

Portrait Of A People's President

Guyana's greatest son and patriot, Cheddi Jagan, died on March 6, 1997. That extraordinary light that shone in this country for almost 79 years has been extinguished; that life of epic proportions that graced this land has been eclipsed by sudden illness and death, but his legacy lives on.

unflagging in zeal, steadfast in purpose, total in commitment, clear-sighted in vision, irreproachable in character, and yet simple in manner, and scented with the sweat and soiled by the toil of the ordinary folk whose world was always his.

Cheddi Jagan was a great Guyanese; indeed the



Dr Cheddi Jagan, the revolutionary, at the May Day Rally, 1980.

Cheddi Jagan's life was characterised by an incalculable breadth and depth and height of devotion and service to his country and to his countrymen and women.

He was, indeed, a giant — indomitable in courage,

greatest that has ever walked this land of ours. In a real sense, much of the history of this land over the last half a century is what Cheddi Jagan endured, did and achieved.

Dr. Cheddi Jagan became Executive President of

Guyana on October 9, 1992 after the country's first free and fair elections since independence. He achieved the rare feat of becoming Head of State and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces after twenty-eight years in opposition.

A committed patriot, and courageous and dedicated leader, Dr. Jagan's labour/political career spanned fifty years. He would have marked on December 18 this year the unparalleled record in Guyanese history of having served as a Member of Parliament for fifty years.

Born on a colonial sugar plantation, he was to become the champion of Guyana's struggle for independence from the British. He became indisputably the founder of the modern political movement in this former colony, and its principal architect of progressive-nationalist politics.

Among his greatest achievements has been the creation in 1950 of Guyana's first authentic mass-based political party, the People's Progressive Party (PPP), which he singularly moulded into a democratic, disciplined and well organised fighting force. Its early goals were the attainment of independence of the then British Guiana, and the building of a plural, democratic and socialist state.

Led by Dr. Jagan, the PPP fought for universal adult suffrage and when elections were held in 1953 under this system, it easily won. The PPP also won the next two national elections in Guyana in 1957 and 1961. In 1964, though the PPP secured the single largest number of votes, it lost power to a coalition of two opposition parties.

The ouster of Premier Jagan's government was engineered at the height of the Cold War by Anglo-American imperialism. Local opposition forces participated in a protracted campaign of destabilisation, which was fomented and financed from abroad. Justifiably in 1964, Dr. Jagan protested that his government was "cheated, not defeated".

Thus began his long and arduous epic struggle in the political opposition for the restoration of democracy and representative government in Guyana. This struggle led to pitched battles against a minority dictatorship in Guyana which had increasingly become repressive. Dr. Jagan and his vanguard PPP were harassed and persecuted.

A tireless fighter, Dr. Jagan's campaign for the return of democracy took him across the world. He lobbied extensively, at home and abroad, and on many fronts. His greatest challenge was against fraudulent elections which were successively held in 1968, 1973, 1980 and 1985.

The lack of democracy, discrimination and state violence plunged Guyana inexorably into an abyss of despair. Guyanese migrated in large numbers as they fled from authoritarian rule. But Cheddi Jagan persisted without relent. For him, the restoration of democracy was Guyana's only hope for survival.

Eventually broad support grew for free and fair

elections. The end of the Cold War facilitated a democratic opening. Foreign backers of the former regime threw in their support for change in Guyana, realising, as President John Kennedy's former adviser Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. was to admit, that the West had done "a great injustice to Dr. Jagan."

On October 5, 1992, the PPP/Civic, a broad-based alliance led by Dr. Jagan, won 54% of the votes in the first democratic elections held in Guyana since 1964, and certified free and fair by international observers. On October 9, 1992 he was sworn-in as Guyana's President - the exact date on which his first government was overthrown thirty-nine years before in 1953 when the British landed troops in the colony.

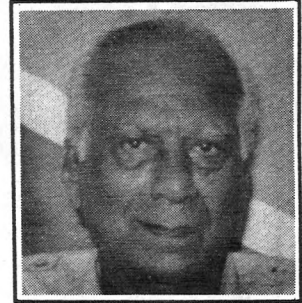
Cheddi Jagan has earned the reputation of being what an American journalist described as the best-known "come-back kid" in modern world politics. His perseverance was based on high ethical values and an ideology rooted in social justice.

Dr. Jagan has written several books describing his struggle for social justice and challenging world powers to live up to the ideals of democracy in its widest sense. In his books Dr. Jagan carefully analysed the forces which influence life in undeveloped states and he argued for greater understanding of the plight of the poor and oppressed everywhere.

President Jagan was a prolific writer. He had what one writer described as "an enviable command of facts and figures". His scores of newspaper and magazine articles on a wide array of subjects have earned him the Julius Fucik Award for Journalism in promotion of world peace, national liberation and democracy.

