

## IV. International

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### BOOK REVIEW

# The Brutish Empire, or Non-Aligned Sovereignty?

by Mike Billington

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#### **The Ants Will Come and Tell Me: A Chronicle of the Benn Family in Guyana's History**

Lena and Daniel Platt

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359 pages.

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As an American who emerged from college in 1967, still clinging to the optimism of President John F. Kennedy, but disgusted that the nation had launched a colonial war in Indochina, I joined the Peace Corps, ending up in a country I had never heard of—Guyana, until just a few years earlier known as British Guiana. Reading this book by my friends Lena and Daniel Platt allowed me to live those two years in Guyana again, reveling in the re-awakened colors and aromas of that former British colony, which were imbedded in my psyche. But more than that, the book provided an insight into the vile character of that Brutish Empire which at the time I only faintly understood.

I had learned that before the British would grant independence to its colonies, it first stirred up racial and religious hatreds and provoked civil wars, as in India. I learned at the time that just a few years earlier, the Black and Indian populations of British Guiana lived peacefully together, and worked together in the political movement fighting for independence. But the British succeeded in finding agents who would play the race card, unleashing racial riots, driving most towns to become primarily Black or primarily Indian, and the independence movement to be divided into a Black party and an Indian party. I also knew at the time that Lena's father, Brindley Benn, was the shining exception, sticking to his moral mission in life, and recognizing that despite his African descent, it was the "Indian" party

under Cheddi Jagan that was the party of principle, and Brindley and his wife Patricia became leaders of Jagan's People's Progressive Party (PPP), despised by the colonial powers.

But I learned from this book that such a stance in life has its "slings and arrows," which this naive Peace Corps volunteer knew little of at the time. Lena and Daniel offer an insight into the courage and moral strength of the native "subjects" of the Empire, who were required to first win independence, and then to overcome the evil which the British left behind, to become truly citizens of a nation. The book also made me confront the fact that the U.S. was, even then, functioning as the enforcer of the Empire's evil geopolitics.

The book is primarily a family history, but that family was at the center of the battle at every point. Only after 28 years of fighting the colonial tricks which kept the PPP in the opposition, despite the majority support of the population, did the PPP finally become the government. The family stories do not distract from the political history, but give further insight into the lives of the heroes who brought about true independence from the Empire's machinations, before and after official "independence."

The Benns' son, Robeson, named after the courageous Black American artist Paul Robeson, continues in his father's footsteps as a political leader and fighter, and the book concludes with the continuing saga of his career. Lena and Daniel also provide a glimpse into the LaRouche movement, of which they are a part, and which clearly gives them a special insight into the reality behind the shadows of the "official histories" of Guyana. Reading this book will contribute to the required understanding of the continuing battle against the imperial powers which threaten civilization today.