

<https://internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article5664>



French Guiana

French Guiana: the negative legacy of French colonialism

- IV Online magazine - 2018 - IV523 - August 2018 -

Publication date: Tuesday 21 August 2018

Copyright © International Viewpoint - online socialist magazine - All rights reserved

For many French people, the only images of Guiana they have are Devil's Island and the Ariane launch site. What is sometimes added to this is a picture of people always holding i strikes for incomprehensible reasons while also being reliant on aid. Behind these media images lurks a colonial reality that fills the daily life of Guianese. Part of the "Old Colonies", French Guiana has been occupied by France for more than three centuries. [1]

The Spanish colonizers gave it the name of Eldorado because of the legend of the "Golden King" describing a king paying homage to the gods by being coated with gold from head to toe. The result was a quasi-genocide of the six indigenous nations of the territory. They were replaced by slaves as shown by the characterisation "slave colony" appearing in the various colonization projects that succeeded each other from 1626, the year in which Cardinal Richelieu installed the first French settlements in this country. If the reasons for the French presence changed during the three centuries of French occupation, the social system remains until today characterized by a colonial relationship. The installation of the Guiana Space Centre in 1964 further strengthened this colonial structure.

The arrival of the first French settlers quickly translated into an attempt to enslave the natives and, faced with resistance, by their massacre. "The French upon their arrival slaughtered all the Indians or attempted to reduce them to slavery" says the philosopher Neuville Doriac. [2] This is evidenced by the massacre that took place in 1857 during the conquest of Cayenne. However, this violence of conquest was not comparable with what happened in the rest of Latin America for reasons that the ethnologists Pierre Grenand, Françoise Grenand and Patrick Mengt summarize as follows by deconstructing the colonial myths produced to justify the French presence

"First myth: (contacts between whites and Indians have always been peaceful). Nothing is less sure... Understanding very quickly that the real intentions of the newcomers differed from their own, the Amerindians, for example the Galibi, fought fiercely. It was only their brutal demographic collapse due to the often-imported epidemics that imposed a change of strategy on them. Retreat, scattering in the forest and passive resistance became their main weapons... Then historical amnesia: (we did not massacre the Indians to take their land). It is true that the only attempted massacre perpetrated against the Galibi dates back to 1657... One must not lose sight of the fact that if neither systematic manhunts nor methodical destruction of villages were organized as elsewhere in Latin America, it is less because of kindness of soul than because Guiana never reached the stage of a true colony and that the extraction of forest products could never be satisfactorily established... Where things went differently, as in the Antilles with the Caribs or in Louisiana with the Natchez, scruples were abandoned, and massacres took place. [3]

The arrival of the colonizers thus triggered a real demographic slaughter because of the epidemics it aroused. The fall in the number of aboriginal people is so important that it generates culturalist and racist theorizations, such as "internal wars", "a worn-out race", abuse of "Cachiro" (an indigenous beer), abuse of "cold baths", "malnutrition" resulting from "laziness", and so on. Deconstructing these explanatory grids, the geographer Jean Hurault says: "most of the authors were too imbued with civilizing ideology, Christian or secular, to admit that the contact of Europeans could be the very cause of the extinction of the Indians". [4] Estimated at between 20 and 30,000 at the time of the arrival of the Europeans, there remained only 1,200 in 1960. "These 1,200 people are the only representatives of some fifty nations that populated Guiana at the time of the first settlement of Europeans", says Jean Hurault. [5] Total disappearance did not occur because of the retreat of aboriginal nations into the forest. This retreat was a survival strategy and a form of resistance, which was taken up later by runaway slaves.

