

"A VISA ERROR AND PEOPLE'S TEMPLE IS MORE REMOTE THAN EVER," TIM REITERMAN, SAN FRANCISCO EXAMINER, NOVEMBER 17, 1978

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GEORGETOWN, Guyana — As the jet banked toward the airport at midnight Tuesday, Georgetown stood out as a strand of lights between the moonlit Atlantic and the black jungle interior.

On the ground, Guyana's heavy air rushed into the plane, hot, wet, sticky air that clung to passengers filling into the airport terminal.

U.S. Embassy officials in powder blue shirt-jackets — businessmen's attire here — made beelines for Rep. Leo Ryan, leader of a small congressional delegation's inquiry into the activities of an urban faith healer who once rubbed shoulders with politicians.

The first indication of the People's Temple's presence was the whispering among the concerned relatives group following Ryan's delegation. To one side of the terminal, several temple members were silently observing.

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In the modest, low-slung terminal reporters sweated their way through immigration and customs, some uncertain that their last-minute planning for entry permits through the Guyanese Embassy in Washington had any effect in the country, itself. The inspectors seemed to have known beforehand that the entourage was related to

the People's Temple mission here.

After a while, most reporters were quietly celebrating their smooth trip through the lines. Then a San Francisco Chronicle reporter appeared outside a nearby window, guarded by a policeman.

Newsman had agreed beforehand to support one another. NBC, which had the strongest credentials, volunteered to stay to help while those reporters on shakier ground went on to Georgetown itself, 26 miles away.

Feeling free and extremely fortunate, one group selected a cabbie from several East Indians and blacks soliciting customers at the curb. After the cabbie was asked to keep his vehicle under 30 miles an hour, he roared off, running the first two stop signs.

A good two-lane pavement carried the group through flatlands, past silvery waterways, bungalows on stilts and some small industry.

At the outskirts of Georgetown the cab cut through the sweet smell of rum from a nearby distillery. At

that late hour the town's few stoplights were working and there were knots of young men conversing on street corners, and some young women and bicyclists traveling the roadsides.

"I'm sorry, sir, but we have no reservations for you," said the desk clerk at the Pegasus Hotel, a cylindrical structure that is Georgetown's finest and a frequent stopover for airline employees. "We are booked up."

Soon there were others — all from the concerned relatives group

— whose confirmed reservations somehow had vanished. The lobby became a little encampment for a dozen Americans whose immediate needs were cold beer and beds after two days of travel. Some opted for another hotel but most stayed in the lobby in tired protest.

"People's Temple," mused a portly Guyanese at the hotel. "Of course I've heard of them. The Reverend Jones. They have a radio show and they tell you how wonderful People's Temple is. They also have a band. They used to play here at the hotel but haven't for a while."

"Do I ever visit their mission? No, it is in a very remote area."

The Examiner's reporter and photographer were able to get a room shortly before 4 a.m. yesterday. Before anyone could use it the front desk phone rang.

"Sir," the clerk said, "that was immigration. They say there is some problem with your passports. They will be here within the hour." Three hours later, up strode a black man in an orange motorcycle helmet, blue T-shirt and jeans. He was barely recognizable as our uniformed immigration inspector of the night before. He demanded the passports, then altered them with his pen. Suddenly an author-

ized stay of five days was reduced to 24 hours.

"I was tired last night," the officer explained. "I made a slight mistake. You must go to the Home Ministry. It opens at 8 o'clock."

At the Home Ministry, an assistant secretary invited us into his office, inspected the passports and inquired about our business as though he hadn't heard of the congressional delegation's visit and knew little of People's Temple.

After some phone calls, the secretary apologized politely for the delay, but said the decision-making officials would be unavailable for several hours. "Call me at 1 p.m.," he said.

After U.S. officials were informed of the passport difficulties shared by most of the press here, it seemed as though Ryan were about to lose most of his press entourage. The 24-hour stamps were about to expire.

At 4 p.m. yesterday in another Guyanese government building, with well-worn wooden stairs and ceiling fans, chief information officer Victor Forsythe explained that some communication delay resulted in the passport problems. He asked several reporters how long they wished to stay. Each said five days. He handed each a press packet on the country and introduced an aide who would assist them.

Finally, he called the Ministry of Home Affairs official and said, "I have spoken with the visiting press and as far as I'm concerned, they can stay five days."