His books include *Forbidden Freedom* (1954, 1955, and reprinted in 1989); *The West on Trial: The Fight for Guiana's Freedom* (1966, '67, '72, '75, '80) *Caribbean Revolution* (1979); *The Caribbean - Whose Backyard?* (1984); and a large number of booklets including *The Anatomy of Poverty in British Guiana* (1964); *The Role of the CIA in Guyana and its Activities Throughout the World* (1967); *Race, Class and Nationhood* and *The State of the Guyana Media* (with Moses Nagamootoo). The first volume of his *Selected Speeches* (1992-1994) was published in 1995.

His more recent monologues contain profound and far-reaching ideas for the developing world, and Latin America and the Caribbean in particular. He shared his vision for a "New Global Human Order," and for sustainable



development with ecological and social justice through partnership.

An unassuming, quiet person in private life, Cheddi Jagan is revered as a national hero among Guyanese and West Indians. In a general way, author V.S. Naipaul saw him as "all things to all men" and, in a specific way, Maurice Bishop, the slain leader of the Grenadian revolution, saw him as "the Dean of Caribbean socialists."

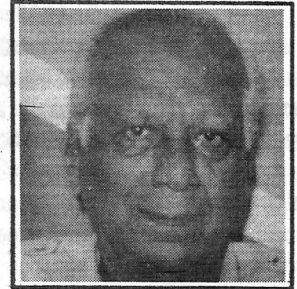
But Cheddi Jagan stood out for his honesty in public life and his uncompromising commitment to a vision of a better quality of life for the people of Guyana and of the world. He was greatly admired for his incorruptibility. A one-time detractor, Dr. Festus Brotherson, Jr, was to admit:

"Dr. Jagan's most commendable qualities are his undisputed sincerity of purpose and personal integrity. Although many people might disagree with his ideas, none can impugn his character. He is genuinely committed to the development of Guyana and he cannot be accused of being corrupt. These traits stand out in a society bereft of developmental direction and drifting in a sea of corruption."

than seeking fortuitous blips in popularity polls...Jagan has maintained his position as Latin America's most admired political leader and the one most attuned to the suffering of the bulk of his country's inhabitants."

President Jagan's ideals were rooted in his own personal experience of poverty and oppression. Cheddi was born on March 22, 1918, on a sugar plantation in Port Mourant, Corentyne, Guyana to sugar worker parents Bachoni (mother) and Jagan (father) who arrived in the then British Guiana in 1901 as infants. Both his grandmothers came to Guyana from India as indentured immigrants. His parents had twelve children, one dying in childhood.

Cheddi Jagan's education from Primary School to University was gained by dedication and sacrifice. After Primary School in Port Mourant, Cheddi became apprenticed



A young supporter garlands his leader.

More recently, the Washington-based Council on Hemispheric Affairs praised President Jagan for his "flawless performance as an authentic democrat" and noted that he was "selflessly devoted to his country". This, COHA said, represents a powerful ethical achievement:

"Amidst a desert of Third World corruption Jagan deserves to be recognized for what he is - a world-class leader of impeccable integrity who is indisputably motivated by genuine concern for the fate of his fellow citizens rather

to a tailor. He then went from the rural areas to the city and attended Guyana's leading high school, Queen's College.

Like many Caribbean people of his time, Cheddi Jagan then went to the USA with the most meager financial resources and worked his way through College doing any task which would pay his way. He spent two years at Howard University in Washington, D.C., then went to Northwestern University Dental School, graduating in 1942 with a DDS. During this period Cheddi also earned a BSc at Central

YMCA College, Chicago in 1942.

On August 5, 1943, Cheddi Jagan married Janet Rosenberg and they returned the same year to Guyana. He and his wife, Janet, soon became involved in trade union and political activities, mainly among sugar workers in the various estates throughout the country. Sugar, then and even now, is the major industry which had earned the colony the nick-name, "Booker's Guiana", as the British expatriate company Booker's, McConnel and Company dominated the economy.

In 1946, Dr. and Mrs. Jagan and two other trade unionists formed the Political Affairs Committee whose objective was the formation of a political party, since the country had none at the time. In 1947, Dr. Jagan contested a seat in the Legislative Council as an independent candidate, which he won. That was the beginning of fifty years of unbroken service as a representative of the people in Parliament.

In 1950, Dr. Jagan achieved his aim of creating Guyana's first mass-based political party, the People's

Soon after Dr. Jagan and Mr. Burnham travelled to the UK and India to present their case for the restoration of Parliamentary life to Guyana. India was chosen because of its long and successful struggle to achieve Independence from the British Empire.

When Dr. Jagan returned to Guyana, he led the PPP into a period of civil resistance. He deliberately broke restriction orders imposed upon him. He was sent to prison which resulted in an intensification of the anti-colonial resistance until the British restored elections in 1957. The Party, however, was placed under intense pressure from reactionary forces which eventually succeeded in causing a split. Mr Burnham created his own faction of the PPP in 1955 which was later to become the People's National Congress.

The 1957 PPP Government was headed by Dr. Jagan with the portfolio of Minister of Trade and Industry. A period of success led to an impressive electoral victory in 1961 even though conservative forces attempted to ensure defeat by altering constituency boundaries to create a situation



A consistent campaigner for Amerindian Rights, Dr Jagan is seen meeting with Amerindians during a tour of the interior in 1968.