Guianese climatic conditions, the carnage and the retreat into the forest of indigenous peoples quickly led to a close articulation between slavery and colonization. The first became in fact one of the conditions of the second. From 1652, the first slaves were mentioned in various documents and the first slave ship was unloaded in Cayenne in

1680. The demand of the settlers was considerable. It was evaluated as follows for Cayenne by a certain Périer des Varennes in 1702: "Cayenne possesses a lot of farmland that remains fallow for lack of negroes. These belong to 80 or 100 inhabitants, most of them are in destitution... It would be appropriate to transport 400 Negroes a year. [6] Ten years later, the governor of the colony relayed this request as follows: "The colony is failing for lack of negroes." [7]

The difficult conditions for landing in Guiana and the higher prices offered by the settlers of Santo Domingo and the French Antilles prevented this demand from being fulfilled and severely limited the number of slaves. In 1820, the secretary of the governor of Guiana established the following distribution of the population: "1,004 whites, 1,733 free people of colour, 13,153 slaves, 1,100 Indians." [8] The number of slaves was further diminished by the significance of marronage, against which punitive operations were organized. Resistance to slavery in the form of marronage was present in all the colonies but the topography of Guiana gives it particular importance: "under the Ancien Régime, desertion of slaves constituted a real plague in the colonies where the black workforce was used only for soil development and cultivation. However, the problem was even more acute in Guiana than in the West Indies, since they were made up of islands and the area blacks could move within was restricted, while in Guiana, a continental country, it was easy for them to reach the border territories of the French colony: Brazil, then a Portuguese possession, and Dutch Guiana." [9]

Many Maroons were content to reach the thick forests where they founded small self-sufficient communities. In addition to these Maroon communities there were more significant social groups made up of Maroons from Surinam. These groups constituted slave communities in the forest and attacked the plantations in order to recover weapons and liberate other slaves. In the early eighteenth century, the Maroons of Surinam were estimated at more than 5,000 people. After a long war against the Dutch army, they were forced to take refuge in French Guiana. The Djuka, Boni and Paramaka settled in "French" Guiana between 1750 and 1840. The arrival of several thousand free blacks strongly worried the French colony. After the abolition of slavery, the treaty signed between French, Dutch and Maroon chiefs recognised the Maroon communities and their territory of settlement. In 1962, the descendants of these Maroons were estimated at 1,000 for Bonni, 7-8,000 for Djuka and 1,000 for Paramaka. [10]

The face of Guianese society in the years following abolition was marked by this legacy: a quantitative weakness of the descendants of indigenous peoples and whites, a greater number of descendants of slaves (but minimal in comparison with the West Indies or Haiti), the presence of black Maroon communities, chronic underdevelopment of the territory. It was in this context that gold mines were discovered east of Cayenne. The lack of labour power resulted in the development of *engagisme*, a monarchist legal regime of quasi-serfdom. With the compensation of the slave owners, *engagisme* allowed a formal ending of slavery while maintaining a system of exploitation affecting former slaves and immigrants under a "contract of undertaking". The former slave who had become "engaged" was joined by new migrants of the same status to ensure the survival of the fortunes of the former slave owners in all the colonies. The historian Sudel Fuma proposes renaming *engagisme* as *servilisme* to better highlight the nature of the relationship between the "contractors". The author emphasizes the discriminatory nature of employment contracts in relation to existing labour law, the violence exercised to compel the acceptance of the contract and the false promises made to have the "contract" accepted before concluding: "why *servilisme*? Because the workers concerned are not free and are subject to a system but are not slaves in the legal sense of the term. This concept applies equally well to the situation of the Indian, African and free *engage* from 1848 in the French or English colonies and clarifies colonial history by giving a real meaning to the real situation of the workers subjected to forced labour at that time." [11]

Two decrees (on February 13 and March 27, 1852) would structure *engagisme* for the French colonies. For Guiana, the development of this new servility was speedy. Here is the quantitative report prepared in 1864 by the Director of the Bank of Guiana: "in the space of twelve years, the Department of the Navy has successively brought to Guiana seven convoys of Africans, four of them recruited in the Free State and three of captives redeemed and returned to freedom, one of Chinese and five of coolies." [12] Apart from the former slaves, the main origin of those "engaged" was India with 8,472 people between 1855 and 1877 and Africa with 1,826 people. By this new "fixed-term slavery"

(from 3 to 10 years) planters and gold mines found the necessary labour power and the new free workers were forced to moderate their claims for wages and working conditions as a result of competition from this indentured labour force.

