

# Getting into stride -1943-1949

Janet Jagan addressing workers at Bourda Green.



During the strike of 1948 the Jagans were very active in organizing relief for the strikers and speaking at meetings to keep up their morale.

About the Enmore strike Ashton Chase wrote: "Dr. and Mrs. Jagan addressed several meetings of strikers and inspired them to keep united in the struggle for their rights. At all the meetings the police took copious notes. Dr. and Mrs. Jagan also paid considerable attention to the day-to-day organization of the strike and to many details. They helped in raising funds for the strikers, in organizing soup kitchens and in the general propaganda work. The PAC agitational bulletins were widely circulated at the GIWU meetings."



Janet Jagan in a protest march holding a placard.

At the graveside of the slain Enmore sugar workers on June 17, 1948

"We are meeting today to pay tribute to our comrades who fell under colonial bullets in 1948. They made the supreme sacrifice so that Guyana and its people could live better lives than they were living. The Enmore Five made the supreme sacrifice and we must be prepared also to sacrifice because without struggle there can be no progress...What is genuinely forgotten is that the workers in 1948 were fighting for trade union recognition, because for many many years they wanted to bring in a trade union to represent them."  
Cheddi Jagan 1993



With his son Cheddi (Joey), who was born in October 1949.



Cheddi Jagan was President of the Sawmill and Forest Workers' Union from 1949-53. Here he is talking to some members. He wrote: "Before I became a politician in the strict sense of the word, I was a trade unionist."

"Mine was the role of 'politics of protest', with the weapons of exposure and struggle. If the legislature was my forum, the waterfront, the factories, plantations, mines and quarries were my battleground. I brought a new dimension to the politics of protest, a continuity between the legislature and the street corner: the legislature was brought to the streets and the streets to the legislature."  
Cheddi Jagan

"We, the people have won. Now the struggle will begin."  
Cheddi Jagan 1947



In 1947 Dr Cheddi Jagan ran for the Central Demerara seat as an independent labour candidate and won office.

At the age of 29 he was the youngest member of the Legislative Council and came to be recognized throughout the country as a virtual one-man opposition in the Legislature.

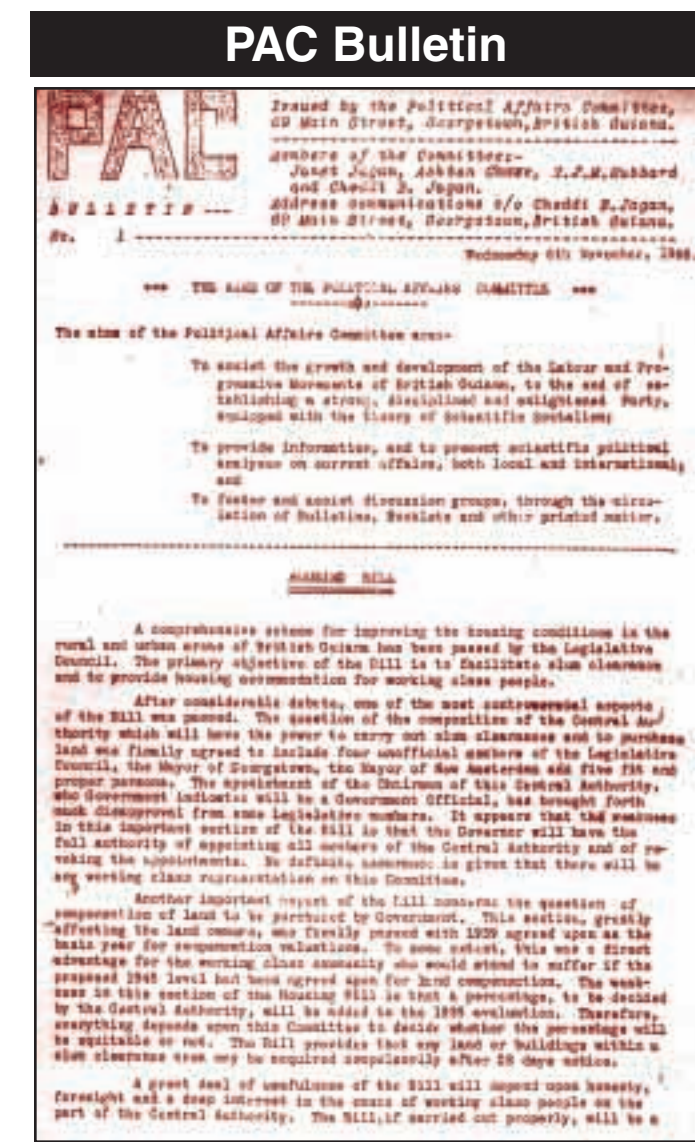
"It was forty-five years ago, on the 18th of December, 1947, when I had taken my seat for the first time in the Legislative Council. That was one of the most exciting, enjoyable and productive periods of my life. I read almost every available report, and put in a lot of energy and seriousness in my legislative work. And the battles were truly pitched: I had to face some of the most entrenched personalities, representing the plantocracy and vested interests. And my experience was that it needed more than mere logic and enthusiasm to convince the powers-that-be of the day. The only way I could succeed, I told myself, was to keep close to the people, who had voted for me to champion their cause. It paid off." Cheddi Jagan 1993

