

*Harold... in Guyana, the Caribbean. This is the most accurate
appraisal by a journalist. I-P (for broadcast 25/11/78) by Mohamed
Hamed*

Peoples Temple

It will be a long time before the truth about the Peoples Temple mass suicides and murders is fully known.

What is certain at this time, at least according to the FBI investigators, is that at least 775 men, women and children perished in a single night of horror in their remote jungle commune.

The Temple and its members were wrapped in a virtual blanket of secrecy, and the distant location of their agricultural settlement, Jonestown, strengthened their privacy.

But this secrecy has followed them into death and is providing fertile ground for speculation as to what led to the virtual liquidation of the ~~org~~ organisation in the most final way.

The grim adjectives that followed Jim Jones and his people in life follow them into death also, and establishment churches and political organisations compete to denounce them.

Often overlooked in the speculation is the history of persecution against which the organisation protested for many years.

The situation had reached the stage over the past year or so where virtually all the Temple's spare time, and even some that could not be spared, had to be dedicated to countering allegations from many directions.

The allegations, which the Temple saw as high-pressure harassment, persisted even after they were, from time to time, rejected not only by the organisation but also by outsiders invited to see for themselves.

Peoples Temple was, indeed, a community of human beings virtually under siege for many long months.

Those who met some of the senior members, including the leader, Jim Jones, could not help feeling that they existed with a seige mentally and that they could not go on in that way forever.

Investigators are beginning to agree that the Jonestown deaths took place because the critical point had been reached with the visit by congressman Leo Ryan and the American press, and it was triggered by an attempt to stab Mr Ryan in the settlement.

After that, the organisation apparently felt that there was no use going on, and a death plan was put into operation.

It appears that many of them killed themselves while others were forced to do so. The plan started with the babies and young children who were first killed, the investigators believe.

What causes the world to recoil is this bizarre act of defiance which the Temple staged as the final solution to its problem.

The Temple must have been living for some time with the knowledge that one day, the death plan would have had to be put into operation.

They would have known that, even as they lived, loved, reared children, and farmed on the commune.

That is a rather unique sort of theology. Most religions preach the celebration of life and the sanctity of life.

Peoples Temple apparently respected life but was prepared to end it all if necessary, as its last act of defiance against the persecution which it suffered as a non-conformist religious organisation with a leftwing political ideology.

It would appear that, by dying, the Temple, has proved its point.

The conscience of the world refused to stir when the Temple cried out against persecution.

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Now, instead of searching itself, ^{and its conscience} the world is persecuting the Temple even in death, ~~and some have the same fresh~~

even in death, and some have begun fresh harrasment of other groups which do not conform.

The world is still a very long way from the tolerance and understanding which even the establishment religions preach.

The self destruction of the Peoples Temple is hardly likely to change that.

But it will certainly stand as an eternal monument to it, and of man's inhumanity to man.

The violence which the Peoples Temple did to itself should serve to remind the world that there are some people always willing to die for what they believe in.

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