

Comrade Chairman,  
Comrades all,

*Sister Nadira - Members of the Jagan Family -  
Excellency Ambassador of China.  
Cde Rohee, Indra - Fellow panalist  
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen*

I am pleased on behalf of the Guyana Agricultural and General Workers Union (GAWU) to offer these remarks as we recognise the tremendous contribution of Dr Cheddi Jagan to our people, our country and indeed our world. Though Cde Cheddi has left us now twenty-six (26) years ago, ~~it is our~~ ~~view, that~~ his teachings and work still remain relevant in our times and serve to inspire and guide our present day struggles. It is with such a conviction, therefore, that GAWU is pleased to pay tribute to the man who contributed his whole life for the cause of the working people and the poor, indeed he was "a Trade Unionist and Patriot."

During his lifetime, Cde Cheddi remained very close to our Union. He was the Honorary President of the Union until he became President of the Country in 1992. Indeed it was not accidental or by coincidence that such closeness existed but it was because of his concern and care for the working class, particularly sugar workers who were heavily exploited by the colonial masters.

Dr Jagan had a long association with workers and workers struggle. He was the Treasurer of the Man Power Citizens Association (MPCA) but could not acquiesce to dishonesty and cheating workers. So after recognising that the MPCA was a Company Union, he resigned and went on to expose the MPCA leadership by organising and educating the sugar workers of the need for a union to truly represent their cause. However, it was not until 30 years of struggle led by Dr Jagan and others like Ramkarran that the GAWU was able to replace the MPCA as the bargaining agent in the sugar industry. To this day the legacy of Dr. Jagan continues to inspire and guide the GAWU in its faithfulness and commitment towards better working conditions and a better quality of life for all Guyanese.

Cheddi Jagan's orientation and bias in favour of the working class and forthright condemnation of all forms of exploitation took a strong hold on him. After his return from studies overseas Dr Jagan wrote a book an "Anatomy of

Poverty in British Guiana” in which he illustrated how the Bauxite Industry, among other industries, were drained financially by North American capitalists.

In 1947, Dr Jagan was elected as the first workers’ representative in the Legislative Council of British Guiana. Cde Ashton Chase in his book, A History of Trade Unionism in Guyana – 1900 to 1961, said “In presenting himself as a candidate, Dr Jagan listed four qualifications which he felt were required to enable a candidate to give proper representation to the electorate. There were:-

1. Full awareness of working class conditions and problems
2. Thorough knowledge of the theory and practice of comparative governments with special emphasis on labour legislation
3. Open and continuous identification with labour’s grievances and aspirations
4. Sincerity and honesty of purpose

Dr Jagan claimed possession of all these qualifications”

His close contact with sugar workers and sawmills and forestry workers supported his mandate in the Legislative Assembly where he was known to have been the sole voice for the downtrodden workers and farmers and every other exploited stratum.

The Political Affairs Committee of 1946 struck the right chord under Cheddi Jagan’s leadership – to educate the masses towards organising into a party of working class. That objective came to fruition with the birth of the PPP in 1950. It exemplified the unity of the races – a truly progressive, nationalist movement.

The purpose: to agitate and advance the political cause of and for national liberation- political independence. Cheddi was always a man in haste for his people and country. <sup>Comrade</sup> freedom from Britain.

He staunchly and successfully lobbied the cause for Universal Adult Suffrage, thus giving all eligible voters, the right to vote from 1953.

The famous 133 days of Jagan's Government was overthrown by the British and American Governments, Why? It was because as historians recorded it, Cheddi wanted to give the workers too much power/rights via the Labour Relations Bill.

Ten years later (1963) an unholy alliance of LFS Burnham and Peter D'Aguiar collaborated with the <sup>Guyana</sup>TUC and the CIA against the Bill. An 80 days strike and blockade financed by the CIA followed. The Bill was withdrawn. What a pity and how unfortunate? Workers were foisted with yellow trade Unions – a gross betrayal of the noble objectives of what Cheddi wanted for them.

Until this day we continue to benefit from the doings of Dr Jagan and his wife Janet, for example, the Cheddi Jagan Government with Janet Jagan as the Minister of Labour in 1958, made May Day, a public holiday which replaced Empire Day.

The Trade Unionist in Cheddi, found him leading numerous demonstrations, marches and addressing rallies. Many would recall his May Day speeches and paying homage/tribute to the Enmore Martyrs with whom he was personally acquainted in their lifetime.

Cheddi had great interest and followed closely developments of the labour movement. His lively debates at the TUC Conferences always exposing the plight and poverty of workers and farmers were indeed lessons to all. To this day, his analyses have stood the passage of time and brought forth the substantive depth of Cheddi's foresight. Jagan believed and had utter faith in the working class and its primary organisations- the trade unions.

The rounded outlook of Cheddi Jagan made him a man for all times.

His international, proletarian conviction thought us to learn about the atrocities, aggressions apartheid and other de-humanizing phenomena and the

struggles of the peoples the world over. Cheddi's knowledge of international affairs was profound and of course he was always on the side of peace, progress and development. He was also Vice President in the Presidential Council for World Peace along with several other worldwide personalities for many years. When he advanced the argument that foreign debts of poor countries were un-payable, some snubbed him.

His phrase "the rich getting richer and the poor are getting poorer" was like a joke to some, but time has shown how true he was. Jagan's latest and still the way the world should proceed now than ever before in the path, "For the New Global Human Order"

Cheddi Jagan was an honest politician. He doggedly pursued what he loved best and in and out of government, at home or abroad he championed the cause for a united and free Guyana. He wanted to see all Guyanese live a better life in peace and harmony.

He is known for so many novelties. The two most outstanding ones to my mind are (1) his ability to see the good in everyone and (2) his sincerity to his people in what he did and thus the devotion of his entire adult life for their good and betterment. He was loved and respected beyond the barriers of ethnic and religious considerations.

Cheddi Jagan's completeness as a <sup>kind</sup> human and ~~kind~~ being paints an almost saintly picture of him. He loved his country and most of all he loved and served humanity for its better good. Guyana has not been the same since his physical demise, but this land continues to draw from the inspiration of this peoples' man, from the strength of this moral pillar – the Father of our Nation.

Years into the future many would wonder at the depth of Cheddi Jagan's foresight, astuteness and iron-will to fight racism and poverty, coupled with his intolerance for dishonesty.

Indeed we could speak for hours about this fighter, this patriot. However, this event, like the man himself, is a humble and modest reflection as GAWU recognises Cheddi's example as a "Trade Unionist and Patriot"