Progressive Party. Dr Jagan was leader the late Forbes Burnham was Chairman and Janet Jagan, the General Secretary. When the PPP won the 1953 elections, Dr. Jagan became Chief Minister and Minister of Agriculture. The Government lasted only 133 days as the British Government, spurred on by powerful conservatives in a hysterical period of the Cold War, suspended the Constitution and removed the Ministers from Office.

favourable to other political parties. Dr. Jagan headed the third successively elected government, as Premier and Minister of Development and Planning until 1964 when the Coalition was put into office.

The Coalition lasted for four years but Guyana was set on a course of dictatorial rule that lasted twenty-eight years during which time Guyana experienced shamelessly rigged elections after the British granted Independence to Guiana in

1966.

Throughout this difficult and dangerous period Dr. Jagan held to his belief in honest government and democracy. In opposition, the PPP waged a relentless battle on all fronts to defend both the living standards and the human rights of the people. Its leaders survived intense repression, and Dr. Jagan himself was occasionally the victim of political persecution aimed at silencing him. Though the country is plagued by ethnic divisions, Dr. Jagan succeeded in creating the broadest possible unity among political, labour and religious leaders for a return to free and fair elections in Guyana.

He and his party led the struggle to restore democracy, and the fortress of fraudulent elections was torpedoed when Dr. Jagan secured the presence of the Carter Center and the Commonwealth Secretariat to observe the October 1992 polls.

For those elections Dr. Jagan led an alliance ticket named PPP/Civic which was a multi-class, multi-ideology and multi-racial partnership. On October 5, 1992, Dr. Jagan's PPP/Civic secured an outright electoral victory and the alliance took office.

Cheddi Jagan thus became the first freely elected President of the Republic of Guyana.

President Jagan formed what was described as a "lean" 15-member Cabinet in this English-speaking South American mainland state of some 800,000 inhabitants. The Cabinet later grew to twenty ministers whose style of governance is characterised by a zero tolerance for corruption and squandermania.

Dr. Jagan implemented collective leadership. Under his guidance the principles of rotation and consensus were practised at both the Cabinet sessions and his Party's leadership Committees.

Under the theme *Time for Change, Time to Rebuild* his administration boldly confronted the challenge of reconstruction, and has made startling successes. During the first four years of this new administration, the economy grew by an average seven percent, and inflation was controlled at below five per cent.

President Jagan has brought Guyana out of the abyss and along the road to progress. He won new recognition and respect for Guyana which has rejoined the world community of democratic nations. His stature attracted boundless goodwill and support.

With prudent policies his government brought upliftment for the people. The landless were given land; the homeless were encouraged to own their own houses. The number of jobless was reduced.

Greater attention has been paid to improving essential utilities and social services - education, health, water,

electricity and transportation. Major infrastructural rehabilitation projects have been undertaken in areas of drainage and irrigation; roads and sea defences; airstrips, airports and stelling; and in community development.

President Jagan has made a life-long advocacy for racial and national unity. He has worked tirelessly for what he visioned as a "new beginning" of ethnic security and the well-being of all Guyanese, especially the working people.

Dr. Jagan held the Amerindian people nearest to his heart, and his last article written on the day he took ill, was filled with concern and hope for them.

Cheddi Jagan was an extraordinary embodiment of an elder rebel and a legendary statesman. But he was also a model of family life having celebrated on August 5 last the fiftieth Anniversary of his marriage with Janet, the Nation's First Lady.

President Jagan would have been 79 on March 22. His was indeed a long, productive and fruitful life. He has restored faith in leadership, confidence in government, and meaning to Guyana's national life. Cheddi Jagan has rekindled Guyana's passion for success. That was why Guyana's leader and Commander-in-Chief in a note to his wife Janet, confidently seemed to be assuring the Guyanese people from his bed at the Walter Reed Hospital, "Don't worry. Everything will be alright!"

So often, tragedy is but a wasting shadow cast by a deep and despairing sense of loss. Ours, understandably, must be a sense of loss, deep loss, but not of despair. Cheddi Jagan would not have it so.

The voice that gunned his messages and challenges in staccato rapid rifle-fire is silent now, but not the messages of hope that burn in our souls, and not the challenges to struggle and sacrifice for freedom, democracy and justice; for national unity and lasting peace; for development especially for the downtrodden; for a new global human order; and not his towering example in the cause of these things.

Cheddi Jagan has shown us the Promised Land. His journey was long, difficult but fruitful. He has shown us the way. We dare not retreat; we dare not squander his sacrifice.

Let the memory of Cheddi Jagan, our President and Leader, ignite us to action, and our love for him constrain us, to make possible through our efforts, that for which he lived and died.

Guyana salutes our greatest hero, and assures him not to worry. Because of him, "Everything will be alright".

The foregoing biographical sketch of Dr. Cheddi Jagan, by no means comprehensive, was compiled by the Minister of Information on March 6, 1997 with the kind assistance of First Lady Ms. Janet Jagan and Minister of Education Dr. Dale Bisnauth.