

Tribute to Uncle Cheddi

By Dr. Clive Jagan March 2023

My Brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers; comrades all. It is with humility and awe that I stand before you this morning as we reflect and rejoice and pay homage to the life of Cheddi Jagan. While I am his nephew, I know that he saw and felt that every Guyanese of any color, of any social status was his relative- was his mother, was his father, was his brother, was his sister, was his son, was his daughter. And he knew and committed his life to protect, to defend, to struggle for and to uplift every single one of us.

Uncle Cheddi grew up in these neighborhoods in the full flush of the colonial enterprise and saw and experienced firsthand the horrible, degrading, soul-sapping continuous exploitation of one group of human beings by another. As a child he lived and experienced a world built on an assumption of the superiority of one group over the other that was based on skin color. He talked often of the “distances”- both social and physical- between the white and the non-white worlds and he found it demoralizing and unbearable. He struggled all his life to crush these distances and for all human beings to be recognized as equal and to be judged not by the color of their skin. Racism for him was abhorrent. Thanks to Uncle Cheddi’s efforts and the efforts of a large number of others, we have closed the distances separating one group from another but there is still more to be done. It is a matter of dismay that we still have appeals to color in our society and to race baiting.

Exploitation- the oppression and the unfair taking from of the working class- was for him a wrong, a heinous crime that he dedicated his life to undoing. He spoke of his childhood fascination with the ruling class and his desire to know what they did and how they lived behind the high fences in their high buildings. He spoke of Christmas time when children were allowed to enter the compound of the massa’s house and massa’s wife standing in her high verandah and throwing pennies down and her clapping and glee at watching them, the children scrambling for the crumbs. He raged against the transnational corporations sucking the wealth out of the underdeveloped countries in South America.

Uncle Cheddi was a man of infinite patience and he lived a life true to his deeply held values. Values of honesty, integrity and peace. He was never seduced by glitz and glamor. He lived a simple life in a simple house. Visiting with him, one was offered a mango, a star-apple, a sapodilla, a glass of water. Whatever fault others might have found in him, he was never faulted for his probity and integrity.

He never wavered from his dedication to the struggle for freedom and the upliftment of all. And in this struggle, he remained committed and true to peaceful and democratic methods. He never fell prey to expediency and sell out. Even though election after election was stolen from the PPP, he never wavered from parliamentary, democratic people supported struggle. Here I take this opportunity to call on my brothers and sisters on the other side of the political divide not to fall prey to appeals to violence and turning guns on those politically opposed to you.

Guyana has come far thanks in no small measure to Cheddi Jagan and the Peoples Progressive Party. Here I would like to take this opportunity to commend President Irfan Ali, Vice President and General Secretary of the PPP Dr. Bharat Jagdeo and all the members of the Party for carrying the torch and advancing the country informed by the vision of Cheddi Jagan for freedom, unity and equality.