

Liaison/Gamma

In this second article of a three part series, David Moberg reports from Guyana on how the Jones cult destroyed independent thought or action among its disciples.

JONESTOWN WAS SUPPOSED TO BECOME a regular city, a virtual paradise. There were supposed to be fruit trees where you could just pick what you wanted. You could eat anything you wanted, do any work you wanted, go back to school. Jim Jones was going to grow food and give it and medical aid to poor people around the world.

Jerry Parks, 45, a one-time grocery store manager, was drawn to this would-be utopia of the Rev. Jim Jones in the deep jungle of Guyana as a chance to "do something positive with my life." He had begun following Jones 23 years ago when he lived in Springfield, Ohio, because the controversial young preacher was "very sensitive to people's needs" and seemed to have "some sort of paranormal faculties."

Here was a man who must be good: he was so sincere, so kind, so devoted to humanitarian work, Parks, like many others, thought. Here was a man with purpose: he had a vision of the world reminiscent of the Christianity of the Bible that established churches had long forgotten. Here was a man who was powerful: he could heal the sick, read people's minds, promise "protection" for his "family," organize projects that would—as the verses of Matthew enjoined—feed the hungry and clothe the naked.

So Jerry Parks sold his \$35,000 home and turned the money over to the Peoples Temple. With his mother, his wife, two adolescent daughters and his older son, a medic who was an established associate minister in the church, he followed Jones to the jungle kingdom of 3,824 acres established four years ago. He didn't find what he expected.

"We found it was a virtual prison camp. Once you got here you weren't allowed to leave. You weren't allowed to dissent. You couldn't talk about going back to the U.S. It was very poor land, and there was heavy rain that leached the top soil off. Living conditions were bad. There were 14 people packed in a little 12-by-20 foot cottage. Children were taken away [from parents]. The food was inadequate—just rice, gravy, greens. But Jones and his group had meat.

"The congregation got up at 6:00 and worked from 7:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. Then we came home and ate subsistence level food, took a shower and went to the pavilion at 7:30 to listen to the news. The last six weeks it got to be every night. They held those 'people's rallies.' He had people believing there was a conspiracy against us, a movement in the U.S. with CIA backing and some defectors. His philosophy was rather than let them come in and destroy this, it was better to commit revolutionary suicide. But there was no revolution out there."

There was suicide, of course, as a shocked world

now knows, with a latest count of 911 dead at Jonestown, five dead at the airstrip where the group of government officials, journalists and defectors were gunned down by Jones' security force and four more in a combined murder-suicide in Georgetown, Guyana's capital.

Not everyone remembers Jonestown the way Parks does, however. Parks had wanted to leave for a long time and made his move with his family when Congressman Leo Ryan visited. Mike Carter, 20, had not wanted to quit. Along with his brother, Tim, and one-time journalist Michael Prokes, he left as the suicide began with a suitcase full of \$5 million for the Soviet embassy in Georgetown. As radio operator, he had been a member of the inner circle at Jonestown.

Five and a half years ago, Mike followed the lead of his older brother and sister into the Peoples Temple in Redwood Valley, Calif. "I never had a lot of friends before," he said, while—like Parks—detained in the decaying but charming Park Hotel in Georgetown. "I was just sort of rotting away in Boise (Idaho), wasting my life on drugs."

He joined a Peoples Temple commune where he found 25 warm, friendly people and a task that seemed meaningful: taking care of the mentally retarded. He was impressed with the Temple and with Jones: "I'd never seen so many people of different backgrounds, black and white, rich and poor, work-

Photos by Matthew Naythons

PRISON CAMP OF THE MIND

ing together. Jones seemed to be a warm person. He would always say something that you'd really dig. I was really against the Vietnam war and he'd say America was trying to get money out of Vietnam and war was just a money-making machine. That turned me on politically. And the humanitarian things appealed most. They had a real nice animal shelter in the valley.

"He had a way of speaking that could draw in anybody. He could range over so many subjects he would catch your interest on one of them.

Like his older brother, Tim, who had joined after several years of a "wandering" life devoted to drugs, Mike believed that Jones had special powers to heal and to read minds. That faith persisted even when they later discovered the fraud—such as the "passing of cancerous tumors" that were really rotting chicken entrails or the "mind-reading" made possible by information gleaned from prospective members' homes by Peoples Temple agents in disguise or stealthily entering by force.

Mike Carter saw Jonestown as socialism in action—a society that successfully eliminated money, racism, sexism, ageism, elitism. He still describes it as a beautiful place where the only complaints came from "parasites" and "bourgeois city folk" unwilling to work or accept the need for "structure," a community that was on the verge of success if only the supplies for new housing and other new equipment had arrived before the fateful Ryan visit. "It was just like a community anywhere in the world," he said. "If you like living in the country, it was paradise."

Paradise or prison camp? Socialism or fascism? What was Jonestown before the mass suicides? How could there be such divergent realities? Prominent visitors in Jonestown, including U.S. State Department officials, Guyanese government leaders and leading U.S. leftists, declared that they had seen "the future" (black doctor and newspaper publisher Carlton Goodlett) or "paradise" (lawyer Charles Garry).

FOR SEVERAL YEARS THE STORIES OF the few defectors from the Peoples Temple or Jonestown had seemed so bizarre, so twisted and cruel, so fantastic that people were loathe to believe them, especially considering the impressive public record of humanitarianism and devotion to progressive causes that the Peoples Temple and Jim Jones had amassed. Al Mills, one of the earliest defectors to make public charges and now a moving force of the Human Freedom Center in Berkeley, maintains that Jones' maxim was precisely, "Do the unbelievable."

