

## ODE TO A DEPARTED LEADER

by Rudy A. S. Gafur

If our late leader could send us a message, he would tell us, "Shed no tears for me. I did not come too early in our country's struggle for freedom. I was right on time."

I remember Cheddi: As a boy seeing a picture of him standing in a police station, staring defiantly at the policemen who seemed to be giants to me. They had arrested him, I believe, for trespassing in his own constituency, which he won in the general elections. The police were merely carrying out the wishes of their colonial masters, and Cheddi later wrote about that. How ironic that Guyanese were used as instruments of their colonial overlords, to harass their fellow Guyanese.

I remember Cheddi: Organising on the waterfront, and ~~at~~ the sugar plantations, championing the rights of workers and farmers - his people - bucking "king sugar," a beacon illuminating the path for his downtrodden people - all six races of us.

I remember Cheddi: For the little things like cottage hospitals, so that we wouldn't have to travel to Suddie, Skeldon, New Amsterdam or Georgetown, but could go instead to Leguan, Vergenoegen or Unity, or to the many such hospitals that he built.

I remember Cheddi: For initiating free high school education for our children; for the Makouria, the Malali and the Torani, improving transportation at cheaper cost.

I remember Cheddi: At Congress time at Freedom House, listening with one ear, while reading a book, trying to improve upon his considerable knowledge.

I remember Cheddi: Confronting some of his countrymen - the lackeys of our colonial masters - and exposing their perfidy. Most of them are dead now but they better look out. I say, "Look out P. A. Cummings, and ~~John~~<sup>John</sup> Debidin, and C. V. Wight, and J. I. Ramphal, and Theo Lee, and John Fernandes. Cheddi is coming up there to make life uncomfortable for you just as he did down here."

I remember Cheddi: At Ryerson University or at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, talking about Guyana and world politics, and my Canadian-born

friends saying, "Man, we have never heard such an incisive expose of colonialism and world politics, especially of the Caribbean and Latin America," adding, "One hour of his lecture is more instructive than a whole semester of lectures by a professor in university."

I remember Cheddi: Giving us our dignity, where skin pigmentation was not a criterion for getting a job, or for going to school; where we could all be proud of our heritage.

I remember Cheddi: As a caring and compassionate human being, an indefatigable leader, an internationally respected and admired politician who devoted over half a century of his life to championing the cause of his country and his people.

I remember Cheddi: As a politician of unquestioned integrity and honesty, qualities which in today's world would constitute a breath of fresh air. He epitomized the finest qualities in a human being, an exemplar whose life we should all try to emulate.

I remember Cheddi: My hero, my leader, my inspiration, the soul and conscience of our homeland, a Guyanese patriot nonpareil.

This is the Cheddi Jagan I will remember. I hope that this the Cheddi Jagan you will remember too.

This tribute to Dr. Jagan was written and delivered on Thursday evening, March 6, 1997, at the Civic Centre, Scarborough, Ontario, Canada. I was one of several hundred participants in a "Wake" for our leader who died in the early hours of the day. I was inspired as I sat listening to others sharing their views of late President. The tribute was composed in less than thirty minutes.

Rudy A. S. Gafur