

Dr Jagan Dedicated Total Life To Underprivileged

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Minister of Labour

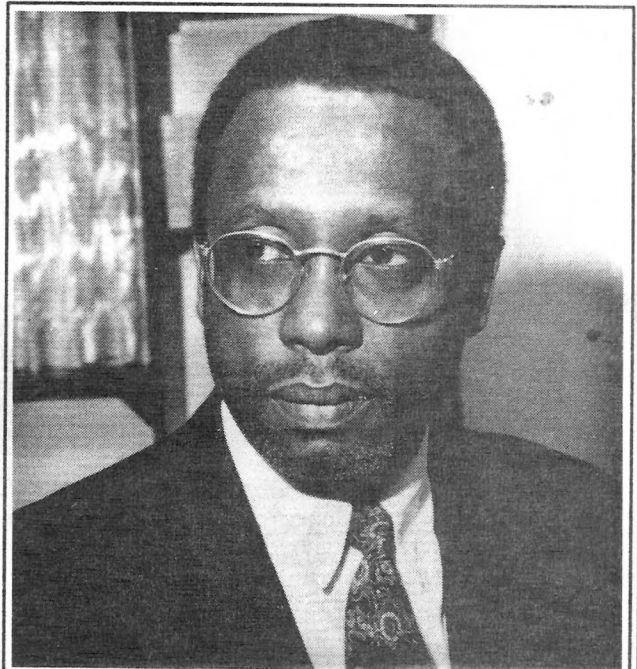
Mr Speaker, in recent weeks so much has been said about our late President that, as one rises to speak, there is definitely a feeling of possible superfluity. Contributions have been so wide ranging and detailed that the effort to find something novel to say appears daunting. Nonetheless, it occurs to me that, among other things, a life's work must contain some fundamental difficulty if it is to be considered great. For decades this National Assembly was the stage upon which the great man unleashed his beloved "dialectics" which must always have paid mind to the complex racial/ethnic nature of our society.

Hon. Members, I hold to the simple belief that life has no intrinsic purpose. The purpose of our existence is the one we give to it. Great lives are also usually those directed towards at least one great enterprise. And great enterprises are normally those which attempt fundamental repairs to the human condition.

Mr Speaker, it is the general belief that the existence of really poor conditions hardly ever lead to revolutionary activism. Really poor people are hardly ever prepared to risk life and limb in chasing the dream of the good society. What is revolutionary is the juxtaposition of a level of material security and a growing consciousness that things could and should be better.

Whether it was Dr Jagan's growing up on a sugar plantation in the heyday of the sugar lords, his subsequent sampling of a better life in Georgetown as he attended secondary school, his studying as one of an ethnic minority in the United States or some combination of these, what is certain is that some time before the tragedy at Enmore, Dr J. threw his lot in on the side of the poor and decided that the overthrow of the colonial system was a necessary prerequisite for the all-round upliftment of his countrypeople.

For the uninitiated, his deep commitment to the elimination of poverty was somewhat frightening. I remember one occasion during the 1992 elections campaign as we were



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leaving a public meeting in Sophia. Out of a silence that bespoke deep contemplation, he said to me, "What are our lives for, Henry, if not to help these people?"

Now, for one such as myself with a much more developed materialist proclivity, this kind of talk was quite unsettling. I believe that my social commitment is as developed as the next person's but this kind of total dedication of one's life in this direction was not what I was contemplating!

From his allegiance to social reform and socialism in the early days right to his recent call for a New Global Human Order we see the thread of Dr Jagan's deep belief in the cause of the underprivileged.