How would anyone believe that Jones persuaded followers to demonstrate their loyalty to him by signing blank confession sheets to be filled in at will or by writing their own admissions of child molestation, bombings of government properties, plots to kill the President, and other crimes or sexual kinkiness? Who would believe the stories of children beaten 75 to 100 times by a thick "board of education"? Who would believe that the People's Temple won support of officials by setting them up in compromising sexual situations and recording the evidence for blackmail? Who would believe that people who had voluntarily joined the church were later threatened if they thought of leaving? Who would believe—until now—reports of rehearsals of mass suicides?

The contrast between appearance and reality was too extreme. Even now, a middle-aged woman who escaped from Jonestown, Edith Bogue, says, "Had this group been what it appeared to be, it would have been terrific."

The simplest answer to this dilemma is that Jonestown was a prison camp of the mind. Before talking to the variety of survivors of Jonestown I had been extremely dubious about claims of "brainwashing" and "mind control." There is much that remains to be explained about the process, but I'm persuaded that something like that does occur in closed, totalitarian cults.

Even more disturbing, it seems clear that the techniques of "mind control," while extreme, are part of a continuum with all forms of acculturation—not just harsh varieties of political persuasion or religious conversion, but also the processes by which any society, any family or any group creates its way of seeing the world. That is not to say that all culture is "brainwashing." Rather, it is tough to draw definitive lines around what is "mind control." Likewise, while some people may be more susceptible than others, the capacity to succumb is not totally alien to any of us.

"Jim Jones always said that if we're ever going to be destroyed, it's from within," Mike Carter explained. "In earlier stages I thought it would mean someone would kill him. Later I thought it meant even one person could leave and tell about our plans to leave [Guyana] for the Soviet Union."

Jim Jones undoubtedly feared both possibilities. He also appears to have been convinced that any de-

The promise of life-enhancing utopia gave Jones the power to create this deathly disaster. Jones preyed on the best instincts of people to realize their worst fears.

factor could tell the world what was really going on. Despite the desperate counter-offensive—including a publicity campaign that conspiracy lawyer Mark Lane was proposing to Jones in the final months—eventually someone might believe the unbelievable.

Yet Jones was correct in another way. The cult was ultimately destroyed by reason and feeling within the individuals in Jonestown.

Jones had successfully attracted disciples with the promise of meaning, happiness, community, love, security, and purposeful labor that would bring fulfillment to them as individuals. Yet his practices were designed to destroy them as individuals and to eradicate their sense of judgment, independent confirmation of reality, personal needs and self-esteem.

He dictated a new reality that concentrated all power in his hands. That was justified by his possession of "para-normal" talents. With that power he sought to make all of his followers completely dependent on him for meaning and interpretation of their lives and the world. He created deep reservoirs of guilt and self-loathing. He destroyed trust and communication. He tried to eradicate love between husband and wife and between parents and children. He devised a world of perpetual threats and insecurity. And he perverted their talents and labor to such a degree that a doctor, sworn to saving life, supervised the deliberate murder and suicide of over 900 people.

Jonestown is rightly discussed in such starkly contrasting terms as heaven and hell, good and evil, socialism and fascism. It was the promise of life-enhancing utopia that gave Jones the power to create a deathly disaster. Jones preyed on the best instincts of people to realize their worst fears. He turned the desire for collectivity into the service of tyranny. He turned the desire for a humane moral order into an amoral terrorism. In the name of love, he was a sadist worthy of the Marquis' imagination. In the name of liberating Americans from impending fascism, he imprisoned those who sought freedom through him. ("There were some people who wanted to go back," Mike Carter explained, "but they had to be held so that thousands more who wanted to come could do so.") By preaching that the end justifies the means, he produced a result that was the antithesis of his expressed goals. Jones was the Monster Dialectician, the Cancer of Reason.

Eventually it was within a few individuals—very ordinary people, not extraordinary heroes—that the contradictions became apparent and the spell was broken. Most of them do not understand why. Most left behind close relatives—some of whom threatened retaliation as their kin left—who died with Jones. Curiously, some of the killers at the airstrip had earlier said that they wanted to leave Jonestown, and some of the escapees who now denounce Jones hesitated at the last moment about whether they should leave Jonestown.

The springs of their decisions to break with Jones' empire were diverse: desire for freedom to make their own decisions, love for spouse or family, rational perceptions of contradiction between the promises and a reality separate from the group construct that they could still discern, and the simple explanation offered by one old man who fled the final slaughter: "I just didn't want to die."

IT MAY ALL SEEM VERY OBVIOUS TO US now. But remember that Jones had nearly everyone fooled to some extent before. *Washington Post* reporter Charles Krause, who was with the Ryan expedition, recalls that up until the moment bullets began crashing toward him after leaving Jonestown he felt that although Jones was "very sick, both physically and mentally," "it seemed to me that the Peoples Temple had a legitimate purpose, a noble purpose, and was more or less succeeding." It is more difficult, perhaps, but just as important for us to understand how most of the people who lived at Jonestown could continue to be fooled as well.

