

The End Of An Era

There were several paradoxes in Cheddi Jagan's political career. Thrown out of power in the sixties due to the machinations of the Kennedy government, concerned about Cuba and the spread of communism in this hemisphere, he returned to office in 1992 in a fair election brought about partly by pressure from a post cold war America. The world had changed radically and Dr Jagan with it. The Soviet Union had collapsed and what was left of the socialist world was in disarray. China was encouraging private investment though it maintained a rigidly authoritarian government structure.

The old divisions of left and right were hardly relevant any longer. A large section of the developing world was locked into IMF programmes which imposed orthodox financial discipline and a free enterprise regime. President Jagan himself inherited such a programme and retained it with minimal adjustments. There were really few alternatives.

It was, in many ways, a long remove from the certainties and simplicities of the young marxist who returned from Chicago in the forties full of reforming zeal and a vision of a brave new world. The real world was to prove far more complicated than he could have foreseen. The first government he formed was put out of power after 133 days. Then the party split and the racial issue increasingly clouded the simple vision of class struggle. America in the early sixties proved unwilling to enter into a concordat of any kind despite his best efforts and conspired in his overthrow. He ended up in the wilderness for 28 long years, with few friends, while his former colleague and later bitter political rival ruled the roost and carried out many of the measures he had himself espoused.

Along the way many mistakes were made, there was much naivete, and considerable ineptitude. But at the end of the day, and in the final analysis, there was much more than this. In the longer perspective he played a crucial role in the struggle for colonial freedom and, whether his vision was flawed or not, he was at all times, without compromise, a man of the people, completely free of the taint of corruption, dedicating his life to the cause. He will be remembered by us all as a honest, decent man, lacking in pretentiousness and malice, available always to the simplest and humblest, happy in his dedication. It was a noble life and will leave us all with the fondest memories of him.

The party he left behind faces a testing time. Losing the charismatic, father figure after all these years leaves them temporarily without a rudder. The constitutional succession, as expected, has been smooth. The succession in the party remains to be determined. It is clear that the views of his lifelong companion and political colleague, Janet Jagan, will play a major role in determining his successor as party leader. Whether she herself will accept the heavy burden of leadership and the dominant role in the coming election campaign remains to be seen. The entire nation will wish her strength and good health.

At this time of deep national grief and mourning this newspaper extends its sympathy to the First Lady and her family and to the members of the central committee of the party he founded. It is a time for us all to reflect on the merits of this dedicated leader who at all times put the good of his country above all else and to learn from his example. We will all miss him.