

The Umana Yana Serving Guyana's Wide Diversity of Interests

by Janet Jagan

I attended three events recently at the Umana Yana, all representing different aspects of Guyanese life, all three of importance, and all using the same venue. I didn't wonder at that, because the Umana Yana is a unique and utterly splendid structure. It's probably the only one of its kind in the world. I wonder if we really appreciate its value. Actually, one of the speakers at one of the three events I attended, remarked on the wondrous quality of the Umana Yana, constructed by the Wai Wai tribe.

The first function I refer to was on Tuesday, May 27th, the 55th anniversary of the Women's Progressive Organization (WPO) and was filled to capacity, with extra chairs being transported in twice. While the attendance was mostly women, there were enough men present to say that a reasonable number turned out, and that was good. The speakers, two of them male ministers of the PPP/C spoke convincingly

and the women also. It was a good meeting.

But let me add here something else on women and their rights which was the theme of the WPO meeting. I copy it from a speech Gail Teixeira made at the

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representation to unions of strength and membership. These unions refused to support the TUC's negative line.

NAACIE'S theme for its Congress was "Protecting workers' rights and future within a hostile glo-

Ms Teixeira said this, and men should take note: "It would be remiss of me not to mention Cheddi's attitude to women in the party and in the broader society. He was the one man I have known who never tried to dissuade any woman from venturing into areas that were seen as male domains. In fact, he tried to get women in the party to be more visible and active at the leadership level... I never heard him make a sexist or disrespectful comment about women or to a woman."

Cheddi Jagan Research Centre in 2003 and is printed in a new publication by the Centre - "The Journal." Ms Teixeira said this, and men should take note: "It would be remiss of me not to mention Cheddi's attitude to women in the party and in the broader society. He was the one man I have known who never tried to dissuade any woman from venturing

or to a woman."

The second function held that week at the Umana Yana was the 50th Delegates' Conference of the National Association of Agricultural, Commercial and Industrial Employees (NAACIE), one of the strong unions of the FITUG group that broke away from the TUC because it refused to give recognition and rep-

resentation to unions of strength and membership. Speakers at the opening included the Union's General Secretary Kenneth Joseph, its President D. Nagasar, Guyana Labour Union President Carvil Duncan, GAWU General Secretary, the guest speaker, Minister of Agriculture, Robert Persaud and Prime Minister Sam Hinds.

Kenneth Joseph, in his inspiring address, made



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it clear that NAACIE had no political affiliation and had invited all political parties and trade unions to its Congress. NAACIE had represented its members, mainly clerical workers in the sugar industry and workers in the production of electricity, for some 60 years.

It was an important meeting of one of Guyana's oldest and sturdiest unions, but was given the usual scant attention by the media, which unfortunately does not see the importance of such unions to the life of this country. Its membership, however, coming from various parts of Guyana were there and keenly concerned with the work of their union and the representation it makes to improve their lives.

It is a union with a long and honourable history.

The third function that drew my interest and support was the launch of the Guyana Arts and Craft Producers Association and its exhibition held on May 31st. The Umana Yana was jam-packed with exhibitions of many forms of Guyanese original crafts including leather, wood, straw, ceramics, sculpture, tie dye clothing, fabulous vases, wooden bowls, gorgeous crafted shoes, jewellery from every imaginable local product, and a wide array of imaginative and innovative handmade items.

After many years in gestation, the artists have now come together in an association that will further the creation and sales of their works, and, will be ready for their presentation to CARIFESTA. We wish them greater success as they stabilize the arts and crafts market.

The Umana Yana was the perfect venue for this excellent exhibition which demonstrated the skills of our artists, as well as the diversities of the ethnic contributions to this area of the nation's culture.