Cheddi Jagan addressing workers at Bourda Green, Georgetown after the shooting of sugar workers at Plantation Enmore in 1948 (both below).



In June 1948 five sugar workers were killed by the Police during a four and a half month strike against a field system that would result in loss of wages. The five dead workers became immortalized as the Enmore Martyrs.

"The Enmore tragedy affected me greatly. I was personally acquainted with all the young men killed and injured. The funeral procession, which was led by my wife, other leaders and myself to the city 16 miles away became a tremendous mass protest demonstration. At the graveside the emotional outbursts of the widows and relatives of the deceased had been intensely distressing, and I could with difficulty restrain my tears. There was to be no turning back. There and then I made a silent pledge - I would dedicate my entire life to the cause of the struggle of the Guyanese people against bondage and exploitation." Cheddi Jagan



The PAC began publishing a weekly bulletin for circulation in the country. The duplication was done on a small hand-operated duplicator which Dr. Jagan had purchased in the United States.

The PAC Bulletin became the bummer of the reactionaries, with the result that there was incessant clamor at home and abroad to ban it. This only encouraged them to expand it!

Mrs. Jagan's training as a journalist came into good use, and she became the Editor of the PAC Bulletin.

Janet Jagan speaking to workers.



In 1946, Janet Jagan along with Winifred Gaskin and Frances Stafford founded the Women's Political and Economic Organisation (WPEO), the first political women's organisation in British Guiana.

Janet became the General Secretary of the WPEO and mainly through her dedication and hard work, it made a great impact in the political life of the colony.



Photo of Cheddi and Janet taken in 1946. One writer describes them in this fashion: "They employed a 'grass-roots' technique never before used in B.G. They not only went to the villages and spoke to the people, but visited with them, ate and slept in their cabins and demonstrated convincingly their self-dedication to the poor estate labourers. They also set up dental clinics in various places and did all dental work for free."

