

Prokes' Statement to the Press

Why did Jonestown end the way it did? I believe at least a good part of that answer can be found on the tape recording of the last hour of life in Jonestown. Unfortunately, the tape has never been played publicly and is being kept locked up by either the Attorney General's office or the F.B.I. But I don't find that surprising in light of what an American Embassy officer told me was on that tape. Last December at the Matthews Ridge Guest House (located about 40 miles from Jonestown), a young man attached to the American Embassy named Charles English (who is 27 years old and had spent one year in foreign service) described parts of the tape recording to myself, Tim Carter and two reporters whose names I can't recall. Probably the most significant thing he said was that he thought the tape would never be played publicly because it would be an embarrassment to the United States. He said it reveals that the people of Jonestown were not coerced into taking their lives, but rather the deaths resulted basically from a collective decision based upon the perception that the community was doomed and there was no use to continue. English said that while he and a number of others were listening to the tape in Georgetown, U.S. Ambassador John Burke came into the room and also listened to it. When it was finished, Burke told those in the room, in no uncertain terms, that they had better not breathe a word of what they heard. He then took the tape into his personal custody.

Another official, the man who headed the Guyanese end of the investigation into Jonestown, corroborated what English said was on the tape. But he went even beyond what English said. Skip Roberts (Guyana's Crime Chief) told me in a private conversation, the day before I left Guyana, that the tape showed solidarity of the people of Jonestown. He said he was deeply moved by what he heard. He said that if he were in Jonestown at the time of the deaths, he could see how he would have willingly died with the people, had he been part of the community. Moreover, he told me he believed there was ^{some} outside plan to destroy Jonestown.

This was no crackpot making wild statements, but Guyana's number two law

enforcement official, trained by academies in the U.S., who is highly respected and has a reputation for being incorruptible. But it's doubtful that he can admit publicly the things he said to me in private. He may do it but it's a touchy political issue. Guyana feels it can ill afford to offend or embarrass the U.S. while it has an outstanding I.M.F. loan and is seeking additional aid. (English of course would be risking his ^{position} to admit what he told us about the tape and Ambassador Burke.)

But if there is nothing to hide, then whoever has the tape should be willing to make it public. It seems to me that a recording of the last hour of life for over 900 people is extremely relevant and crucial for the public to hear. I have no doubt whatsoever that the recording was made intentionally. It was found on the tape machine in the pavilion, where meetings ~~are~~ ^{were} normally recorded and where it was in full view of scores of people. Jones asked that all meetings be recorded and I have no doubt that the last meeting was any exception because I believe he wanted to leave something that would prove why the people died. An article in Rolling Stone magazine said it concisely: It stated, "The mass suicides of history, Masada and Saipan, had occurred when a people were under siege and surrounded by enemies. Jones and the people of Jonestown were no exception: for months they had been harassed, persecuted, surrounded and besieged by shadow forces. When the final attack was imminent and undeniable, they chose to die."

I believe the tape will corroborate this, and I am convinced that its contents have been deliberately misrepresented to the press. Why is it being kept locked up? Because its contents would help to reveal the truth about Jonestown, that's why. The press should demand that the tape be made public. I'm not talking about a transcript, either, because the Embassy officer (Chas. English) said a transcript would not give an accurate portrayal of what was going on-- there were too many overlapping voices. In order to be properly evaluated and understood, the entire 50 minutes of the original tape should be played to the press, unedited and

uncensored. (The Guyanese were provided a copy of the tape by American officials, but it may not be the same one Skip Roberts heard.)