Jonestown was probably 80 to 90 percent black, although Jones and most of the top leaders—with the exception of his adopted son, Johnny Jones—were white. Many of them, perhaps a quarter of all Jonestown, were over 60 years old, usually poor. Desperate, insecure, lonely and usually religious, they were fairly easy recruits, who turned over their social security checks to Jones.

"I used to see those pitiful old people in the [rest home] hacienda where I worked and I thought, 'At least I'll never end up like that,'" said Edith Parks, a 64-year-old white woman who set off the exodus with her note to NBC reporter Don Harris. She worked with the "seniors" and is convinced that "most of them would have fought for [Jonestown]. They didn't have to worry about where they were going to end up." Most of them probably died willingly for Jones as well. One survivor, who escaped after the killing was well underway, said that some of the old people confined to their houses pleaded with him to help them to the camp's pavilion when they found out that the long-discussed, occasionally rehearsed suicides were actually taking place.

Many of them felt that they were already dependent on Jones for their lives. "People laugh about the healing," Mrs. Parks, a religious woman before meeting Jones, said, "but he helped me. I had cancer that had metastasized and the doctor said I had just a matter of months. But I got stronger and stronger. So you kind of hang around somebody who does something like that for you."

Many of the younger blacks and whites were also convinced that Jones had healing powers or that at least he had a great capacity to read people's minds. Robert Paul, a tall black man in his late 20s, joined shortly after he got out of Vietnam because Jones presumably cured his kidney ailment. "I figured the man had powers," Paul said. "I just had to go with him."

Tim Carter, 31, raised a Catholic, bitter and confused after "killing for Christ" in Vietnam ("There's a hell of a lot of brainwashing in America, too," he says defensively), was visiting a friend who knew of Jones. When Tim looked at a picture of Jones giving the peace sign, "I got this incredible jolt from the base of my spine right to my head. It was like the picture reached out. I got this incredible rush. I vowed that from that point on the thing I had to do was find this man Jim Jones." At his first Peoples Temple meeting, Carter felt that Jones read his mind. "It was like I'd known him all my life, forever—like I was coming home. I decided for myself that this was Christ incarnate. He would say, 'You know who I am.'"

Many others felt that Jones saved them from a life of crime, drug addiction, alcoholism, prostitution or aimless drifting through the nether reaches of American society. As Mike Carter explained, many were "people who just didn't have much in life." One ex-addict, ex-alcoholic told Tim Carter, "If I wasn't here, I'd be all fucked up. I'd be in jail, in the hospital or have an overdose." The addicts had simply picked up a new "Jones"—Rev. Jim.

Still others were young whites, even some nearing middle age, who either were politically committed to peace and to ending racism or else were searching for some kind of social commitment. There were a few professionals as well as a smattering of the people who have more typically joined the cults of the '70s: young whites from affluent homes lacking much love or purposeful work. They were in revolt against American materialism and, like Mike Carter, lapped up Jim Jones' tirades about how every bite of a McDonald's hamburger oppresses the poor of the world even further.

Finally at Jonestown there was another large group of varying ages: the children and other relatives of older members who had joined Peoples Temple years before. Many of the Jonestown residents in their 20s had been coming to Jones' services since they were children or early teens. Other kids were born into the cult. Some of these families had joined up with Jones in the Midwest or early in Ukiah and were heirs to a rural, border-state tradition of Holiness churches.

THE COMMON IDEOLOGY WAS "HUMANITARIANISM." That could bind together those who were primarily religious with those primarily political. Each conveniently ignored parts of Jones' preachings. "I became involved in everything with the group—bake sales, sewing circles, everything a church does," Edith Bogue said. "It was really a nice homey thing. I always had a lot of extra children to take care of, too. I don't understand political stuff. I don't like it. So I just ignored it. If there was an election and he said to vote for somebody, I'd vote for him."

The extreme ideology of service and sacrifice was also a way for Jones to make members feel guilty about satisfying any needs of their own. Think of the starving blacks in South Africa, he would say;

Leslie Wilson, of the Peoples Temple, is interviewed for her participation in the formation of the Jonestown airstrip of Jonestown, Guyana (S. Cal.).

think of the tortured Chileans. Why should you have more clothes, food or luxuries?

The Peoples Temple provided purpose, meaning, community, salvation (with subsequent dependence on Jones), access to his special psychic, strategic or organizational powers, and an opportunity to follow and emulate a man who was so sensitive, loving and kind that he must be good—a man who claimed to be the reincarnation of Buddha, Jesus, The Bab, Emancipator, Alexander the Great, Father Divine and Lenin. Close followers were also flattered to be identified as reincarnations of such worthies as the apostle Peter or Lenin's wife, Krupskaya (Marceline Jones, his wife).

Jones claimed to be from an advanced evolutionary plane. He returned—like the bodhisattvas or Jesus—to save these followers, all of whom had been with him in some other life and all of whom had been too selfish in past lives to escape the cycle of death and rebirth.

Once drawn in to the Temple, people underwent a process similar in form to that used by other cults, such as the Moonies or the Children of God. Dr. Harold A. A. Sutherland, chief of psychiatry at the College of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey, and a student and expert of cult techniques that Jones used to create a group identity that superseded individual identity, isolation from family and friends (and, in the jungle, from all other human society), exhaustion, repetition of extreme and pervasive threats and the humiliation and shaming of members.

People turned over not only all of their money and property but also jewelry, passports and other identification. If anyone kept personal photos they were publicly laughed at.

Very few letters written by Jonestown residents were ever mailed and few were delivered. Also, as soon as new people arrived, they were told they could never leave again.