Cheddi Jagan in 1946



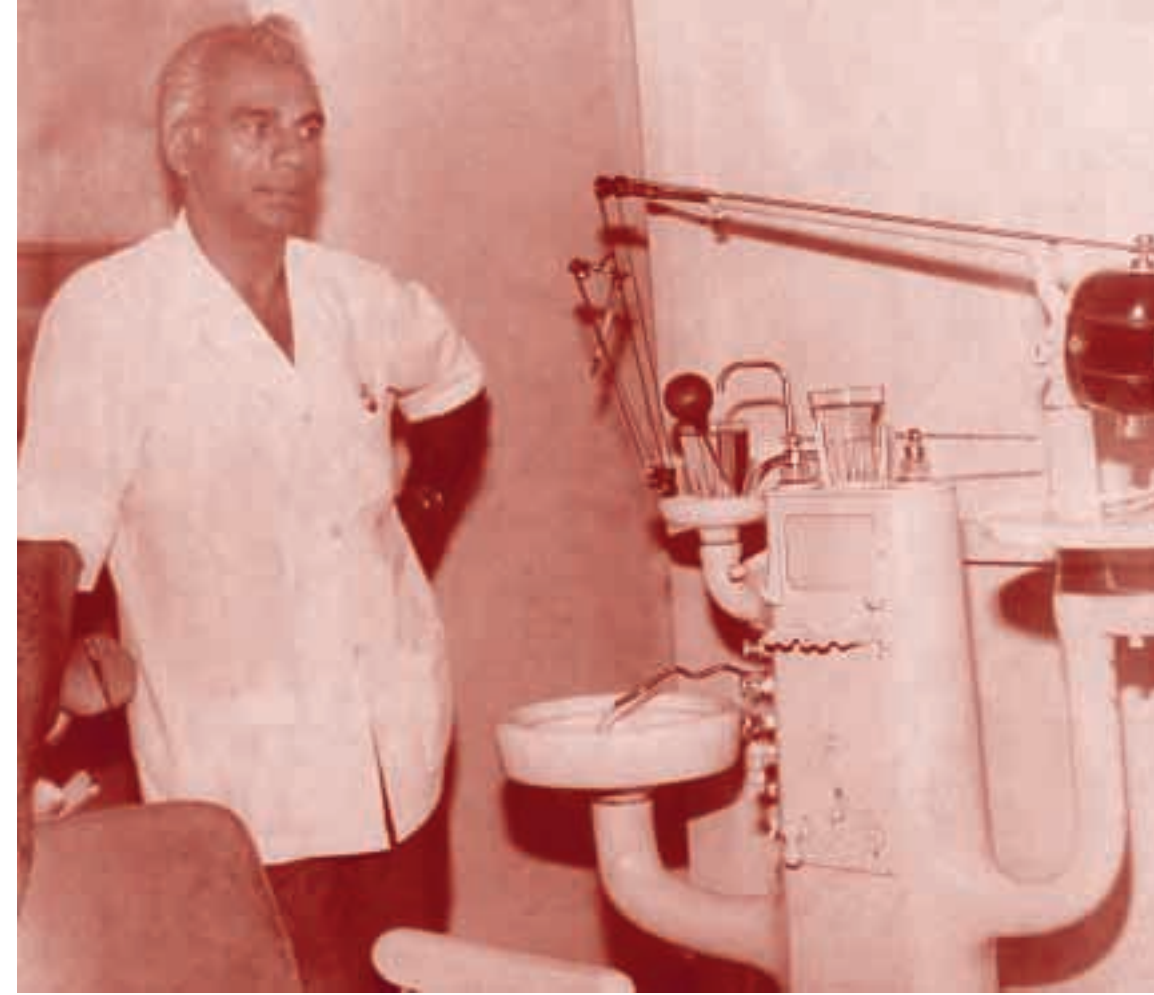
He had another responsibility, to his family, and from very beginning after his return from studies in the USA, he began the systematic education of his younger brothers and sisters, sending them abroad for studies in dentistry, law, medicine, optometry and nursing.

Dr. Jagan practiced dentistry full time from 1943-1957. After that he worked only part time, during the lunch hour, due to his full time political career

He was a very meticulous person and could not stand anything second rate or not of the highest standards. He demanded the best from those who worked with him and gave the best to his patients - whether poor or rich, and he had both. He never 'short-changed' anyone and was always totally honest. If he did something, whether it was in his profession as a dentist, or later as a political leader, he gave the best that he could.

The other dentists were annoyed at his low fees, but he felt he could not exploit his patients. Also, he refused to ruin good teeth by gold crowns, which then were in fashion. He was responsible for ending the gold crown craze that existed in those days and which destroyed good teeth.

Cheddi Jagan at his dental surgery in 1965.



After he returned to Guyana, the sugar workers in his home town began coming to him for advice on fighting various issues. They were proud that one of their own had attained such great heights as becoming a "Doctor".

"Fortunately, this never went to his head and he was little affected by the esteem in which he was held." Janet Jagan



Janet and Cheddi at home in 1957. They worked together at his dental surgery. Janet's 2½ years as a nursing student helped her to be a good dental assistant.

On November 6, 1946 Jocelyn Hubbard, Ashton Chase, Cheddi and Janet Jagan (pictured below) founded the Political Affairs Committee (PAC), which was the forerunner of the People's Progressive Party (PPP).

In its three years of existence, November 1946 to December 1949, it worked with the trade union movement, spreading new and progressive ideas, giving solidarity, both local and foreign (sugar and bauxite workers strikes and the Canadian Seaman's strike in Georgetown), teaching and holding classes in Marxism-Leninism, preaching and practicing internationalism, guiding working people into struggle and laying the foundations for a political party to lead the country to independence and to be equipped "with the theory of Scientific Socialism."



