

The Birth of the PPP 50 years ago

by Janet Jagan

January 1, 1950 was the birth of the People's Progressive Party. Thus, on January 1, 2000, the PPP celebrates its 50th anniversary.

This was the day of the transfer from the Political Affairs Committee, (PAC) born in 1946 with the aim of forming a political party, to the PPP. The PAC Bulletin, published monthly from 1946 then became Thunder, official organ of the new party.

During 1949, talks began within the PAC and friends/members of the PAC to achieve its goal of forming a political party whose objectives would be the attainment of independence for the Colony of British Guiana and establishment of socialist ideals as the path of liberation from imperialism and colonial rule.

There gathered, during the months of 1949, a number of persons who formulated the policy, structure and forms for the new party. These included Cheddi Jagan, Janet Jagan, Sydney King (now Eusi Kwayana), Ram Karran, Martin Carter, Ashton Chase, Rudy Luck, Ivo Cendrecourt, F. O. Van Sertima, Fred Bowman, Pandit S. Misir, and later, Forbes Burnham.

Dr. Cheddi Jagan, speaking on the Party's 25th anniversary stated the principles and aims of the PPP - "The PPP was born in struggle and rooted in the working class. The bullets which snuffed out the lives of the Enmore Martyrs acted as a catalyst agent. And the betrayal of the workers by the opportunists and band wagoners of the Labour Party set the seal for the birth of the PPP in 1950.. We fought for freedom, democracy, human rights and socialism. We strove untiringly of national independence. At the very beginning we declared that our people would never be able to exercise their humanity unless our country was free from colonial rule and foreign domination.. But ours was not just a struggle in abstraction. We combined the long term with the immediate. If we were to realise our goals of independence and socialism, we must have democracy," he declared.

He also said, 25 years ago, and so true today – "It is time to say that in Guyana today there is no important facet of life which the PPP did not pioneer : education, health, banking, etc."

When the PPP was being organised and formulated in 1949, the Party's name was chosen, the name of the official organ of the Party, Thunder, was selected from a famous poem by the English poet William Morris – "Hark, the rolling of the Thunder." The colour of the Party flag were agreed upon - black, red and gold – black for the difficult period of hardships and pain; red for struggle against tyranny and injustice and gold for the new day following the struggles. The Party's song, written by Sydney King was chosen and the Party's symbol, two hands breaking the chains of colonialism and imperialism was agreed to.

After Mr. Burnham's return to Guiana from studies in England, he joined the group formulating a new party in the latter part of 1949. Due to the existing ethnic division and tension, it was agreed that the Party would have two leaders, from each of the two major ethnic groups. Thus it was that Forbes Burnham was chosen to be the Chairman of the PPP and Cheddi Jagan the Leader. This decision was given the official stamp when the first Congress was held in 1951.

Shortly after the formation of the PPP on January 1, 1950 the Party printed its aims and programme in the April 1950 edition of the Thunder. In essence it stated:

"After scores of years of British rule and misrule, of trials and errors, of Constitutional experimentation British Guiana is in great peril. Our people continue to exist on the borderline of starvation. ...there has been no organised group speaking with the voice of Guianese of all races and classes championing the cause of the oppressed and exploited and presenting a constructive policy and programme as a hope to guide us out of our present abyss of poverty, despair and frustration...

The Party pledges itself to the task of winning a free and independent Guiana.

The statement also declared:

"The Party will strive for the unity of workers, farmers, progressive businessmen, professionals, civil servants and the cooperation of all social groups."

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