Yellow gold, blue gold, green gold and black gold

It is common to hear about the absence of economic stakes for France in Guiana in order to deny the colonial character of contemporary Guiana. A simple look at economic history and Guianese resources refutes this assertion. Gold is the second export resource of Guiana today, after space activity (which accounted for 83% of total exports in 2014), with 50 million euros exported in 2006. The gold issue accompanies the entire colonial history of Guiana. In a pamphlet which was significantly titled ("Gold Guiana" or the "Euros with golden Eggs") dated 1936, the curator of the Cayenne Library remarked that "the history of gold in Guiana is almost inseparable from the history of French colonization in this part of the South American continent, from the sixteenth century of the Christian era." [13] The author recalls that the first explorers sought in Guiana the town of Manoa, capital of the ancient Inca Empire. He stresses that the first farms were established as early as 1676 by Jesuit priests with Indian labour. The official starting point of the gold industry remains however the discovery of the deposits in the Arataye creek in 1855, of which the Director of the Interior at the time said: "A new era appears to rise on our country, and Cayenne will be before long a rival to California... Thus, it is now an established fact: gold exists in the interior of Guiana." The exploitation started immediately but without real capital investment and consequently a weakness of production, but substantial profits. "All the gold gathered to date - more than three hundred tons or five tons per year on average - comes from surface alluvials, not from mines properly so called; And our mineworkers are in short only navvies and claim stakers" says the author. [14]

The state of the technology, the weakness of investment (buyers merely supplying themselves from a multitude of small prospectors bearing all the costs) and the changes in prices on the world market explain a fluctuating and modest production until the 1970s. The improvement of extraction techniques and the sharp rise in the price of gold in the world market (as a result of the abandonment of gold/dollar parity) led to a revival of production and the entry onto the scene of big international industrial companies (Grupo Mexico with Mexican and American capital, Cambior with Canadian capital, WMC with Australian capital, La Source with French and Australian capital and so on). The results of the new industrial prospecting came quickly. In his report to the prime minister dating from 2000, Christiane Taubira mentions a discovery by the Asarco company of 35 tonnes in reserves and 60 tonnes in resources at Camp Cañman, another by the Guyanor-Cambior company of 45 tonnes in reserves and 60 tonnes of resources in Yaou and Dorlin, and other promising but not yet exploitable discoveries. [15]

Subsequent discoveries confirmed the enormous gold potential of Guiana. The chair of the board of directors of the country's biggest gold producer, the Auplate company (exploiting the mines of Dieu Merci and Yaou), thus said in 2014 that Guiana is "the largest gold reserve in the world". [16] In the same period, the mining company Montagne d'or made public its project of industrial mining for 2022 with a production valued at 6.7 tons per year. However, this project of open-pit mines is fraught with consequences: deforestation (1,513 hectares of the Amazon rainforest) and massive cyanide spillage (46,500 tonnes for a period of exploitation estimated at 12 years). If President Macron has announced his support for the project, a protest movement is growing, in particular among indigenous peoples. The collective "Or de question" has organised public demonstrations and appealed through the courts for the cancellation of the operating permit. Industrial choices based on needs external to those of the population and concerned about immediate profitability without taking into account long-term effects are, let's remember, one of the first characteristics of colonial logic

In addition to gold, Guiana has an exclusive economic zone of 13, 000 km² rich in fishery resources and in particular in shrimp resources. However, the sector remains largely under-exploited with production varying from

3,000 to 4,000 tonnes per year in the 2000s and falling from 700 to 800 tonnes in 2017. The destination of this production underscores the colonial dependence: 85% is exported to France and 10% to the French Antilles.

Guiana also has considerable wood resources. The Amazonian forest covers 8 million hectares of forest of which 7.5 million belong to the state. However, the resource is largely under-exploited with a production of only 72 000 m³ of logs. A paradox typical of a colonial situation (where the priority of investments depends solely on profitability and not local needs), Guiana imported 17.6 million euros of wood products and exported 3.1 million euros in 2014.