Founding members of the Political Affairs Committee (PAC).

# Seven years in the USA

September 1935 - October 1943



Cheddi Jagan with one of his Hawaiian-Japanese friends at Niagara Falls in 1939.



Photo taken in 1941 in Chicago.

Cheddi Jagan lived in Washington, D.C for two years and attended Howard University, taking a pre-dental course, two summers in New York City and spent the last five years in Chicago, Illinois at Northwestern University.

Cheddi was a dedicated student and his hard work earned him a free tuition scholarship for his second year at Howard and in 1938 entry into Northwestern University Dental School for a four year dental program.

His years in Washington DC opened his eyes to the condition of African Americans and the realities of legally enforced segregation in the south. Living in Chicago, and briefly in New York City, studying social sciences and the writings of socialist thinkers broadened his education. When he graduated from Northwestern University in 1942 with his degree in Dental Surgery (DDS), he also received his Bachelor of Sciences (B.Sc.) degree.

Because his parents could not afford to support him financially, Cheddi had to work while attending school. He had many jobs - tailoring (he had "picked" up at home from a friend) in a hock shop, salesperson selling patent medicines, dishwasher, delivering evening newspapers, presser in a laundry and an elevator operator.



Cheddi met Janet Rosenberg (pictured above and below, was born in Chicago on October 20, 1920) at a party for a mutual friend. It was love at first sight!

After 8 months of courting, they were married at a simple ceremony at Chicago City Hall, without the consent of either family. Cheddi had made Janet a simple gold wedding band in the dental lab where he worked. The photo above was taken on August 5, 1943, their wedding day, in a 25 cent photo booth that shot automatic photos. This was their only wedding photo!

In October 1943, Dr. Jagan returned home. His wife Janet, arrived in British Guiana just before Christmas of 1943.



Photo of Janet Jagan

"She influenced me with a deep and abiding faith and caring for the poor, the disadvantaged and the handicapped, the oppressed and the marginalized, and she has a very deep commitment to honesty in politics. As a result I do not worry about anything. I work together with her very closely, we debate soundly without anything to worry about or anything to hide. She has given me peace of mind." Cheddi Jagan



Cheddi Jagan age 18, at Howard University, Washington D.C. He earned his living while living there doing tailoring and other odd jobs.



Cheddi and his friend Orrin Dummett, studied dentistry together in the USA. This photo was taken in the 1970's. Orrin wrote about Cheddi: "He was always a hard worker, always focused and always ambitious. Always an outgoing, charming person, he was well liked and got along with everybody".



Cheddi at the age of 20.



Cheddi played cricket in New York and Chicago. This photo must have been taken during one of those games.



