

# Legacy Of A Guyanese Hero

In time, historians will dissect his political life, analyse his objectives and point out the foibles of his leadership. But to thousands of Guyanese who grew up in the 1940s and the 1950s to the sound of his vibrant voice clamouring for freedom and the end of colonial rule, the man Cheddi Jagan will live on in their minds as an indestructible hero who championed the cause of the working class.

Yesterday, Guyana was plunged into mourning when President Cheddi Jagan died at the Walter Reed Hospital in Washington, United States of America, after a valiant battle with illness. Although all citizens were aware that the President was in a critical condition after suffering a heart attack on February 14 last, the news of his death, broken in the darkness before dawn by Acting President Mr Sam Hinds, still had the power to shock and momentarily disorient the strongest of minds.

President Jagan's legacy to this nation could never be adequately chronicled in a column such as this. Yet we will endeavour to encapsulate his greatest achievements and illumine some aspects of his humanity. The present generation may know Dr Jagan firstly as the Leader of the Opposition until October 1992 when he led the People's Progressive Party/Civic to victory in the general elections. By then, Dr Jagan was an elder statesman, known throughout the Third World and the former socialist countries for his campaigning for a return to democracy to Guyana.

Dr Jagan's political activism spans two

generations and several periods of this country's history. The son of humble parents from the sugar estates, Cheddi Jagan's concern for the poor, exploited workers was kindled early in his life. He was academically brilliant, and after completing his secondary education at Queen's College, he left these shores to study dentistry in the United States of America. It was while there that he met and fell in love with Miss Janet Rosenberg whom he married in 1943.

When the handsome young doctor and his American wife came to pre-independent Guyana in the mid-1940s, they, with the help of other sharp minds, ignited the latent flames of nationalism and changed forever the contours of this nation's political history. When Cheddi Jagan teamed up with the equally brilliant young lawyer Forbes Burnham to present the People's Progressive Party to the electorate in the early '50s, they held in their hands the future of this country. With the support of the best intellects of the time, the PPP ushered in the most glorious moment of nationalism witnessed in this land. It was a unity that transcended race, tribe, class and religious persuasions.

One of Cheddi Jagan's bitter disappointments was that he was never able to convince his political opponents to recapture this unity in order to harness the energies of the people towards meaningful development and prosperity.

As the nation mourns its loss, we are convinced that the best homage all citizens can pay this great son of Guyana is committing themselves to the cause of national unity.