

Jagan tipped to become Guyana's next president

By NORMAN FARIA
For Caribbean Week

GEORGETOWN, Guyana — While international figures including former U.S. president Jimmy Carter prepare to travel to Guyana to observe the upcoming elections, opposition leader Dr. Cheddi Bharat Jagan appears to have a better and better chance of becoming the next president of South America's only English-speaking republic.

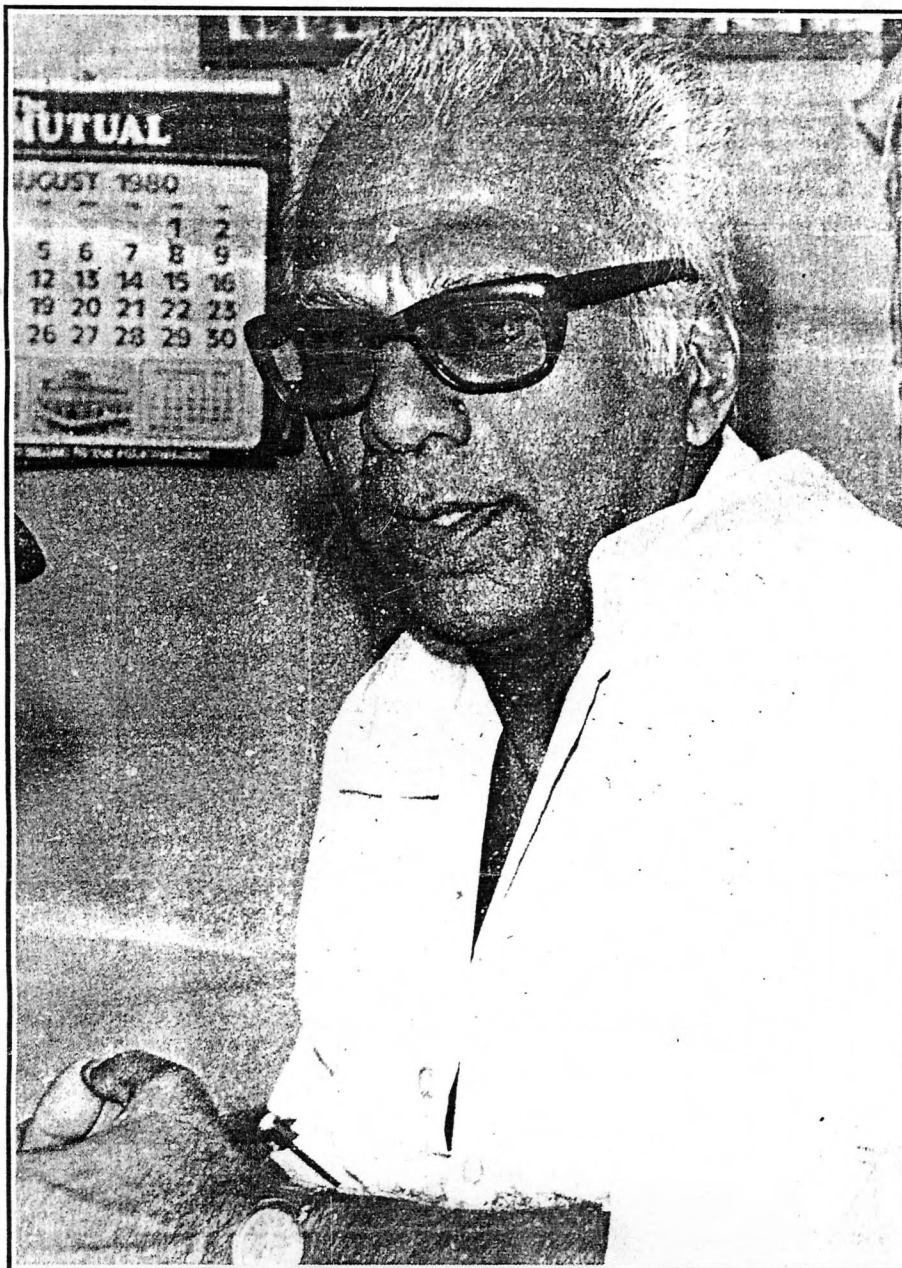
Dr. Neville Duncan, head of the Department of Government at the Barbados campus of the University of the West Indies, agrees: "I would say yes. There is a great deal of apathy right now among the Afro-Guyanese who have traditionally supported the ruling People's National Congress (PNC). There will even be cases where they will vote for other parties like the Working People's Alliance (WPA). If the People's Progressive Party (PPP) of Dr. Jagan doesn't become the dominant party after the votes are counted, there is the possibility that he would still be given the nod as president from a coalition of the parties set up after defeating the PNC. This of course presupposes there is a free and fair election."

