

August 9, 1953.

The Hon'ble
Dr. C.B. Jagan,
Audrey Salamalay.

"MEET THE MINISTERS"

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AUDREY SALAMALAY:

The Leader of the House of Assembly and Minister of Agriculture, Forests, Lands and Mines, should really need no introduction to the Majority of people in British Guiana. As the Parliamentary Leader of the majority Party - the People's Progressive Party, and the Minister elected by his fellow-ministers as their head in the House, the Honourable Dr. Cheddi Jagan is within the limitations of our Constitution, the virtual Prime Minister of British Guiana.

At the general election in April this year, Dr. Jagan contested the Corentyne Coast seat and beat his nearest opponent by 4,975 votes. This is not his first term of office as a member of the Legislature.

I want you to look over my shoulder as I glance through and comment on the newspaper clippings about this remarkable personality. The Honourable Cheddi Jagan was the member for Central Demerara during the life of the last Legislative Council. For five years he was the only member of the present majority party with a voice in the public assembly. His voice - often a lone voice - became well-known for its persistence, and the classic example of his marathon efforts was his six-hour speech earlier this year, during the debate on the Undesirable Publications Bill, - a session of the Legislative Council which lasted from two o'clock to eleven at night. Dr. Jagan opposed and moved amendments to every clause without success. Five months later the majority party, in the present House of Assembly, voted the repeal of the Undesirable Publications Bill, and this measure is now about to be reviewed by the State Council.

Just recently turned 35, with his first grey threads appearing among his thick, black hair, and with his flashing smile, who is this young Guianese, who in less than ten years after qualifying and returning home as a dental surgeon, has become the most important political figure in British Guiana? I had hoped that the voluminous clippings the BPI has amassed since 1942 would have provided a picture. But do they? Let us see what they say:

On October 10, 1943, the Daily Chronicle reports that a new dental surgeon, Dr. Cheddi Jagan, has returned home after 7 years as a student in the United States of America. This clipping mentions that while in Chicago, young Dr. Jagan became interested in social services and pursued studies in this direction in his spare time, eventually taking the Bachelor of Science degree.

I see his name popping up now and again in union activities, May Day marches, and as a writer of controversial articles in the press, and in 1947 he announced his arrival on the political scene, when he contested and won the Central Demerara seat from that seasoned politician, J.I. de Aguiar.

The "recall" motion seeking introduction of legislation to give the electorate of every constituency the right to recall members was probably the most talked of motion in 1948, and throughout 1949 he was in the news for his activities in regard to the Enmore shootings and the trespass notices served on himself and his wife by ten sugar estates.

His motion for extending old age pensions and his attempt to introduce a minimum wage law caused much discussion throughout the country. I see his name appearing in the clippings as President of the Sawmill Workers' Union and as a member of the Trades Union

Council

Council. More and more of his activities in the trade union field are recorded in the press.

When the Waddington Constitution Commission came to British Guiana, Dr. Jagan and his newly formed Party took an important part in the activities in connection with the proposals for a new constitution. The Legislative Debates were heated on the Commission's reports, with Dr. Jagan holding out for wholly elected representatives and a greater degree of power for the legislators. Perhaps the most important of all his activities during this period was his stand against the introduction into the rice industry of the Colonial Development Corporation with what he regarded as preferential treatment. His Party picketed outside the Public Buildings urging legislators to oppose the Bill.

After April 27, Dr. Jagan and his victorious People's Progressive Party were described by Time Magazine as quote the first group of Communist Leaders ever to rule in the Commonwealth unquote. Leader Jagan and his wife Janet were labelled by that newsmagazine as quote out and out Communists unquote. Dr. Jagan has publicly denied that he or his wife are agents of or owe allegiance to any foreign power.

DR. JAGAN:

Yes, that is quite true. I owe allegiance to none other but my party and British Guiana. It's common knowledge that I am a confirmed socialist - perhaps too red and outspoken for some people. I have made no effort to disguise the fact that I believe in the superiority of the socialist system. Capitalism proved itself more efficient than feudalism and slavery and so replaced them. So will the the capitalist system in due course be changed into a higher and more efficient, socialist system. Likewise socialism itself will evolve into the higher, communist stage of society. Unlike some socialists I have not hidden the fact that I am a great admirer of the Soviet Union, People's China and the People's Democracies. The efforts at human regeneration in those countries deserve the sympathetic consideration of all peoples. As a developing country we must learn not only from the rich experience of the technically advanced countries of the west. There is much to adopt from the new methods of organization in these advancing countries. Let us keep an open mind. Let us not be led astray by propaganda about Soviet imperialism and slave camps. The Russian revolution was fought not to bring about oppression but rather to end it. I believe that the Russian revolution like the French and American Revolutions will always be regarded as a landmark in the history of development of human society.