It would take a lot of pressure for that tape to be played because I believe, from the accounts I've been given, it would reveal too clearly something that the government does not want to admit, and cannot admit-- that Jonestown represents a symbol of the massive institutional failure of this country to meet the needs of its own citizens. It's no coincidence that most of the members of Peoples Temple were black, when you consider that most of the inhabitants of the huge slums and ghettos in virtually every large city of America are black. They don't like living in misery and if they could get out they would, but they aren't being provided the opportunities they need to do so. That's why so many blacks joined Peoples Temple-- it provided the opportunity to escape the misery of their lives in the ghetto. Jim Jones jumped into the vacuum created by the failure of this system to meet the needs of its black people. He then met those needs that had been neglected and gave the credit to socialism. The U.S. Intelligence apparatus would obviously feel duty-bound to stop him, particularly in light of their history and reputation for going after progressive political and civil rights organizations.

(W)

Beyond the satisfaction of their material needs, people found dignity and pride in the Temple that racism had previously denied them. But attempts to deny Temple members their new found freedom--and to us it was freedom--still persisted even after the move was made to another country. And that's why so many chose to die in the end. It was a moral act of courage and commitment to their beliefs. They were saying, "We're not going to take anymore. We'll die by our own hand rather than be destroyed or broken-up by the long arm of the oppressor."

What I'm saying is that the reason so many people died and took their children's lives is because they believed their community--that they had built with their own hands--was under siege by the United States government, which I agree was the case. The State Dept. was well aware of the Temple's negotiations to move to the Soviet

Union in order to escape the threats to its security in Guyana. Undoubtedly the State Dept. and the CIA wanted to prevent a tremendous Soviet propaganda victory based upon nearly 1000 Americans moving to the Soviet Union in quest of the Human Rights they had been denied in the U.S. But to what lengths was the State Dept. prepared to go to discredit Jonestown? Would they sacrifice a congressman? Evidently. Otherwise, why did they allow Congressman Ryan to go to Jonestown when they were told in a legal affidavit that there was arms there and they knew the visit would be considered an act of provocation. Why did they allow it? Because the State Dept. wanted an incident. Well, they got it. I'm not even convinced that they got more than they bargained for, since the affidavit also told of suicide rehearsals-- and warned the State Dept. that they should be taken seriously. Moreover, in a letter from Peoples Temple to the State Dept., it was stated that Temple members would rather die than be harassed from continent to continent. The State Dept. purposely called the bluff by sending Ryan; it was a deliberate act of provocation.

(u)

I believe in the basic rightness of the life and work that went on in Jonestown, and I can't disassociate myself from the people who died, nor do I want to. They were beautiful people who cared about each other and who identified with all people who suffer oppression and persecution around the world. Jonestown functioned on a high level of ethical behaviour and human devotion that you had to see and experience in order to comprehend. The rights of the individual were respected and defended; sharing and concern for others was a requirement. These things were like a code of the community. The people weren't brainwashed fanatics or cultists-- the Temple was not a cult. It was a political organization that built its own socialist community. It might be fair to say they were fanatical in one sense: After moving 6000 miles to get away from racism and harassment, they weren't going to be pushed around anymore. Maybe it sounds trite but they were saying basically the same thing as Patrick Henry, that is, "let us have our freedom, or we will die."

But the State Dept. and C.I.A. couldn't afford to let such a large group of socialists from the United States find freedom in another land. So they harassed us by sending their lackeys, through Tim Stoen, to Guyana and deliberately played upon the paranoia that exist in Jonestown, until they finally got what they wanted.

The truth about Jonestown is being covered up because our government agencies were involved in its destruction up to their necks. I am convinced of this because, among many other reasons, I was an informant when I first joined Peoples Temple. I didn't remain one, however, because I came to realize that the Temple was probably the only hope for the many people it was helping off the streets, off of drugs, out of crime, and out of mental institutions, jails, and prisons. I learned to identify with these people until they became my brothers and sisters and then I understood what it meant to be black and old and poor in this society-- the hell of living everyday in fear.

(u)

The people of Jonestown died--as one suicide note said-- because they weren't allowed to live in peace. They died because they didn't want to be left with no choice but to come back to live in the rat-infested ghettos of America. They died for all those who suffer oppression. I refuse to let my black brothers and sisters and others in Jonestown, die in vain.