

SOME OTHER VIEWS OF CHEDDI JAGAN

By Harry McD. Persaud

THE DIRECTOR OF THE *Skeptic Society*, Michael Shermer who teaches at *Occidental College* in Los Angeles, quoting the nineteenth century philosopher, Arthur Schopenhauer in April, 1997 issue of *Natural History* magazine, under the caption, *How to be a Skeptic* stated, "All truth passes through three stages. First, it is ridiculed. Second, it is violently opposed. Third, it is accepted as self evident." Cheddi Jagan's relationship with the United States of America can be summarized in Schopenhauer's statement above.

Cheddi Jagan's contribution to politics and to the political welfare of the "wretched of the earth" will, I am positive, will be well spelt out by others who are more qualified and *au fait* with his works. It is my intention to touch on a few of the little known aspects of his life which might be overlooked by others, dwarfed as they are by his other achievements and contributions.

I believe that it was Lenin who stated that, "Politics apart from life is a farce." Based on this premise then, it subsumes that everything a person does is political. Although I do not wholly subscribe to this view, we will judge for ourselves how far this is so after our discussion.

As A Father And Grandfather

I can clearly recall one July, as an acquaintance and I were about to depart on a holiday to the United States from Guyana that we visited Dr. Jagan's home. I cannot recall if this was because of an invitation by the doctor or because of my acquaintance's closeness to the family. However,

when we arrived and were ushered to the backyard, there was the doctor with a basket on the ground and a pole in his hand, picking fruits. He could have easily ordered this done but, since the fruits were meant for his children and grandchildren, he felt that he must do this himself, since when I volunteered my help, he diplomatically refused politely, saying he had enough. He then washed, wiped and packed the fruits and elicited a promise from my acquaintance to deliver the fruits personally to his children and let them know who sent them, and to tell his grandchildren the fruits were from which trees. Such acts can only come from some one who dearly loves family.

Love For The Misunderstood

Some time in 1987, prior to the foregoing encounter, I was enjoying the breeze on the upper deck of the *M.V. Malali* on one of my frequent trips to the Essequibo Coast, when the Doctor made his appearance beside me. I was unaware of his presence until he asked if I was enjoying my trip. I was taken back and apprehensive at first, but when I discovered that there were no visible bodyguards or other persons who might misconstrue our encounter (such was the political atmosphere at the time), I relaxed and conversation began to flow easily. He soon elicited the purpose of my visit, where I lived and where I worked – in short order.

Since I was working in the Central Rupununi and shared alike the pleasures and hardships of the Amerindian people, their hopes and dreams of a better life, I soon waxed into the hardships and deteriorating social and other living conditions of the area. Maybe, I was a little too enthusiastic in my condemnation of the shortage of even indigenous foods (farine, tapioca, etc.). This, I felt was brought about by the government's policy to propel the natives into a moneyed economy by encouraging them to plant peanuts, tomatoes, carrots and onions. This caused a concomitant drop in the cultivation of cassava and thus a drop in the manufacture of the staples. Not only did the tomatoes become ketchup during those rare occasions when it was transported for trans-shipment to the capital, but also the onions grew and got rotten, and the peanuts were piled up in tons for lack of transportation, while the pittance paid on the spot for peanuts could not buy any

appreciable amount of food from the local stores, or the cheaper items across the river in Brazil. This caused a number of producing families to migrate out of the area.

Before I was finished the doctor asked what solution I would propose. I seized the opportunity to propose a daily cargo airlift. He pointed out astutely that firstly, unbot-tled ketchup is of little use and onions are cheaper than the cost of transportation. Peanuts however had shelf life but is a poor substitute as a staple. "The culture of a people," the Doc averred, "Must experience change from within and never be drastically imposed upon." I was amazed how quickly Dr. Jagan analyzed the situation both economically and socially. This surely must have come from a deep interest and an intense understanding and love for a people who have been the least understood of the Guyanese population.

The Doctor's Religion

Many, especially religious zealots, have questioned and may still be perplexed about Jagan's religion. Ever since the beginning of organized society, people have been categorizing, dividing, stratifying and pigeon-holing members of society, even castigating certain sects and sections when they do not conform to what the ruling elite perceive to be the order of the day. There are however certain individuals who do not seem to fit any particular category. They do not really defy the religious status quo as such, but defy the status quo to categorize them – a kind of lover of all, but belonging to none. Jagan was one such person. He embraced the universality of God and saw his mission in trying in his unique way to alleviate the suffering of his fellow man. He had a holy mission from the onset of his career to educate, inspire and move people towards the achievement of a better life. He felt he was missing something if he did not pursue his labor of love towards achieving this dream of a better life for his people. It is an axiom that this passion of his transcends maps and boundaries as can be validated from his fight for universal adult suffrage to his quest for a global human order. This then shows that he had an intense love for his fellow human beings. I am sure then that when the time of reckoning comes, he will be counted as Abou Ben Adem was. His name as a lover of men shall lead all the rest. Remember, the Lord Jesus said,

"Even as you do it unto your brother, you do it unto me."

When Jagan's history shall be recorded, a shrine or plaque may attest to his greatness as a politician and father of the Guyanese nation. But surely remembering him as a father, as a lover of the downtrodden and as lover of his fellow man, is also a great legacy to leave to his children and all Guyanese to emulate. May his soul rest in peace and the legacy he has left us live on.