But who exactly is Dr. Cheddi Jagan? The veteran politician gave up a potentially lucrative career as a dentist to enter the hurly-burly of Caribbean politics immediately after the Second World War. He worked alongside — and sometimes criticised — such noted Caribbean political personages as Trinidad's Dr. Eric Williams, Jamaica's Norman Manley and Barbados' Sir Grantley Adams.

Now 72, Jagan was the son of indentured labourers who came from India to work on a sugar plantation in what was then British Guiana.

His political awareness and education began as a young man on the plantation. Studying dentistry in Chicago in the late 1930s and early 1940s at Howard University and the Northwestern University Dental School, he was forced to work at three part-time jobs simultaneously to pay tuition fees. Incredibly, he also found time to take part-time courses at the YMCA College, where he learned more about the social sciences, including the study of Mahatma Gandhi and the campaign for Indian independence from Britain.

However despite the "difficult experiences and shocking observations" which — in his book *The West on Trial: The Fight for Guyana's Freedom* — he said were part of his seven-year stay



Dr. Cheddi Jagan: He may win elections in Guyana.

Photo by Norman Faria

in the U.S., the future British Guiana premier managed to make many friends of all races there. In the process, he broadened his understanding of the economic roots of racism.

Shortly before his return to British Guiana in 1943, Jagan married Janet Rosenberg, a Chicago girl who broke away from the strict marriage customs of her Jewish religion.

Immediately, they began to help form a political organisation to lead the struggle for the colony's independence — two of the first Caribbean politicians to take this path. In 1946, Jagan, his wife, Jocelyn Hubbard, and Ashton Chase formed the Political Affairs Committee which evolved

early in 1950 into the PPP. In 1953, the party won 18 of the 24 seats in the colony's Legislative Council.

Significantly — and this is important against the background of the ruling PNC describing the PPP as an "East Indian party" — Jagan referred to the poll as "rout of the racists." He did not refer to white racists, though he had some harsh words for them too:

"(During the election campaign) the National Democratic Party and the League of Coloured Peoples attempted to woo support away from us by appealing to African racism... On the other hand, in the countryside, the Indian voters were told (by the Hindu Pandits and Debedin's

United Farmers and Workers Party) that I was sacrificing the interests of the Indians and selling out to the Africans," he observed in *The West on Trial*.

In the parliamentary arena, the PPP, led by Jagan, moved to pass a number of long overdue laws including those relating to land reform and labour relations.

The plantocracy which then owned or controlled the mono crop agricultural sector — and indeed the island's economy — didn't take too kindly to the growing power and influence of the PPP. On Thursday, October 8, 1953, with the blessing of Washington, British troops landed in the capital, Georgetown. The PPP had been in office for

only 133 days. The Jagans were among those placed under arrest.

Jagan was then in the forefront of trying to avoid a split — described as "right opportunist" by the PPP at the time — by a small minority led by Afro-Guyanese Forbes Burnham. During the 1957 poll Burnham had already formed his PNC, with the help of the CIA as it was later learned.

Jagan led his party to convincing electoral victories in both the 1957 and 1961 elections. After the latter poll, the PPP was hard-pressed to control social order and an orderly economic development. Lawless bands and terrorists — later documented as financed by the CIA — launched a campaign of terror to bring down the government. In 1962, British troops again landed.