The long, hard, hot work days, usually seven days a week, followed by extremely long evening meetings and short nights of very crowded and not very private sleep made people much more willing to accept whatever they were told.

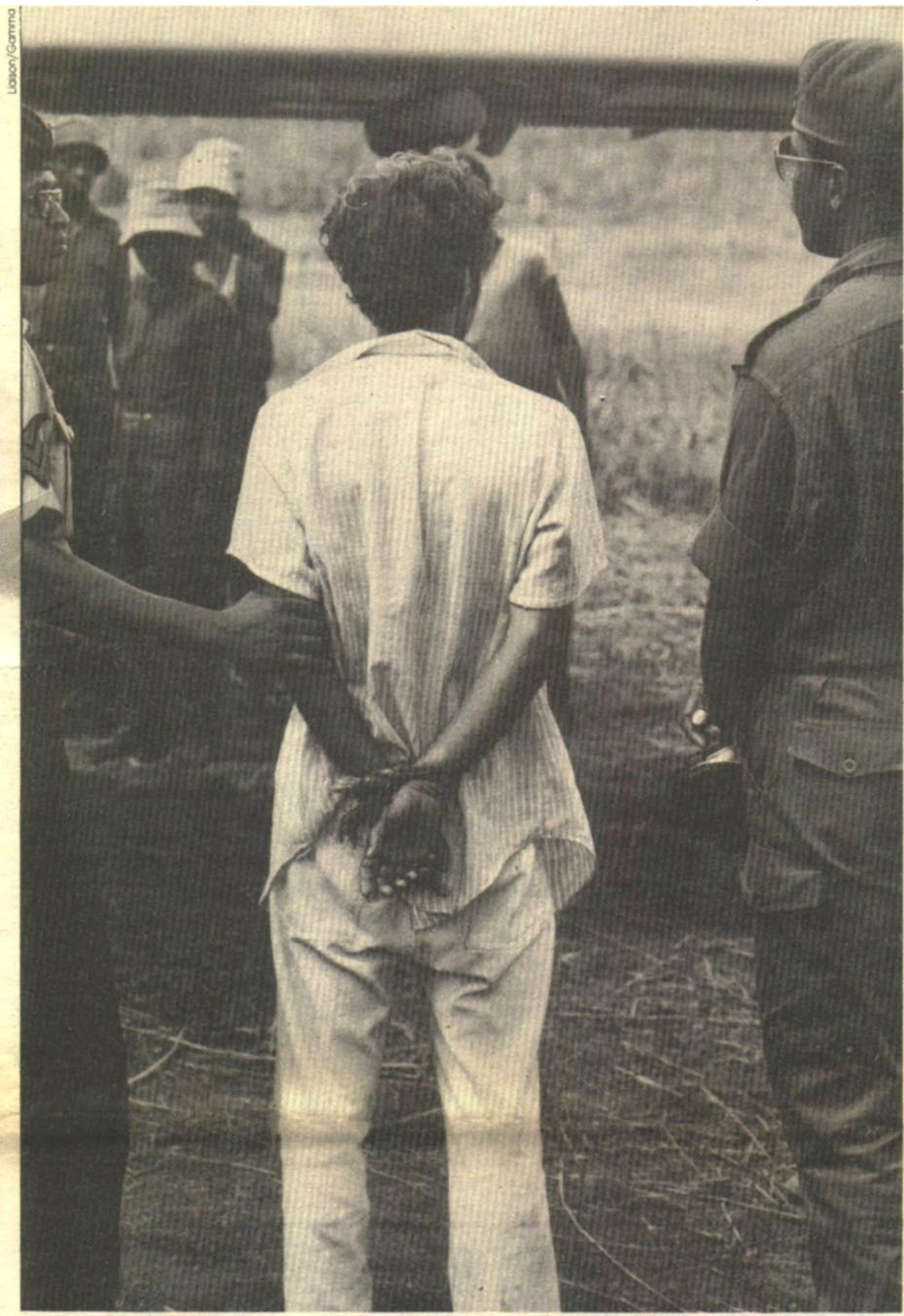
Jones was particularly adept at inventing threats. First, he could read anyone's mind so that even private thoughts were known. Then there was an extensive camp discipline system: a roughly 40-member security force that had access to the camp's arsenal, beatings—often by a group of seniors with their canes, by a group of karate experts, or by relatives—water torture, a sensory deprivation chamber, an "extended care unit" where "incorrigibles" were kept heavily drugged, sentences to the "public service unit," a hard labor crew stigmatized with reddish-orange hats. Such punishment was necessary, Prokes says, because so many of the people in the community were still "acting out" their old criminal mentality. When people were called "on the platform" since last May, however, they were unlikely to be beaten but rather subjected to public shaming.

If anyone tried to leave, Jones warned that they would encounter giant poisonous snakes and 17-foot tigers, hostile Amerindians and Guyanese Defense Forces, or Guyanese government and American embassy officials ready to send them back.

Jones even used his metaphysics to define his life and death boundaries of the cult. Anyone who committed individual suicide—a method of escape a few reportedly tried—would regress 500 lifetimes in the cycle of rebirth. But mass, "revolutionary" suicide to avoid destruction of the cult by enemies would guarantee escape from the cycle to a higher plane of being.

Then there was, of course, The Conspiracy: defectors aided by right-wing wealth and the CIA were trying to destroy Jonestown. In particular, Tim and Grace Stoen were trying to recover her six-year-old son John.

