

# JAGAN THE PHOENIX

By Festus Brotherson Jnr.

The man of the moment in the unstable politics of Guyana is the leader of the opposition Dr. Cheddi Jagan. He remains the most visible and well-known opposition figure and, to the consternation of his rivals and detractors, has been demonstrating impressive solid bases of mass support in various parts of the country as the People's Progressive Party (PPP) hones its organizational skills. It is quite conceivable that Dr. Jagan could be the next President of Guyana once the general elections are fairly conducted.

This is quite a remarkable turn-around for one who many had written off as confined to the political wilderness to reflect the past glories and speculate on how things could have been. Dr. Jagan was Premier of then British Guiana for 135 memorable days in 1953 before his radical marxist views prompted his ouster by the United Kingdom government which then had responsibility for the colonial administration. His PPP rose to office again in 1957 and he held power until 1964 when he was forced out of office by British and American collusion which had led to the abolition of the first-past-the-post system of elections in favour of proportional representation. In the numbers game of radical politics in those years, this meant that Dr. Jagan would be effectively kept out of office for the past 26 years, aided by the PNC's highly developed skills at rigging.

Much has happened since 1964, and especially in the last few years, to facilitate Dr. Jagan's resurgence. First is the decline of communism as an important factor in politics both locally and abroad. This means that the former Premier is less likely to be opposed by the Americans and be less able to form and sustain foreign communist alliances of any important consequences were he to become president. Besides, like all other individuals and parties, on the left in Guyana, he has reshaped his views to reflect more pragmatism.

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.

One immediate benefit of a Jagan presidency would be the return of Guyana of a badly needed work ethic. Put differently, the PPP leader appears to be the one political figure who has the capacity to reinstill in the workforce a sense of pride and efficacy — important requisites in any attempt to boost the yearly slumping levels of production. This is especially the case in the sugar industry where the opposition leader's mass support has remained constant and impressive for the past 24 years through his leadership of the country's largest trade union, the Guyana Agricultural and General Workers



CHEDDI JAGAN  
*Guyana's Next President*

Union (GAWU). And sugar has remained a major revenue earner for the nation.

Many political leaders who oppose Dr. Jagan do so on unpersuasive grounds. Their politics of disfavour have strengthened rather than weakened the PPP's leader's chances of electoral victory. One frequent charge is that the PPP leader has been around for too long and it is time for Guyanese to be allowed to choose from among newer and younger aspirants to high office. (Dr. Jagan is now in his 70s). A principal spokesman for this school of thought is Mr. Eusi Kwayana of the Working People's Alliance (WPA). He, unprompted, took himself

out of the running for top office and has urged other older politicians to do the same.

In the Patriotic Coalition for Democracy (PCD), the umbrella group which loosely unites opposition parties, talks were stalemated for months on the question of choosing a consensus candidate for the presidency. These meetings have now been abandoned but during their sessions, all sorts of alliances, proposals, and counter-proposals were examined, principally by the WPA, the Democratic Labour Movement (DLM), and the PPP. The Reform Movement, Guyanese Action For Reform and Democracy (GUARD), proposed Mr. Ashton Chase, a respected lawyer, veteran trade unionist, and former political activist.

But Mr. Chase has himself been around a very long time yet, oddly, the WPA supported his candidacy. The PPP vetoed it. The only party which seemed to understand the reality of Dr. Jagan's power was the DLM, which has consistently stated it would support the PPP leader's candidacy.

The PNC, meanwhile, has been trying to promote all sorts of fears about the PPP and the ruling party leadership has said that the forthcoming general elections will be a straight fight between itself and the PPP. Dr. Jagan's witty and accurate response is that the elections "will be a battle between the minority PNC and the rest of Guyana."

The PPP leader has also given timely assurances on racial politics on which the PNC was equally guilty as the PPP during the 1960s, and which then resulted in blacks and East Indians slaying and maiming one another in a senseless spree of political violence. Dr. Jagan has promised: "We want to tell the people that in any government in which the PPP or Jagan is part, there would be no racial or political discrimination whatsoever." These are reassuring words.

*"Dr. Festus Brotherson Jnr. was political aide of the late President Forbes Burnham and former Editor of the New Nation, official organ of the ruling People's National Congress (PNC). In the November 1988 edition of the Caribbean Contact Dr. Brotherson made this startling revelation: "The responsibility for rigging has always been that of a specialised secret group. Some members have revealed themselves to me and claimed that the actual results of the 1985 poll had not Hoyte but Cheddi Jagan winning..."*