Although the PNC's use of a black form of Zionism persuaded or intimidated most Afro-Guyanese to vote PNC, Jagan was such a popular leader and the PPP's programmes so well received by the ordinary Guyanese that it again gained the majority of the votes at the 1964 election. Yet the party was kept out of office first by gerrymandering prior to the poll and then by an unprincipled coalition of the PNC and the right-wing United Force (UF). The UF was soon squeezed out and the PNC has ruled through rigged elections ever since, according to such regional political analysts as Duncan and Dr. George Belle.

"There is a general lack of democracy. Elections have long been rigged. Additionally, there is no democratic management of the economy, leading to inefficiency and chaos which causes suffering to Guyanese of all races," Jagan told *Caribbean Week* in an interview.

The Jagans have often been described in the media as "Marxists." Indeed, one of the reasons given by the colonial authorities for removing them from office was that the PPP was a "communist" government. The Jagans have never denied their appreciation for Marxist theory and maintain that "a democratic, anti-imperialist and socialist course" is the way forward for their troubled country. However, nothing about his political life over the last 45 years indicates that any PPP administration would be intolerant of opposing views.

His hair is greying now, but the veteran PPP leader and Caribbean person still speaks with the same vigour, clarity and passion which characterised his early speeches at open air meetings in the sugar belt or under the rafters in Georgetown halls.

Jagan wins Guyanese election

Norman Faria

BRIDGETOWN, BARBADOS

In what political observers say is a stunning electoral win and a vindication of the people's perseverance and confidence in their long quest for democracy, the left-of-centre People's Progressive Party (PPP), led by Dr. Cheddi Jagan, broke the 28-year stranglehold of the People's National Congress in South America's only English-speaking country, Guyana.

Despite looting of stores in the capital Georgetown on election day and other provocative actions such as the highjacking of several ballot boxes by PNC-inspired gangs, the PPP won 28 seats out of the 53 in the Cooperative Republic's Parliament. Two smaller parties, Working People's Alliance and the right-wing United Force, each got one seat under the proportional representation system in the former British colony of mainly East Indian and African peoples. In terms of voter support the PPP garnered 52 per cent and the PNC 44 per cent.

There are about 40 per cent Afro-Guyanese and 51 per cent East Indians, the latter the descendants of indentured workers brought in after the slave trade in the last century. Traditionally, the vote has been along racial lines with the PNC getting the bulk of the Afro-Guyanese vote and the PPP the East-Indian support. The PNC, first under Forbes Burnham and then Desmond Hoyte, are generally considered to have rigged every election since the PPP last won the single largest bloc of seats (24) in 1964.

This time, after several delays, a poll was conducted under an international team of observers including former Ontario Premier David Petersen and former Canadian NDP leader Ed Broadbent. It was deemed fair and free of rigging.

While the racial divide still generally held in the recent election — and the new administration will have to do all it can to stop any opposition playing the race card — political observers saw a crossover of some Afro-Guyanese voters to the PPP. One instance was the mining town of Lynden, where ballot boxes were taken into the street and the contents strewn around.

Speaking with reporters afterwards, the 74-year-old Jagan said that one of the priorities of the new administration is to cut down on the cost of living. "People wanted change from their existing misery. They saw the PPP as bringing about this change. It [the PPP victory] was a vote against the PNC," Jagan told the *Barbados Nation*, adding that his party was wrongly labelled as an "Indian party."

"We are not on a witch hunt. There will be no discrimination of any kind," said Jagan.

Most regional papers wished Jagan and the PPP well. However, several advised that Jagan's Marxist past should be "watched." In a front page story, the *Barbados Advocate* suggested there was a "socialist flavour" to the PPP's plans. It noted that among the party's plans was to stop the disinvestment of public utilities and firms and the establishment of a labour code to ensure workers have the right to join trade unions and have them recognized.

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