Finally, the discovery of offshore oil deposits in 2011 by Total, which possesses an exclusive permit for exploration, has raised big expectations. Although the extent of the deposit and its reserves cannot yet be quantified, the existence of large hydrocarbon potential in the Surinamese-Guianese basin has been proven. The USGS (United States Geological Survey), a scientific agency of the U.S. government, estimates that this basin is second in the ranking of the most promising unexplored offshore oil basins in the world. [17]

Guiana maintains an economic structure dependent in its choices and its priorities on the needs of the metropolis. Exports and imports are made exclusively with the metropolis first, the other colonies in the West Indies and Europe thereafter. The commercial fabric is owned by the big *béké* families of Martinique (the Bernard Hayot Group, the Fabre-Domergue group, the Dormoy family and so on). The raw materials and construction industries are dominated by French multinationals (Bouygues, Eiffage, Vinci, Bolloré, Auplata, and so on). The two characteristics of a colonial economy are present: the exploitation of resources for the benefit of the metropolis and the monopoly of marketing for big metropolitan companies. The only specificity here is the use of the Caribbean bourgeoisie as an intermediate in the exploitation of the colony. To give only one example illustrating the absurdity of colonial logic for the Guianese people, we quote from a Senate report dated October 2017: "That raw materials imported from Brazil by Guiana must pass through Le Havre is stunning." [18]

As for the plight of the people of Guiana, it is enough to recall a few figures to understand that the local resources are not intended for them: 40% of those aged 15/24 are unemployed, only 12% have the baccalaureate qualification, the average annual income is less than 4 4% of that of the metropolis, the number of beneficiaries of the RSA work-welfare benefit is four times bigger than in France, consumer prices are 12% higher than in France, those of more expensive food products 45% higher and those of housing 20% higher and so on.

Geostrategy, space centre and "Dutch syndrome"

We have deliberately set aside for the time being the main economic activity of Guiana, the Guiana Space Centre (CSG) in Kourou and Sinnamary. A base for French and European launches commissioned in 1968, the CSG is both the biggest economic activity in Guiana and a key strategic issue for the European Union. The decision to set up the space centre in Guiana in 1964 was done at the same time and for the same reasons as that to carry out nuclear tests in Polynesia. Algeria's independence simultaneously deprived French colonialism of its nuclear testing ground in the Sahara and the Hammaguir base near Bechar where missile and rocket launch tests were conducted. Two sets of factors contributed to the choice of Guiana. The first related to geographical and climatic factors: Guiana is close to the equator and does not experience seismic and cyclonic hazards. The second was political: Guiana at the time was thinly populated and characterized by low economic development which limited both the risks of human disasters in the event of accidents and those (it was believed) of a consistent medium-term demand for independence.

These factors quickly give Guiana a special place in global competition for space activities. *Défense*, the review of the Institute of Advanced National Defence Studies (IHEDN) summarised as follows in 1991 the geostrategic issue of

France's "Outre-mer" and the specific place of Guiana within it: thanks to the low latitude of Guiana, France was able to develop, first for its own needs, and then in cooperation with its European partners, in the framework of the "European space agency", the "Guiana Space Centre". Of all the space rocket launch centres in the world, it is currently the best location, especially for geostationary satellite firing towards the east. Without Kourou, there would be no possible independent French and Western European space policies... It is known that the control of nuclear energy for civilian and military purposes, that the use of space and that the exploitation of the oceans will be the three essential sources of power for the twenty-first century... This [the Outre-mer] brings to France a triple opportunity to remain a great power. The first is to host, thanks to French Polynesia, the nuclear weapons testing centre furthest from populated areas in the world. The second is to own the best location for space shots in the world, with Kourou in Guiana ... The third is to have the third biggest world maritime domain offering marine and underwater wealth, as well as support points and a unique dimension. The combination of these three strengths is a major political and strategic interest that neither the United States of America nor the USSR possesses, nor any rising power." [19]