Since Jones forbade all close parent-child ties, it is fittingly ironical that his fanatical attachment to John-John, whom he claimed to have fathered, was a major cause of his undoing. Jones had used his influence with the Guyanese government to block issuance of an arrest warrant. He obtained such clout by backing Prime Minister Forbes Burnham's referendum giving him extraordinary powers, by having aides cultivate close ties with the government (including an affair between one woman and the Guyanese ambassador to the U.S.), and by providing the government a model for hinterland settlement and a claim on border territory disputed with Venezuela. Despite such influence, Jones was afraid to go to Georgetown or elsewhere for medical aid, and his isolation contributed to his siege mentality and the eventual suicide.



JONESTOWN WAS SUPPOSED TO BE A model communist village. Jones had long discarded most of his religious appeal, declaring that there was no god and that the Bible was fit only for toilet paper—which, according to one report, was its use in Jonestown. After moving to Jonestown in late June 1977, in anticipation of the unfavorable article to appear a month later in *New West*, Jones also stopped his faith healing, which caused a few of his followers to believe that he may have lost his powers.

With growing external criticism and lawsuits and with the expanded difficulties at Jonestown as hundreds of followers arrived, Jones became more obsessed with "structure," the term used for his totalitarian rule. "People who couldn't accept 'structure' were 'anarchists' and lowest on the totem pole," Tina Bogue Turner, 22, said. "They were selfish, inconsiderate capitalists and they better get their shit together or nobody would like them. Being called an anarchist was the worst thing that could happen."

Jones reinforced the "structure" continually. Throughout the day the camp's loud speakers would blare messages from Jones, mainly his version of the news, with special emphasis on physical oppression, torture and death connected with political struggles. Toward the end his voice was frequently slurred and slow.

"There were messages all day and most of the night," Edith Bogue recalled, "even while you tried to sleep—just news, book reviews. He would start out with news but it would be interspersed with sermons: 'How can you be so horrible? How can you be so selfish? All you want is to go back to the U.S. and eat hamburgers and pay taxes to build napalm to burn skin off babies or build fragmentation bombs.' He said if you ever spent a dime on taxes, you should feel guilty. Then he would say what a kind, loving father he was, how he would die for us, how he would let them tear his eyes out for us.

"There would be a break of maybe half an hour and it would start all over again. He'd repeat the same tapes. He kept you so exhausted you couldn't remember anything, so he had to repeat them over and over for you to do well on the tests he gave."

Frequently he'd begin a "sex tirade," she said, "and tell for four or five hours how bad sex was. He'd say it was selfish, self-motivated, that you were only having sex with yourself, that's what you see in the other. Men don't like women; they like men. Women don't like men; they like women. If you were in a relationship, you were not with the cause. You'd want to spend time with the relationship and not work in the fields. 'I've never seen it fail. Someone gets in a relationship and their work falls off.'"

Suddenly, with the painful shock of recognition many of the escapees have experienced these past weeks, she said, "Oh, my god. How could we be so crazy? I should have been killed out there, I'm so crazy. Anybody who reads this will think we were the craziest people in the world. It was like watching a kaleidoscope. You'd never know what you were thinking. You'd think he was insane, and then you'd think you were insane for thinking he was insane."

The guilt, self-hatred and confusion that she continues to feel were central to the support of the "structure" at Jonestown. Ultimately the best enforcement of the structure came from people's repression of themselves.

Although "everybody messed around to every extent" sexually, according to Leslie Wilson, 21, sex and, particularly, intimate, trusting relationships were hampered. People were disciplined for not going before the "relationship committee" to get approval of starting an affair. Jones' attempts to undermine family and marital ties worked remarkably well: spouses, lovers, parents and children were afraid to talk with each other about their doubts for fear they would be turned in.

There was virtually no privacy. The cabins were so crowded it was hard even to whisper secrets, and sex—when fatigue did not rule it out—was noisily

public. Since there was a strict rule against gossiping, grapevine communications were also shut off. For those who believed Jones could really read minds, there was no refuge at all.

Communication at the "people's rallies" was almost entirely one-way. Jones' news broadcasts that started the evening portrayed a horrific U.S.: Klan lynchings in the street, hamburger at \$8 a pound. Jonestown residents did not see newspapers or magazines unless they were part of the trusted few who went out on Temple business, and new recruits were ordered not to discuss events in the U.S., for fear of contaminating Jones' irreality.

IN THE FINAL MONTHS THE "NEWS" WAS followed by language lessons, mainly Russian. (The first phrase they learned was, "Thank you, Dad." Jones urged followers to call him "Dad," and commanded them to be always grateful.) Jones was planning to take his colony to the Soviet Union, since he did not think the Burnham government was strong enough to shield him.

Then Jones—or, since he began to appear less frequently, his wife or son Johnny—would review the "warnings" and "praises" for the day. (Praises were given for turning in offenders or working overtime.) A warning, particularly if contested, could be drawn out into a several hour public humiliation as the offender was called "on the platform." The themes were predictable: the person on the platform and the residents generally were berated for not being guilty enough, for being elitists or anarchists, for causing Dad pain or not showing proper gratitude, for not suffering with the oppressed of the world, for being traitors, for selfishness or for racism, sexism or bourgeois tendencies. Blacks who wanted to leave would be vilified as Uncle Toms or Aunt Janes.