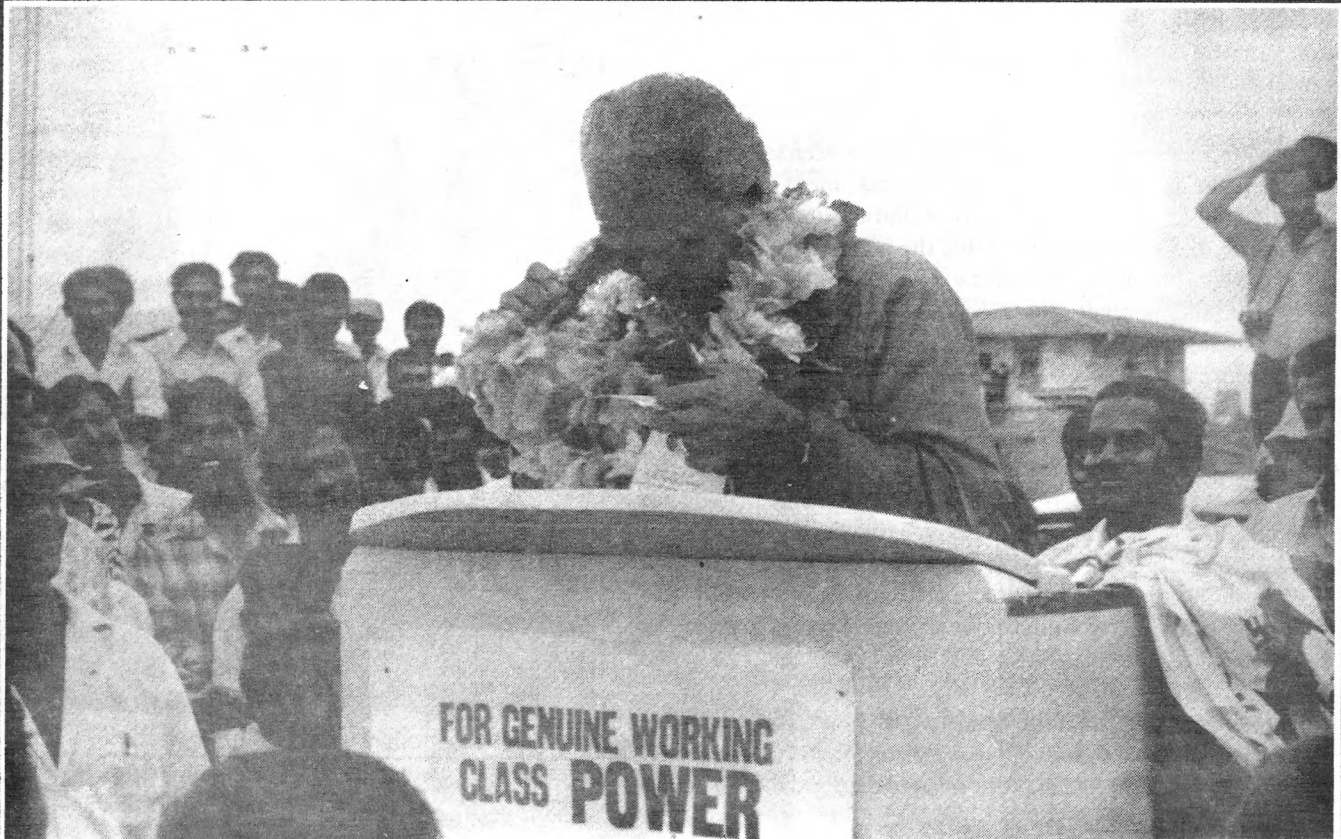
Mr Speaker, all great plays require an appropriate stage and here was Dr Jagan's greatest problem. The continuously threatening racial and ethnic schisms which plagued our society had to be contained if his great work was

ever to see the light of day. Given his orientation labouring for a section of the working class was never on the cards. From his willingness to accommodate Forbes Burnham in the mid/late forties to the formation of this Civic, we see an attempt to address this problem.

Nevertheless, all such efforts at accommodation had to be constructed in a fashion that would not thwart his major effort to liberate the working people. This fundamental difficulty was always uppermost in his mind and became an essential part of his psyche. Thus, in its various formulations,

essential before all social/racial problems can be adequately addressed. Thus his near obsession with economic growth and distribution.

During his years of struggle he was quite miraculously able to be at the forefront of the fray and still somewhat above it. As a result, Cheddi Jagan's death and its aftermath can be viewed as providing a catalyst to help us mitigate our social division in a sustainable manner. In this period many people are clamouring for stability. In my opinion, what is most required is change: a willingness to attempt to create a future



Dr Jagan addressing a May Day Rally organised by GAWU.

we have heard that he did not wish to dominate but did not want to be dominated for fear that his essential project might come up dead in the water. This scenario had to be handled extremely delicately and we all heard him say time and again that his politics required that we learn to walk between raindrops!

For all kinds of reasons, the working people to whom our late President pledged his life are only now tentatively emerging from years of material deprivation. As to the racial and ethnic problems, they still loom large. To me Dr J. appeared a materialist who seemed to have believed that some undefined critical level of material satisfaction is

which opens new and more exciting vistas.

This is definitely not a call for the introduction of all manner of untested propositions. Indeed, I would rather it be construed as a most conservative plea that we seek to lessen the importance of politics in social life and be more creative in our use of existing machinery.

Mr Speaker, even in death the good Doctor may make his mark.

(Delivered at a special Parliamentary sitting to honour Late President Cheddi Jagan held on Thursday, March 27, 1997)