These comments are still topical despite the disappearance of the USSR and the cessation of nuclear tests (which can always be restarted quickly if necessary). They are enough to underline the difficulties that the national liberation movements of the last French colonies have faced and will face. France uses the Guiana advantage in the relationship of internal forces in the European Union for leadership of the latter, with the result that the struggle is no longer between Paris and a colony but between France and the European Union. From 1975, with the creation of the European Space Agency (ESA), France's tilt to Europe was carried out. The ESA is responsible for launches inside the CSG with the launch of Ariane, the first specifically European launcher and the world leader in the commercial satellite market. "With the CSG, Guiana has become a technological showcase for France and Europe... This equipment becomes essential for defence, meteorology, data transmissions, audio-visual systems and so on. The CSG... inserts Guiana in the technical-technological environment with a strategic position at the international level, especially since the world has only about thirty bases for launching satellites" according to a group of Franco-Brazilian geographers. [20]

For Guiana, the opening of the Space Centre is reflected in an economic imbalance known as the "Dutch syndrome", one of the consequences of which is the strengthening of colonial dependence. The expression refers to the unbalancing effects of a new financial windfall (putting into operation of a new raw material source or in Guiana the huge investment linked to the space centre). Initially used to describe the consequences of the discovery in the Netherlands of a large natural gas field, the expression then widened to all the situations characterized by a sudden influx of new financial means. These effects can be summed up as follows: centring on the new sector at the expense of others, inflation linked to increased national income and demand, economic dualization between a hypermodern sector and atrophied sectors, the juxtaposition of wealth and poverty. The Dutch syndrome reinforces all the characteristics of colonial dependence. The space centre is not articulated to the whole of the local economy but appears as an appendage of an external economy.

Finally, the strategic character of the space centre leads to a consequent military presence. Officially there are 2,100 military personnel from the three armies who are permanently stationed in Guiana (in Cayenne, Kourou and Saint-Jean-du-Maroni). To this figure we must add the police force which numbered 920 in 2017. Officially their objectives are to ensure the security of the space centre, to monitor the borders with Surinam and Brazil to fight against illegal immigration, to fight illegal gold seekers and against illegal fishing. In fact, this military presence plays a deterrent function in the face of a social movement and a constantly growing independence movement.

Counteracting the independence movement by all means

As in all the old colonies, the aspiration for autonomy and then independence was almost non-existent when the

colony changed status in 1946 to become a French department. As elsewhere, the aspirations that Guianas invested in departmentalization were soon to be disappointed. After decades of slavery, *engagisme* and sub-citizenship, departmentalization was sold as a promise of equality, as the end of the colonial relationship. Disappointment came quickly with the observation of a persistence of colonial dependence and economic and social inequality with the metropolis. The time of the balance sheet arrived in a context of world anti-colonial effervescence: the Vietnamese victory at Dien Bien Phu in 1954, the outbreak of the armed struggle in Algeria in 1954, the Bandung conference in 1955 and so on. It was in this context that the first Guianese nationalist organization was born: "Where Césaire uses the word resurrection, his readers see the words of autonomy, independence and revolution. This is the case with the Guianese students who created, in Paris, in 1955, the Guianese Committee for Social and Political Action, which would take the name of the Guianese People's Union (UPG, 1955-1965), the first nationalist and autonomist party in Guiana. For 10 years, the UPG opposed the politics of assimilation and disseminated anti-colonialist ideas in Guiana." [21]

Identifying with anti-colonialism, the UPG did not demand independence but autonomy. Severely criticizing departmentalization and assimilation, the organization worked for a reform of relations with the metropolis in an egalitarian sense. The barrage against the new movement was immediate on the part of the Gaullists. Despite its profession of autonomist faith, the UPG were attacked as "separatists", "anti-French" or "anti-white" notes the historian Serge Mam Lam Fouck. [22] The young nationalist movement was quickly the object of colonial repression in the form of the expulsion from Guiana of its leaders. A specific Order on October 15, 1960 stated: "officials of the state and public institutions of the state in service in the overseas departments whose conduct is likely to disturb public order may, on the proposal of the prefect and without any other formality, be recalled automatically to the metropolis by the minister to whom they are responsible to receive a new assignment." [23]

Serge Patient, Bernard Linglin and Marius Milon were thus removed from Guiana under this Order. To the remoteness of the leaders was added the censorship of the nationalist newspaper and the dismissals of militants to destabilise them. A climate of pressure on militants was put in place causing fear and destabilization. The Order of 15 October 1960 directly struck a very limited number of autonomist militants... [but] it cooled much of the ardour, including among the non-civil servants says Mam Lam Fouck. [24]. The organization would not survive this ordeal. However, it had sown seeds of awareness that gave rise quickly to new and more radical structures.