Yet he would always shift ground at various points to insist that poor, suffering Dad, on the verge of death, carrying the responsibilities on his shoulders of bringing communism to the world, hated by people for whom he'd done so much—that he still loved them all very much, that he was a kind, warm and generous Dad, that it hurt him to have to discipline them but it was for their own good.

Reduced to infantile position, deprived of legitimate outlet for their anger, publicly shamed and made to feel guilty for betraying the cause, the offender would then have to accept whatever punishment was meted out by saying, "Thank you, Dad."

A further twist in the weakening of the individual ego came with "self analysis." These letters addressed to Dad might be requested once every few months.

"You were supposed to write and demoralize your-

self, tell how you wasted money back in the States on hamburgers and cars and cokes," Jim Bogue, 46, one of the earliest Jonestown settlers, said. "You were supposed to write how he was so great and how you didn't work up to capacity. You were supposed to tell the negative side of your attitudes."

The letters were groveling and self-accusatory with their apologies about elitism or not feeling sufficiently guilty, but through them it is evident that Jones faced a continual struggle to maintain the repressive apparatus that he had established. For example, Jones urged People to confess their sin of being "ruled by food" and then promise to do everything possible to avoid such an error. So when the next meal of rice, gravy and greens appeared, the individual would feel guilty at being so weak, so selfish, so capitalist to think for a moment about a McDonald's burger. Jones reinforced such feelings with "news" that corporations in the U.S. were now deliberately poisoning the food and that they should be grateful to Dad (an important theme of self-analysis) that they had pure, healthy food. (The next issue of *IN THESE TIMES* will print some as-yet-unpublished self-analysis letters and discuss what they reveal about Jonestown.)

The tyrannical "structure" of the "family" of Jonestown was reproduced in the minds of its members. The isolation of the community and of the individuals within the camp, the blockage of all escape routes and the crusade against individual identity or self-esteem (typically attacked as "elitism"), the pervasive terror, the distorted news, the public ridicule and the personal complicity of members in developing a deep sense of guilt and of dependence on "Dad"—all this led to a creation of a sense of reality more in keeping with Jones' teachings than with people's independent perceptions. Members would, of course, deliberately lie to defend Jonestown, but many of them may have truly seen reality as Jones told them, to. It is possible to see the gradual change in the survivors according to the degree they have become "contaminated" in Dr. Sukhdeo's words, with another reality outside the cult: the ones most inside, most under Jones' continuing domination, for example, deny that there was ever any physical punishment at Jonestown and still show "inappropriate smiles" in discussing the tragedy of their "paradise."

During times when cultures are disrupted and people feel that they are powerless to act effectively to put their world together in a deliberate, rational fashion,

The Evans family is the only one to have survived the Jonestown suicides and murders intact. The children are ages 5, 7 and 11.

they frequently turn to leaders who claim supernatural powers and promise utopian visions. Many such movements or cults in the past, from peasant wars of the middle ages to Levellers during the rise of capitalism, from Ghost Dances of the Great Plains Indians to the "cargo cults" of Melanesia, have an egalitarian, cooperative, radical character that makes them seem kin to socialist ideals. Yet they always suffer from a faulty picture of the world and how change can be brought about. Usually the followers are cut loose from old social moorings, not yet firmly engaged in a new one, feel oppressed and have been stymied in previous efforts to establish self-esteem, meaning and control in their lives.

With the decline of the corporate liberal consensus of the decades after World War II and the frustration of the new forces for change in the U.S. during the late '60s, it was not surprising that cults of various types began to develop and appeal to those desperate for meaning and effective power—poor blacks, frustrated middle-class humanitarians, followers of marginal churches, drifting youth disillusioned with bourgeois vacuity in the case of Peoples Temple.

Perhaps Jones was purely an opportunist who saw "socialism" as a means of rallying a band of the discontented to carry him to fascist power, as Al Mills argues. Perhaps Jones really did believe in socialism, but had a psychotic faith only in himself—not the people—as capable of bringing in a new order. If so, his decision from the start contradicted his supposed goal.

Jones' success in winning support from much of the left in California, despite his reliance on undemocratic, unprincipled methods and on "mind control" should make many leftists more cautious about messianic charlatans in the future, even if they mouth the right slogans and deliver people. It should also lead many to rethink the relationship between the means used for achieving change and the kind of socialism to be realized. It may also raise new questions about the legitimacy of various methods of political persuasion, including some used by countries or groups that claim to be socialist.

There is another lesson in the prison-paradise disaster, which is no less important just because it was expressed—as in many previous messianic movements—in an irrational way. Jonestown was a largely black colony and most of the people there, however misguided, thought that they were building an egalitarian, cooperative world. If they had not believed in that, they never would have become "mind control" victims. They were so despairing of real change in the U.S. that they chose to commit mass suicide. We may think they were crazy for doing so, but when everything else had been accounted for, we should not completely forget that tortured message. ■



EDITORIAL

The perversion of our virtues

The Jonestown horror is one of those "small" incidents that illuminate an age and that so deeply affect the human mind that no tendency of thought can remain untouched.

It has drawn liberals, conservatives, radicals, socialists, the religious and non-religious alike, to reflect more deeply on American society, modern times in general, human nature, and the ambiguities and contradictions within their own beliefs.

