREAT TO U.S. NATIONAL SECURITY.

13. RODNEY SAID THT THE WPA MERELY WANTED THE OPPORTUNITY TO RESTORE HONESTY AND INTEGRITY IN GOVERNMENT AND TO BETTER THE LOT OF THE GUYANESE PEOPLE. WHILE NOT WANTNG TO BE A CLIENT STATE OF ANYONE, THEY ADMIRERD THE UNITED STATES AND DESIRED FRIENDLY RELATIONS WITH IT. THE SAME WAS TRUE OF NEARBY NEIGHBOURS. RODNEY SAID HE WAS CERTAIN A WPA-LED GOVERNMENT WOULD GET ALONG WELL WITH THE VENEZUELANS AND TRINIDADIAN. HE WAS ESPECIALLY SURE THAT RELATIONS WOULD IMPROVE WITH SURINAME. HE BLAMED BURNHAM'S ARROGANCE AND GUYANESE ABUSES OF THE SURNINAMESE FOR THE PROBLEMS THAT EXISTED BETWEEN THESE TWO STATES. THERE WAS ABSOLUTELY NO REASON WHY RELATIONS SHOULD BE SO BAD. IT ALL CAME SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 04 GEORGE 05493 02 OF 03 191126Z

DOWN TO BURNHAM'S BULLYING TACTICS AGAINST A SMALLER AND WEAKER STATE, SAID RODNEY.

14. EARLIER THIS YEAR, THE WPA HAD INTENDED TO ORGANIZE ALL OPPOSITION GROUPS INTO A GOVERNMENT OF NATIONAL RECONSTRUCTION ALONG THE LINES OF THE DOMINICAN MODEL, GET THE PEOPLE OUT INTO THE STREET, AND DEMAND BURNHAM'S RESIGNATION. SUBSEQUENT EVENTS HAD PROVEN THAT SUCH AN APPROACH WAS NOT FEASIBLE IN GUYANA; THEREFORE, AN EFFORT WAS BEING MADE TO COORDINATE OPPOSITION TO BURNHAMA AND FORMULATE A POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC PROGRAM WHICH TOOK INTO CONSIDERATION ALL ELEMENTS WITHIN GUYANES SOCIETY, INCLUDING THE PRIVATE SECTOR. RECENTLY, A SERIES OF WEEKEND MEETINGS HAD BEGUN BETWEEN REPRESENTATIVES OF THE WPA, PEOPLE'S PROGRESSIVE PARTY (PPP), WORKING PEOPLE'S VANGUARD PARTY (WPVP), LIBERATOR PARTY (LP), PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC MOVEMENT (PDM), COMPASS, AND OTHER BUSINESS AND PROFESSIONAL ELEMENTS. THUS FAR, THE GROUP HAD COME TO AN AGREEMENT IN THE POLITICAL SPHERE, BUT STILL LACKED CONSENSUS ON

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PAGE 01 GEORGE 05493 03 OF 03 191113Z

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S E C R E T SECTION 3 OF 3 GEORGETOWN 5493

ECONOMIC MATTERS. THE BIGGEST OBSTACLE TO HARMONY ON ECONOMIC QUESTIONS HAD BEEN THE PPP. THE PPP HAD TAKEN A POSITION ON ECONOMIC MATTERS THAT IT CONSIDERED IDEOLOGICALLY CORRECT AND HAD NOT SHOWN THE FLEXIBILITY ON IDEOLOGICAL QUESTIONS THAT THE WPA HAD DEMONSTRATED.

15. RETURNING AGAIN TO THE THREAT OF VIOLENCE THAT WAS FACING HIM, RODNEY ASKED EMBOFF TO ASSIST HIS WIFE AND CHILDREN IN OBTAINING PERMANENT RESIDENT ALIEN STATUS IN THE U.S. IN THE EVENT HE WAS KILLED. LIKE HIMSELF, HIS WIFE WAS NOT ALLOWED TO WORK DESPITE THE FACT THAT SHE WAS A UNIVERSITY GRADUATE. NOR WOULD SHE BE ALLOWED TO FIND WORK AFTER HIS DEATH. THUS, HE WANTED TO MAKE CERTAIN THAT IN HIS ABSENCE, HIS WIFE AND CHILDREN WOULD NOT HAVE TO REMAIN AT THE MERCY OF THE BURNHAM GOVERNMENT. HE DID NOT LIKE TO ASK FAVORS, HE SAID, BUT WOULD DO SO WHERE THE WELFARE OF HIS FAMILY WAS CONCERNED. HE EMPHASIZED THAT HE WAS NOT ASKING FOR ASSISTANCE FOR HIMSELF BECAUSE HIS FIGHT WAS HERE IN GUYANA AND HE INTENDED TO SEE IT THROUGH.

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SECRET

PAGE 02 GEORGE 05493 03 OF 03 191113Z

EMBOFF EXPLAINED THAT SUCH A REQUEST WAS NOT EASY DUE TO STRICT IMMIGRATION REGULATIONS.

16. COMMENT: RODNEY WAS INTENT ON CONVINCING EMBOFF THAT THE USG HAD NOTHING TO WORRY ABOUT FROM THE WPA FROM THE STANDPOINT OF NATIONAL SECURITY. THE WPA WAS CONCERNED MAINLY ABOUT INTERNAL GUYANESE AFFAIRS WITHIN THE REGIONAL CARIBBEAN CONTEXT. HE DID NOT TRY TO SKIRT IDEOLOGICAL DIFFERENCES BUT SAID THAT THE WPA RECOGNIZED THAT GUYANA COULD ONLY BE SAVED BY A GOVERNMENT WHICH REPRESENTED ALL INTEREST GROUPS AND RACES. THE WPA WAS SUFFICIENTLY FLEXIBLE AND HAD WORKED UNTIRINGLY TO INCLUDE ALL OF THOSE INTEREST GROUPS AND RACES IN THE OPPOSITION MOVEMENT. HE WAS NOT ASKING THE USG TO HELP THE WPA; ON THE OTHER HAND, HE DESIRED THAT THE USG NOT INTERFERE IN THAT PROCESS OUT OF SOME INBORN HOSTILITY TOWARD THE WPA. (WPA PUBLIC COMMENTS RECENTLY HAVE AVOIDED ATTACKS ON THE U.S.) LASTLY, RODNEY GAVE EMBOFF THE IMPRESSION OF A MAN WHO HAD A PREMONITION OF IMMINENT DEATH. HE WAS NOT SHRINKING FROM THAT FATE, BUT HE WAS TRYING TO PUT A FEW AFFAIRS IN ORDER BEFORE IT CAME UPON HIM.

ROBERTS

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