The year in which the UPG disappeared was also that of the establishment of the Guiana Space Centre. The effects on Guianese national consciousness were paradoxical as described by historian David Redon: "The establishment of the of the Guiana Space Centre (CSG) on an area of 96,000 hectares would work both as an accelerator and a gravedigger for Guiana nationalism. Accelerator, as the expropriation of the 641 families of Kourou, Malmanoury and Sinnamary had immediate traumatic effects on people who had to abandon their lifestyles. The discourse on "guyanité" crystallized around the expropriation and disappearance of Malmanoury, giving body to nationalist, autonomist and independentist discourses. In contrast, the state could now assert the effectiveness of its assimilationist policy with the "progress" brought to the Guianese people by the CSG and its economic benefits." [25]

As in Guadeloupe, many nationalist activists became involved in the trade union struggle with the creation in November 1967 of the Union of Guiana Workers (UTG), which adopted at its founding Congress a Guiana flag and a motion for independence at its third Congress in 1973. The discourse was no longer that of autonomy but explicitly that of independence. The union base (which is at the same time a base among youth) of the pro-independence movement strongly worried the French government. The decision in 1973 to install the third Foreign Infantry regiment of the Foreign Legion (3rd REI) in Guiana witnesses to this concern.

They number several hundred men (reaching 1,000 soldiers in 1995) and the main mission is the protection of the space site. Already in 1962, the installation of a first contingent of the Foreign Legion had provoked a demonstration on June 14 called by the Democratic Guianais Front and several trade union organizations. [26] Prefect Claude Erignac reacted by violent repression with many wounded, arrests and prosecutions. It was the first time in the

political history of Guiana that police forces were charging demonstrators. The astonishment was thus great says Mam Lam Fouck. [27] The installation of the 3rd REI awakened the memories of this colonial repression dating from barely a decade.

The second reaction of the French government to this radicalisation of youth and trade unions was a project to change the social structure of Guiana by a massive importation of migrants from metropolitan France. The so-called "Green Plan" project announced in 1975 had the official objective of developing Guianese agriculture. The project, in preparation since 1973, supported by Olivier Stirn, the secretary of state for the overseas departments and territories, announced an objective of 30,000 settlers over five years for a department which at the time had only 55,000 inhabitants. While in Guadeloupe, Martinique and Réunion, the French state organized the massive export of youth through the BUMIDOM (Office for the Development of Migration in the Overseas Departments), it tried here to drown the Guianese people with settlers totally dependent on the French state. The candidates were promised concessions and aid for installation. If success was immediate in France (nearly 20,000 applications), it logically aroused the wrath of Guianese. The mass demonstrations were suppressed but the project was officially abandoned. Such a plan of settlement awakened in fact the old memories of settlement projects of the slavery era and in particular those related to Devil's Island.

The sociologist and anthropologist Marie-José Jamil summarizes as follows the reactions to the Stirn plan: "Designated then by its authors as "the overall plan for the development of Guiana", this project included an important "immigration" component which could not but awaken immediately old memories. The revival of the term "development" was sufficient to evoke the colonial period... Any massive immigration plan in Guiana also evokes, inevitably, the prison. The case is too well known for it to be necessary to expose it. I will therefore confine myself to recalling the principles and, first of all, the colonization by the penal colony laid down in 1850 by Napoleon III." [28]

The opposition to the Legion and the Stirn project catalysed Guianese consciousness, which was reflected in October 1974 by the creation of the Guianese Movement of decolonization (MOGUYDE) and the same year of the National Liberation Front of Guiana (FNLG). In December 1974, the pro-independence organizations were accused of the "Christmas" conspiracy with the arrest of 13 MOGUYDE independence activists, other pro-independence organizations (Jeune Garde, FLNG and the Guianese Socialist Party) and the UTG trade union. They are accused of "infringing the security of the state", preparing for attacks and kidnappings. Eight of them were expatriated to France and brought before the State Security Court. Another attempt to decapitate the independence movement. But this time the general strike triggered by the UTG and the mobilization of the Guianese diaspora imposed the return to the country of the political prisoners. The charges against them were abandoned. The scenario was reproduced in July 1980 with the arrest and expulsion of four militants from the FLNG accused of setting fire to a fuel depot and an attempt to attack the police station in the centre of Cayenne. They were released without charge one year later.