The People's Temple was in a sense an all-American affair—led by Jim Jones, the quintessential American name, a man from small town Mid-America, brought up on the Bible, the American idea of fair-play, and imbued with the "can-do" spirit. It started in "God's Country" and pioneered its way to a "new frontier," first to California, as in olden days, then to the wilderness of Guyana, as in biblical times.

It appealed to Americans of the most diverse persuasions: to the conservative's yearning for initiative and authority imposing order and discipline; to the liberal's desire for helping people and rehabilitating individuals without drastic social change; to the radical's hope for an alternative community; to the socialist's dream of a classless society cured of racist and sexist divisions; to the Christian's vision of salvation in love and a transcendent cause; to the atheist's trust in a humanitarian here and now; to the ascetic's longing for self sacrifice; and to almost everyone's hope of finding meaning and purpose in life.

The People's Temple refracted all these American virtues—and ended in the monstrous vice of mass murder and suicide.

If from Jonestown we reassess the virtues we take for granted, and see that, whatever our ideological differences, our vices flow from the conflict and perversion of those virtues, we may come closer to recognizing the common humanity that inspires socialists as well as others.

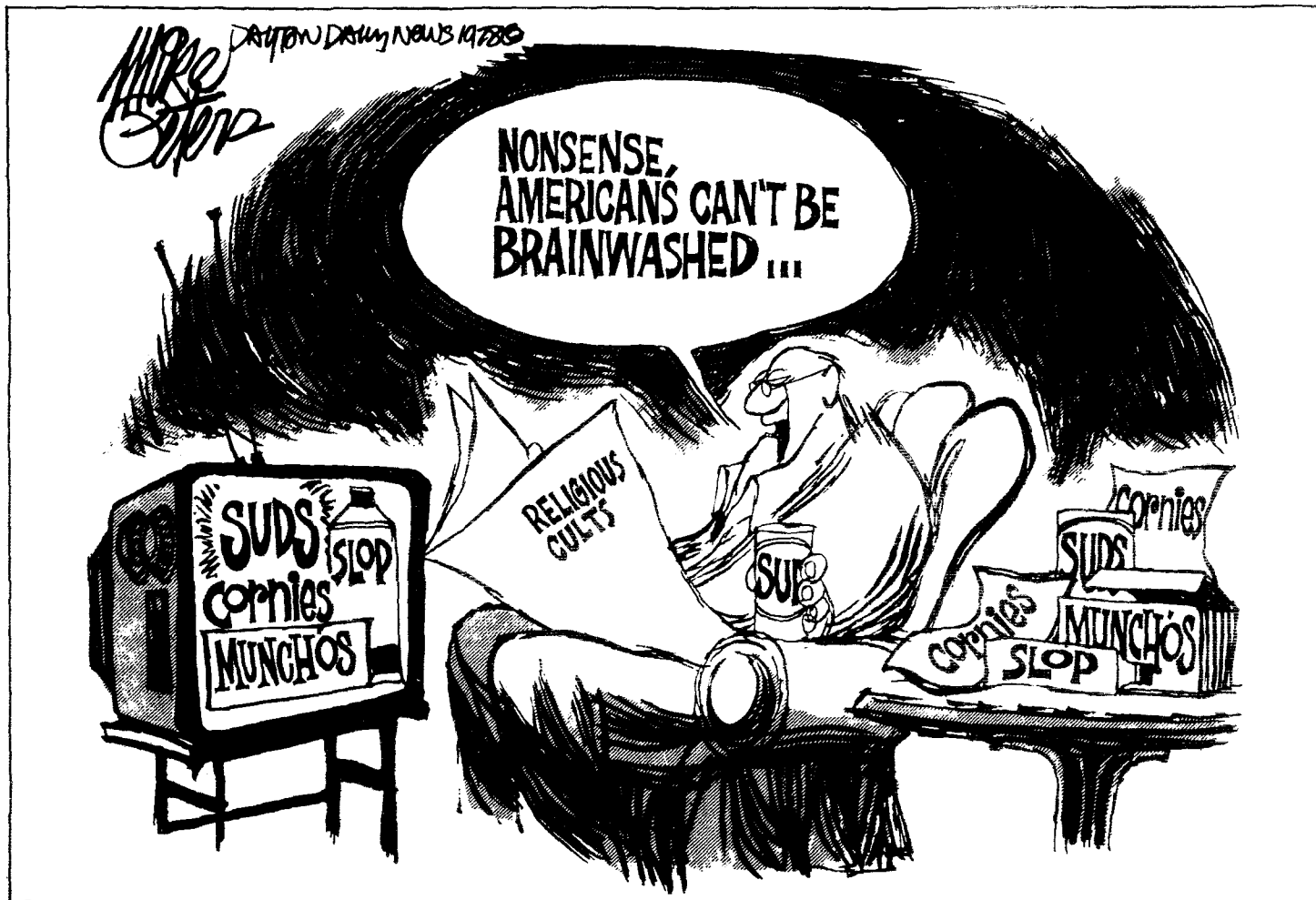
Perhaps this is why, for the most part, the media and politicians have not seized upon the macabre event in Guyana for partisan advantage—at least not yet while its searing impact still speaks to our inner doubts and better judgment. It cuts us all too deeply.

In this spirit, we will not here take up the ways in which the ills of capitalist society made a People's Temple possible. The media have traced at length such cult's roots in existing social and cultural conditions. Besides, it would only be a half-truth. (See David Moberg's report and analysis, pp. 11-14). Nor will we dismiss Jonestown as some "fascist" aberration and thereby disown its relevance to our own values and practices as leftists and socialists.

