

The General Secretary

by JANET JAGAN

What is the role of the General Secretary in the People's Progressive Party? None of the party's official documents, including the Party Constitution, give a clue to his wide range of responsibilities, except to state that he is elected by the Central Committee and is also a member of the Executive Committee and Secretariat. These three references in no way indicate the scope of his activities and responsibilities.

However, at all levels, international, regional and national, it is an accepted fact that the General Secretary of a party is the official spokesman of that organisation.

He is *ipso facto* the leader of the party and gives guidance and direction on most matters. To do this, he must be involved at all levels and be *au fait* with all that goes on in his party, in his country and be up to date on world trends and developments.

To begin with the General Secretary, like all members, must be a member of a Party Group. And in the case of our General Secretary, this is a reality. He is an active member of the Group from which he derives his membership in the Party and is always the very first to see that his membership card is in order. By tradition, the GS is the first to pay up his dues each year.

The General Secretary's formal duties include chairmanship of the Central and Executive Committees and the weekly Secretariat. This responsibility not only means the actual chairmanship of these meetings, but a consistent and important input in proposing and formulating policies and analysing local, national and international developments. Normally, the General Secretary provides an evaluation of new developments at each meeting of the Central and Executive Committees. (The Central Committee meets quarterly and the Executive, generally, monthly).

At the triennial congress, the General Secretary presents the Report of the Central Committee, a document that has been approved by the Central and Executive Committees, and is, to a great extent, prepared by the General Secretary and his colleagues in the Secretariat.

These, then, are largely his responsibilities within the orbit of the Party Constitution. However, that is only a small part of the ultimate responsibilities of the General Secretary. It is his duty, in the main, to see that the Party functions and fulfils its responsibilities to the working class and the people of Guyana. It is his responsibility to see that the PPP maintains its position as the vanguard of the working class and to ensure that the principles of democratic centralism are adhered to in the Party. The latter is very important, for in some parties, the General Secretary may overlook the necessity of consultation on all major issues with the vital decision making bodies, the Central and Executive Committees.

Above all, he must be close to the people, to the grassroots. If not he could end up removed from the thoughts and aspirations of the working people and become an "elitist" or "ivory tower" leader. Our General Secretary, as is publicly known, fulfils all requirements in this direction. He meets with Guyanese at all levels — at the work place, in the villages, in the city backyards, in the sugar estates, at public meetings across the country. He also meets with religious leaders, with businessmen, professionals, students, teachers, women and artists. Our General Secretary has an enormous capacity for this aspect of his work and has put his younger colleagues to shame in the amount of energy expended, illustrating his physical and mental resources, which are apparently undiminished by time.

The General Secretary is also expected to give leadership to the youth and women's arms of the Party, always addressing their Congresses and now and then giving guidance at Central Committee meetings of the WPO and YO. Frequently, too, he meets in caucus with the leaders of these bodies, giving his ideas and sharing his experience.

Because of historical factors, the General Secretary who throughout his career has been associated with the struggle of the sugar workers, has continuously given leadership to the union of sugar workers. He has been for many years the Honorary President of GAWU, not merely an honorary post, but an actual one. His influence on behalf of GAWU in the Trades Union Movement is well known, as is too, his annual national address to Guyanese workers on May Day, on the TUC platform.

In our particular circumstances, the General Secretary has, for 40 years, been the parliamentary leader in the gov-

ernment and in the opposition. He served as the nation's first Premier. In parliament, from his first entry in 1947. (three years before the formation of the PPP, but during the time of the Political Affairs Committee) he has given evidence of his sterling qualities, in fighting for the welfare of the people, in exposing the exploitation of the capitalist class and in furthering the cause of socialism.

Above all things, he has demonstrated, particularly in the independence struggle, his patriotism and quality to lead. all important features in the make-up of a General Secretary.

There are still many other facets of the multi-responsibilities of the General Secretary, not the least being his ideological leadership and his use of theory in practice. This comes out in his analyses to the various bodies of the Party, in his writings and in his teachings. The latter involves his lectures at every Accabre College session and at numerous seminars and other platforms. Any General Secretary worth his salt is expected to write on many subjects and our General Secretary is a leading figure as a writer. He is the author of four major books and countless booklets and articles printed locally and overseas.

A General Secretary must not only give political leadership, he must give moral leadership. He sets the tone for honesty, principled behaviour, comradeship, respect for women's equality and also on such issues as drinking and smoking. It is common knowledge that the moral leadership given to the nation when he was Premier was something highly valued, particularly as compared to what followed, and the downward changes that have taken place since 1964.

A General Secretary also has the duty to be visible, in his own country, and overseas and to put his party, so to speak, on the map. In the Caribbean, the PPP General Secretary has done yeoman service in strengthening the left movement, in furthering the concept of scientific socialism and in rallying to the many causes that need support. He has been criticised for going abroad frequently, but this too, is an integral part of a General Secretary's responsibilities.

Last but not least, the General Secretary, in this troubled world in which we live, must give attention to the profound question of disarmament and peace. As such, our General Secretary also holds the position of President of the Guyana Peace Council and serves on the Presidential Committee of the World Peace Council.