

DR. CHEDDI JAGAN

Among the many eulogies which Cheddi Jagan has inspired in recent days, praising his unfailing commitment to socialism and improving the lot of the ordinary people of his beloved Guyana, his world renowned reputation as an economist and campaigner for debt relief in the Third World, I would like to add a personal contribution.

I was fortunate enough to have met Cheddi and Janet as a result of their long standing friendship with my husband, Billy. In the course of two visits to Guyana in 1994 and 1996, I was privileged to be welcomed into the home of this most remarkable person. In an age when most politicians, of whatever persuasion, provoke among their constituents expressions of cynicism, "The Chief" stood out as the shining exception. Whether engaged with politicians, diplomats and academics at an international conference or sharing a joke with a stallholder in Bourda Market, he radiated humility and integrity. His genuine interest in the ordinary people of his country was obvious to all. Watching him at any public function, his natural charm and engaging smile were irresistible. He particularly enjoyed his encounters with young people - whether asking students about their studies at President's College or frolicking with his grandchildren at the swimming pool.

Cheddi had impressive self-discipline and an enormous capacity for work. Even after an exhausting day in Cabinet or at a succession of public functions, he still found the energy to work long hours into the night - on economics, welfare, international relations, debt relief - any and every topic which might bring about improvements to the lives of ordinary Guyanese.

He still however maintained his links with his humble roots. A delightful and enduring memory is that of the President of the Republic of Guyana, after a busy day at official functions, stopping off at his family home one evening to tend his sheep and pick bananas from his yard.

No one who met Cheddi Jagan could fail to be touched by his personal warmth, gentleness and charm. It was a privilege to have known him. May I offer my sincerest condolences to Janet and all the family as well as to the people of Guyana who have lost not just a great leader but a father to the nation who cared passionately about and strove tirelessly for their wellbeing.

Mary Jane Strachan

9th March 1997