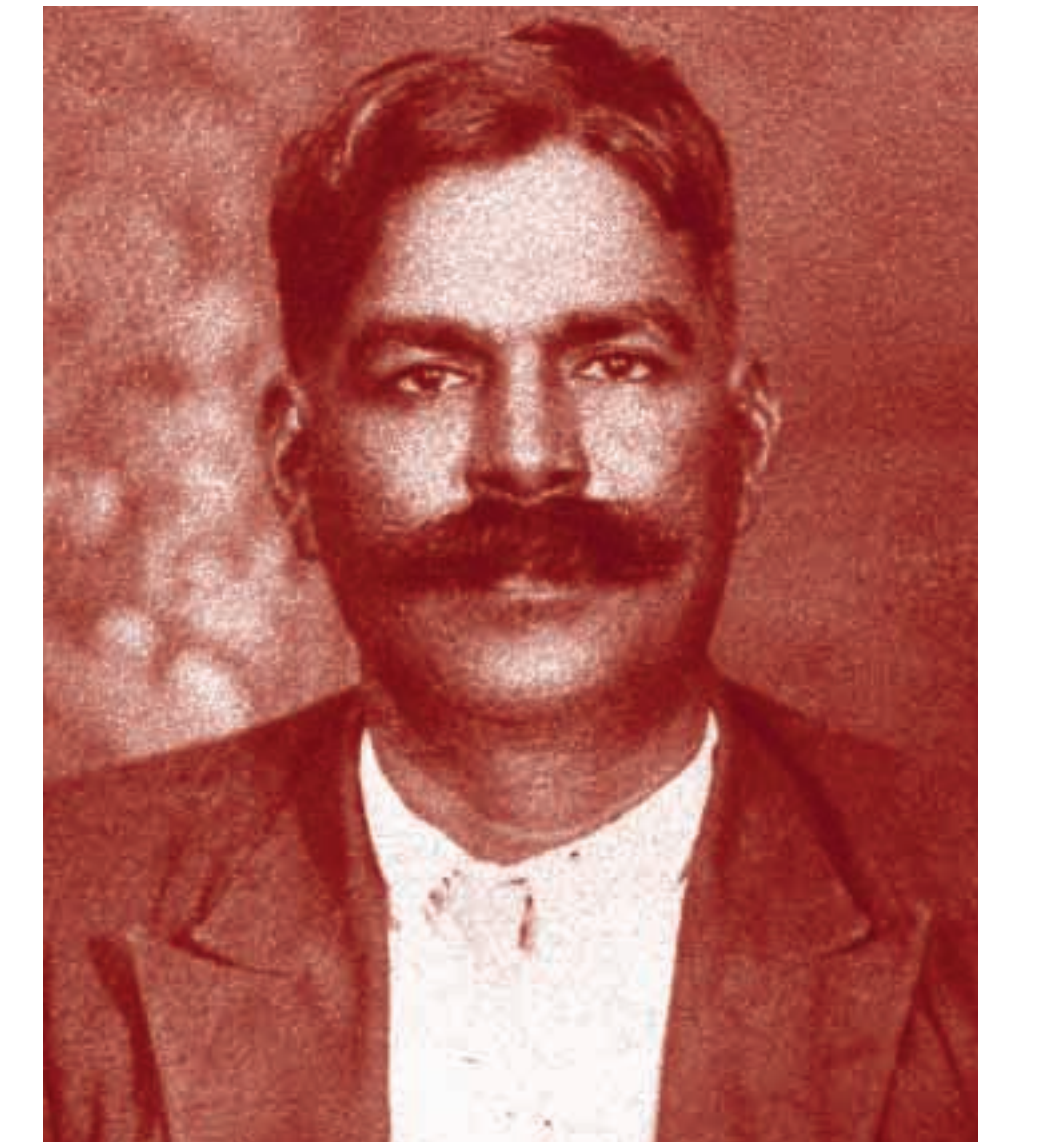
Cheddi with a friend taken while he was studying in Chicago.

# Growing Up

Cheddi Jagan was born March 22, 1918 on a sugar plantation in Port Mourant, Berbice, British Guiana, the son of indentured sugar workers. His parents, had arrived on the sailing vessel Elbe as young infants with their mothers from the district of Basti in Uttar Pradesh, India. Both his grandmothers came as indentured immigrants in 1901 and were "bound" by five year contracts to different sugar plantations in the county of Berbice. Life was very hard and both his parents had to start working in the canefields at a young age to supplement the family income.

His mother never went to school, but his father was a bit more fortunate, attending school for three years! He thus saw the need for formal education, and made sure that his son, Cheddi Jagan attended school.

Cheddi Jagan's father



"My father had a small pocket but a big heart. He was bold and flamboyant and had a county-wide reputation as a great sportsman, particularly at cricket, horse racing and betting. He was a tall, fair skinned, impressive looking man with a picturesque and the largest moustache in the county. Any leadership qualities I have, I acquired from my father." Cheddi Jagan

Dr. Jagan's mother



"My mother was a short, quiet, thrifty and deeply religious woman, who took care of budgeting our family's life. She endured long suffering with infinite patience. From my mother I learnt the elements of finance." Cheddi Jagan

Photo taken in 1993 of his birthplace in Ankerville, Port Mourant.



Cheddi attended primary school and two years of secondary school in his area. He often had to stay home from school to work in the rice fields and to cut and fetch cane. He also helped his mother keep a kitchen garden and to sell produce from it. His mother allowed him to keep a part of the proceeds for his share of the work.

At the age of fifteen his father decided to send him to Queen's College, a government secondary school in the capital city of Georgetown, about one hundred miles away. There he boarded with three families.

Trying to find a job after graduating high school, became almost impossible. The civil service was closed. To be a school teacher you had to become a Christian, something that his Hindu parents would have none of, and his father could not bear the thought of him working on the plantation.

Finally his father decided to send him to the United States to study dentistry at Howard University in Washington, D.C.