It was in this context of repression and abusive arrests that an attempt at armed struggle was launched by the Revolutionary Caribbean Alliance (ARC) from 1983 to 1988. This organization, which demanded the independence of Guadeloupe, Martinique and Guiana, organized numerous attacks in the three colonies and in metropolitan France. This struggle ended with the amnesty Law of July 10, 1989 concerning all the attacks committed before July 14, 1988 following the proposal by the ARC to stop the armed struggle in exchange for the amnesty of its militants. The imbalance of forces was simply too significant for this form of struggle to be effectively enforced over time.

As the relationship of forces necessary to short-term independence was not present, the national idea reoriented itself towards a struggle against the consequences of colonization. [29] An epoch of great mass movements led by the UTG and supported by the pro-independence political organisations opened and has continued until today: a six day general strike in 1992; riots in Cayenne in November 1996 to demand education for all children; a few months later, in April 1997, new riots erupted after the arrest of four young people accused of attempting to burn the state prosecutor's home in the November 1996 riots; the country was paralysed by a vast social movement in November-December 2008 (roadblocks on all major axes, barricades, a general strike) in protest at the rise in fuel

prices of fuels which became a movement against the high cost of living.

This last movement was so massive and radical that the French state was forced to make major concessions. President Sarkozy announced 137 measures to reinvigorate economic development and financial aid to families of modest income to take inflation into account. Above all, the French state is aware of the real progress of the idea of national independence which has only grown in the course of all these conflicts. He proposed a referendum on the status of Guadeloupe but was careful not to formulate the question in terms of independence. Finally, the question in the referendum in January 2010 presented a false alternative: "Do you approve of the transformation of Guiana into an *outré-mer* community governed by article 74 of the Constitution, with a specific organization taking into account its own interests within the Republic?" The No vote prevailed overwhelmingly but on the basis of majority abstention (51.84% of the vote and 2.33% of spoiled or blank ballots).

The same causes producing the same effects, a new social movement broke out in March 2017 and blockaded the entire territory for a month. The space centre was blockaded causing the postponement of an Ariane launcher. The conflict resolution agreement of April 21, 2017 provides for the release of 1 billion euros to improve access to care, security, employment status and justice.

If the current relationship of forces makes independence unlikely in the short term, the idea of independence idea has become largely prevalent among the population and especially among youth. While the demands today concern rampant insecurity and economic demands, they implicitly condemn the colonial model. The fight over the consequences leads inevitably to more or less long-term action against the causes: colonization. If the relationship of forces changes (under the impact of international events, the struggles of the Guianese people and repression and anti-colonial mobilizations in France) independence would be a concrete utopia in the short term.

PS:

If you like this article or have found it useful, please consider donating towards the work of *International Viewpoint*. Simply follow this link: [Donate](#) then enter an amount of your choice. One-off donations are very welcome. But regular donations by standing order are also vital to our continuing functioning. See the last paragraph of [this article](#) for our bank account details and take out a standing order. Thanks.

[1] "The old colonies" is a term designating the first French colonies established from 1534-1815, before the new wave of colonisation under the Third Republic.

[2] Neuville Doriac, "Esclavage, assimilation et guyanité", *Anthropos*, Paris, 1985, p. 16.

[3] Pierre and Françoise Grenand and Patrick Menget, "La question amérindienne en Guyane française. Eléments de synthèse", *Ethnie*, 1 (1-2), June-September 2005, p. 56.

[4] Jean Hurault, "La population des Indiens de Guyane française", *Population*, year 1965, number 5, p. 820.