Too often those of us on the socialist left will support movements, such as the People's Temple, and overlook their undemocratic behavior, because we feel "they are on our side," or because we admire their claims to certainty, their determination, sincerity and dedication.

But in so doing, we abandon our principles of democracy and our view of the social relations we believe a socialist movement should be seeking to develop, for the sake of short-term advantages. We yield to manipulative temptation and embrace the idea that the ends justify the means. We betray our knowledge that ends and means are always interrelated and that we cannot achieve a socialist democracy through authoritarian—and sometimes criminal—shortcuts.

Supporting or uncritically ignoring authoritarian tendencies also accustoms us to acquiescing in a prevalent characteristic of bourgeois society: that of pitting



individuality and the integrity of conscience against society as if they were mutually exclusive. And that violates one of the important ideas of socialism—that a democratic society requires strong individuality, exercised in people's freedom of association and thought. Or, as Lewis Mumford once put it, a strong community requires strong egos. A "community" of conformist, unthinking people is what Marx referred to as a *false community*.

Bourgeois society strongly identifies individuality with pecuniary success and acquisitiveness, which subordinates individuality to the dictates of the market, the organization and peer prejudice.

Leftist support for authoritarian or cult-like tendencies only helps strengthen the individual-against-society, a dichotomy that socialists should be seeking to overcome.

More important, such support reflects and nourishes the all too frequent adoption of authoritarian values and cult-like habits within socialist organizations.

The parallels between characteristics of the cults and those of many left and socialist groups past and present are apparent:

- Fascination with organizational technique ("structure") at the sacrifice of

clearly stated and publicly debated principles.

- Deification of a doctrine as an eternal canon, to which the "sinful" world must adjust or be damned, and reducing thought to sloganeering and static formulas, cutting it off from studying the historical world.

- The idea that "the people" are "not ready" for the doctrine, making a democratic route to socialism virtually impossible, and ensuring elitist authoritarianism.

- Perversion of "collectivism" and "self-criticism" from true collegiality based on the honest exchange of views and the encouragement of diversity in gaining greater knowledge, into a bludgeon for smothering the individual's critical judgment as well as the group's right to hear it, and for enforcing conformity and a blind faith in a leader (or leaders).

- The practice of acting and speaking in public at variance with the beliefs held in private or within the group, thereby making socialist ideas into specialized or occult doctrines accessible only to the initiated.

- Segregation of members from the "outside" world, instilling fear and distrust of "outsiders," and defining society as something evil to be destroyed rather

than as the source of any possible regenerative ideas and movements.

- Idealization and exclusive identification with imagined "allies" external to one's own people (the "Third World," China, the Soviet Union, Cuba, etc.).

- Perversion of the idea that "the personal is the political" from a reasonable observation of the social character of personality, into an authoritarian weapon against privacy, dissent, variability, personal judgment, and critical thought.

All these characteristics and others are to be found among us socialists—as well as among those of other political and religious persuasion. That suggests we share with others a common humanity. But it also suggests that if we are indeed committed to changing our society into a democratic community guaranteeing liberty and equality, then we should be equally committed to confronting and overcoming these characteristics: to hold our "virtues" up continually to critical judgment.

If we don't grasp the implications of the People's Temple horror as signifying the need to quicken those critical efforts, we may consign ourselves to the treadmill of "keeping up with the Joneses," and Guyana's jungle may be closer than we think to the streets of America.

The seven percent solution

The salary increases ranging from 30 to 60 percent that Ohio, Illinois, and Cook County (Chicago) politicians voted to bestow upon themselves highlight the double standard characteristic of income distribution in the U.S.

The 7 percent wage guideline now being pressed upon working people by the Carter administration is obviously not accepted by the wealthy, the powerful, and the famous as applying to themselves. They expect their salaries, capital gains, dividends and tax breaks to raise their incomes well above the inflation rate and as high as "the market will bear." The "7 percent solution" is for everyone else.

When baseball star Pete Rose negotiated a 200 percent (\$535,000) pay increase, from \$265,000 to \$800,000 per year, he said he only wanted recognition, at the going market price, of his performance

in his craft. He wanted, that is, no more than all the other rich, powerful, and famous routinely expect as their birthright from the market system. The Ohio and Illinois politicians want and expect the same. Don't they work hard at their jobs, they asked. Doesn't their important contribution to society warrant the price they demand?

But let a steel worker, a sanitation worker, a teacher, a machinist, or a bus driver ask the same questions and they are roundly denounced as perpetrators of inflation. They are told the market does not value them as highly as a corporate executive, a baseball player, a rock star, or a politician. Which says something about the market's priorities and their incongruity with the priorities of a humane and equitable society.

The administration's inflation fighters,

including the President, are furious with the Ohio and Illinois politicians' pay raises—not because of their size (chief inflation battler Alfred E. Kahn said nothing about Pete Rose), but because of their embarrassing timing—and from politicians who set a powerful public example for better or worse.

If a Democratic President can't count on the faithful in Cook County—the Peter's Rock of his own party—to keep the veil over the market system's inequities, whom can he count on? As one unidentified Democratic U.S. Senator was quoted to say by the *New York Times* (Dec. 6), "No one any longer believes that anyone is on the level." The politicians' pay hikes all too publicly confirm what everybody already believes. No wonder Kahn and the other Carter administration statesmen called it an outrage.