

# Cheddi Did Not Capitulate

By Peeping Tom - Apr 27, 2018

This is the first in a series of columns, which will critically examine the politics of Cheddi Jagan. This series of articles is being written to mark the centenary of his birth.

The triumph of imperialism at the end of the 1980s led to political reassessments. Instead of lauding individuals for their ideological consistency, capitulating to neo-liberalism became a virtue.

Cheddi Jagan was designated a failure because he was an unrepentant communist. When Cheddi was fighting for democracy in Guyana, the biggest criticism of him was not so much his ideological belief but rather his party's inability to bring about peaceful change. He was seen as ineffective against Burnham who actually used Cheddi's communism to consolidate his grip on power.

At that time, Cheddi's ideology was not the main criticism levelled against him. The government of the day was also leftist.

Since the disintegration of the Soviet Union, socialism is no longer viewed in such favourable light. Many hard-core leftists have "jumped ship". They have abandoned left-wing politics. They are now trumpeting neo-liberalism. It is almost as if their embrace of socialism never occurred. They have capitulated.

Yet no one calls these former comrades to account. They are not denounced as traitors. They are not seen as having abandoned their beliefs and of being opportunistic. Instead, it is those who, like Cheddi Jagan remained faithful to the creed that, are assailed as failures for refusing to abdicate the Left.

Long before the Berlin Wall was punctured, there were forces in Guyana, which had retreated from the Left. Following the American invasion of Grenada, the leftist Working People's Alliance adopted the policy of geo-fatalism. It decided that the Americans would never allow a socialist government in this part of the world.

It is one thing to accept the realities of the objective conditions at the time. But it is quite another thing to abandon the ideology of socialism which is what occurred in the WPA.

If the WPA wanted to abandon the Left, they could have easily found consolation in the analysis adopted by the Russians who had assessed that the culture and size of the countries of the Caribbean militated against the building of socialism.

The explanation of the post-Burnham PNC was that its transformation was by a process of evolution, thus confirming the inexplicable progression from socialism to capitalism, rather than vice versa.

During these times which tested the consistency of our political parties and leaders, Cheddi Jagan remained as is being claimed, an "unrepentant communist", even though he himself dodged the question about his ideology when pressed by Desmond Hoyte during an election debate.

Cheddi may have wavered but he did not betray the Left and capitulate.

By the time the campaigning for the 1992 elections began, the Soviet Union had begun to disintegrate. In fact, had the events of 1989 not happened, there would never have been free and fair elections in Guyana since the West would have continued to support the rigging of elections.

The PPP was faced in the run up to those elections also with the failure to form a united opposition platform against the PNC, a development, which was stirred by forces, which were in bed with the Americans. Among these forces was also an influential faction of the business class who had begun to talk to the PPP.

The PPP knew that the Americans had concerns. But it also knew that the world had changed and that socialist governments, of which Cuba was a prime example, were facing grave problems as result of the reduction in support from the Eastern bloc which was undergoing transformation.

Cheddi did not capitulate. He moderated and just before the 1992 Elections issued a statement that the building of socialism in Guyana was not an immediate goal of his party if it won power. In many respects, he had little choice. The economy which was in dire straits was being fed by development financing from the West. There were limited alternatives.

The PPP Administration found itself in the unusual position of a leftist party forming a government, which was pursuing an economic model that was a product of western imperialism.

Cheddi however, unlike so many others, never abandoned the philosophy of Marxism- Leninism. He remained true to what he believed. At one of his party congresses after he was restored to power, he reaffirmed that his party was a part of the Left.

To his dying day, he never left the Left. It is not him who has to answer for any failures of his party to adopt to the changing world order. He did not capitulate.

Cheddi died an unrepentant communist, and for not disowning the Left, he should be praised rather than condemned.

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