[5] Jean Hurault, "Les Indiens Oayana de la Guyane française", *Journal de la société des Américanistes*, 1961, volume 50, p. 141.

[6] Cited in Marchand-Thébault, "L'esclavage en Guyane sous l'ancien régime", *Revue française d'histoire d'outré-mer*, volume 47, number 166, first quarter, 1960, p. 12.

[7] *Ibid*, p. 13.

[8] "Des colonies; particulièrement de la Guyane française en 1821", Barrois, Paris, 1822, p. 80.

- [9] Sylvie Mirot, "Un document inédit sur le marronnage à la Guyane française au XVIII^e siècle", *Revue d'histoire des colonies*, volume 41, number 143, second quarter 1954, p. 245. Dutch Guiana covered the territory known before and since as Surinam
- [10] Jean Hurault, *La vie matérielle des noirs réfugiés Boni et des indiens Wayana du Haut-Maroni*, ORSTOM, Paris, 1965, p. 11.
- [11] Sudel Fuma, "Le servilisme à la place du concept d'engagement pour définir le statut des travailleurs immigrés ou affranchis après l'abolition de l'esclavage en 1848",
<https://histoire974.wordpress.com/2016/01/19/le-servilisme-a-la-place-du-concept-dengagement-pour-definir-le-statut-des-travailleurs-immigres-ou-affranchis-apres-labolition-de-l'esclavage-en-1848-sudel-fuma> .
- [12] Pierre Rivière, "La Guyane française en 1865. Aperçu géographique, historique, législatif, agricole, industriel et commercial, Imprimerie du gouvernement", Cayenne, 1866, p. 171.
- [13] L. Bassières, "La Guyane aurifère ou la "poule aux œufs d'or"", La Typo-Litho, Algiers, 1936, p. 5.
- [14] Ibid, p. 16 and p. 30.
- [15] Christiane Taubira-Delannon, "L'or en Guyane, Éclats et artifices, Rapport remis au Premier ministre", la Documentation française, Paris, 2000, p. 33.
- [16] Jean-François Fourt interview with BFM Business, March 7, 2014.
- [17] USGS, Assessment of Undiscovered Conventional Oil and Gas Resources of South America and the Caribbean, 2012,
<http://www.jhiassociates.com/guyana-suriname-basin.html> .
- [18] 24. Olivier Cadic cited in Elisabeth Lamure and Antoine Karame, "Rapport d'information au Sénat", number 56, October 26, 2017, p. 16.
- [19] Alain Auger, "Place et rôle géopolitique de l'Outre-mer français", *Défense*, number 56, March 1991, p. 26.
- [20] Gutemberg de Vilhena Silva, Jadson Luis Rebelo Porto, Paula Gabriele Sena dos Santos and Miguel Dhenin, "La géopolitique de l'Union Européenne pour les régions ultrapériphériques: Assimilation, fragmentation et rôle de la Guyane française dans son contexte régional", *Confins*, number 26, 2016.
- [21] David Redon, "Les mouvements indépendantistes guyanais", *Une saison en Guyane*, number 17, August 2016, p. 12.
- [22] Serge Mam Lam Fouck, "L'Union du Peuple Guyanais et l'invention du nationalisme en Guyane française (1955-1965)" in: *Outre-mers*, volume 93, number 352-353, 2nd quarter 2006.
- [23] 33. "Journal officiel de la République française", October 18, 1960, p. 9483.
- [24] Op. cit., p. 285
- [25] David Redon, "Les mouvements indépendantistes guyanais", op. cit., p. 13.
- [26] The Front démocratique guyanais (FDG) was created on June 7, 1962, around the demand for autonomy.
- [27] Serge Mam Lam Fouck, "Histoire de la Guyane contemporaine 1940-1982", Editions Caribéennes, Paris, 2000, p. 208.
- [28] Marie-José Jolivet, "La politique de développement de la Guyane. Récurrence et point de rupture", ORSTOM, Paris, pp. 221 and 223.

French Guiana: the negative legacy of French colonialism

[29] If some pro-independence organisations disappeared, others emerged, like the Mouvement pour la Décolonisation et l'émancipation sociale (MDES) in 1991.