I am an ardent supporter of the World Peace Movement. Vast amounts of manpower, material, and technical resources amounting to billions of dollars are today being spent for armaments and war preparations. These can be and should be diverted to peaceful construction, particularly of the backward areas of the world. The cost of one rocket fighter, not to speak of an atomic bomb, could help to carry out a major part of our immediate developmental programme. The problem of hunger is much more urgent. We do not need war-planes, tanks and bombs. We need tractors, bulldozers, combines and draglines. War is not the way out of the so-called population problem. War is not the answer to the settlement of international disputes. These must be settled by negotiation. The leaders of the world must get together. They must work as diligently for peace as they do for war.

British Guiana has a bright future. It is true we have right now very many pressing problems. For instance, the problem of unemployment and under-employment. Unemployment is like cancer. It is wasteful and degenerating. We have inherited many other ills. The Government has now under consideration a full developmental programme. There are some who despair. Others are shouting that only foreign capital can pull us out. I am not so pessimistic.

Socialism is my faith. This faith is founded and based on the people. I have every confidence in our people. Too many times I have been given free, unsolicited advice - "Oh, Jagan", I have been told, "the people are ungrateful, the same people who put you up today, will pull you down tomorrow." These persons, I am afraid, do not understand the people. Neither do they understand what motivates people like me. To them the people is something to be used and exploited. And politics is to them either for personal glory or fortune or both. They will never understand what fired people like Jefferson, Thomas Paine, Nehru, Stalin, and others. They will never feel the intense emotion like others who have left fame and fortune to fight for freedom. It is utter stupidity to them that a man should leave the security of his home and family to join an international brigade in the fight against fascism. But they will leave no stone unturned in recruiting other people's starving sons as rice soldiers for imperialist wars. At times they will beat their breasts with patriotic fervour. But they are not true Guianese.

Yes, my bedrock is the people - the workers, the farmers, and others who must work to live. But I do not want to give the impression that capitalists have no place in our community. For a good many years to come, it is true, the capitalists, particularly our local capitalists, have a progressive role to play. We will offer them every protection. For their part they must regard themselves as partners in a joint common programme of development. The emphasis must be not on what can be taken out, but on what can be contributed.

You the people can and must play an increasingly greater role in the government of our country. You must organize intensively. There must be relentless discussion. International and local issues must become topics of the day. Only thus will you be provided with the foresight and knowledge to move into the future without fear. The weakness of our constitution must be thoroughly exposed. You must carry out a continuous agitation for the removal of the reactionary State Council, the official members of the Executive Council and the dictatorial veto and reserve powers of the Governor. You spoke in no uncertain terms on April 27. We were put into power. We are your mouthpiece. You are sovereign. You alone should be our check. Take into your own hands the powerful weapon, the recall. This weapon we are prepared to give you. But remove all other undemocratic checks.

You must also be every vigilant and critical. Declare war against waste, corruption, and nepotism. Organize and develop mutual aid schemes. The co-operative movement must be strengthened at all levels. Much can be achieved by community effort. Let me digress here to tell you of one of my ideas. You know that drainage and irrigation is the bugbear of our country and that major works should be carried out. But you are also aware that these schemes will run into several millions. We may not be able to raise the money to undertake all these schemes at the same time. Yet they are all very necessary. How are they to be done? I feel that the underemployed and seasonably unemployed amongst you must be mobilized. In the past, canals were dug, dams were constructed with bare hands. If we cannot get the money and the machines we must undertake to do these things again with our bare hands. This has been done in China. It is being done in India. But you may ask "How will these people be paid?" The answer is: they will be given land properly drained and irrigated in payment for labour given. But how will they live you will ask? They will live as they would have to in any case on the earnings of their gainful employment in the sugar plantations, rice fields and other places. What will be mobilized will be their free, unoccupied time. Of course they can be paid in cash, a percentage of their weekly or daily wage. For instance, let us take the case of a rice farmer holding 5 acres of land. He becomes seasonably unemployed for a great portion of the year. The same applies to the sugar workers. And then there are the office workers and others who may be able to devote weekends and other times when they are not gainfully employed. Their free, unemployable

time can be put into a drainage and irrigation project. If they are to be paid two dollars per day, one-fourth or one-third of this wage can be paid in cash. The rest can go towards down payment for land purchase. I realise that this will involve a great deal of planning and effort, but I do not regard it as an unsurmountable problem. I invite your comments about this suggestion. You must play an active part, not only in the formulation of policy but also in administration and management. You must give the lead and set the example in your community life. If our country is to develop rapidly, we must cast aside our prejudices. We must adopt new methods and habits. Jointly and with a spirit of sincere co-operation, let us put our shoulders to the wheel and really make British Guiana a place we can be proud of. Long live Guiana!