

## **Address by President Cheddi Jagan at the Site of The Enmore Martyrs Monument on the 45th Anniversary of the Death of The Enmore Martyrs - June 16, 1993**

June 1948 was Enmore and the brutal slaying of five sugar workers. Dr. Jagan led the funeral march of the workers from Enmore to La Repentir cemetery in Georgetown. This event had a deep effect on him and furthered his belief that he had a role to play in the liberation of the Guyanese people from tyranny, exploitation and colonial rule. In his book "**The West on Trial**", he expressed this more decisively when he wrote that he had made a silent pledge at the graveside of the five Enmore Martyrs that he would devote his life to freeing his people from exploitation.

Quotation by Cheddi Jagan taken from the **West on Trial**

*"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**

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. We must all be prepared to pay penalties and indeed to give up our lives.

The Enmore Martyrs followed a long tradition of working people fighting for social progress and human development. We honour Cuffy, because he and others fought against slavery. We honour others who fought against indentureship, a different form of slavery. We honour workers in Britain who not only fought for democracy, political democracy, but for trade union rights and against capitalist slavery. When they organised their first trade union they were sent off as prisoners to Australia. In fact they helped found Australia.

We had not too long ago celebrated May Day (in 1948) for the reduction of the working day to eight hours. The slogan: "8 hours work; 8 hours recreation and 8 hours rest" was raised but for this workers were gunned down and literally put to the gallows.

While we pay tribute to the Martyrs we must remember what were then the conditions against which they were fighting. A Royal Commission came here in 1945 to investigate conditions.

In those days workers lived in logies which were built in the slavery and indentureship periods. There were pit latrines, nothing like the ones we know now or septic tanks and other facilities. Pit latrines over the trench; and when the rains came the whole compound in several estates used to be totally flooded and people had to move around in boats. On one such occasions I remember going to the compound at Lusignan to the manager; his compound was dry. I asked him why can't he use the same pump that he was pumping to clear his compound to clear also the compound of the workers. His answer was: "Jagan, do you know you are trespassing?"

Although I was elected for that area in 1947 as a representative I did not have the right to visit the people who had voted for me. Such were the powers of the sugar planters at that time. So powerful they were, that the head of the sugar plantocracy, although he was defeated in the 1947 elections when I won, was nominated by the Governor to the Legislative Council. So, as we remember our Comrades it is good that we remember from where we started and to where we have come.

A lot of things have changed. Yes, but it could have been better. Unfortunately the unity that we created, which came about as a result of the sacrifice and the struggle of the workers, was destroyed in 1955 when the PPP was split. Had the PPP not been split in 1955 the tragedy and the suffering that we experienced today would not have been so. Yes, Independence came, but where are we today under that independence and under the people who were put in power? Nearly 80% of our people are below the poverty line. We are saddled with a huge debt burden. Money borrowed, money spent, money mis-spent, stolen. Now almost every penny collected from the ordinary people in taxes has to pay for the debt burden.

One individual who is now heading the human rights section of the Carter Centre came to see me not long ago and he said: "You know, I was reading your book **The West On Trial** and want to congratulate you because you were fighting for all aspects of human rights. Not just civil and political; you must have the right to vote and have the right to elect the government of your choice as stated in the United Nations Covenant on Civil and Political Rights". Then he went on to say we were also fighting for economic, social and cultural rights. Under the earlier PPP government we improved education, we improved medicine and health services. We had the best education system in the whole Caribbean. We introduced the University of Guyana; we introduced the Guyana School of Agriculture and other technical schools because we understand the linkage between social development and economic development. If the people are sick, if

they are hungry, if they are uneducated, then they cannot be good producers and this can affect economic growth.

If we do not have economic growth we cannot have social development. For us the two are inter-linked and we will continue to fight for them here. I want to make it quite clear to those who have spoken here from the Labour Movement, Cdes. Pollydore, Philadelphia and Komal Chand, that as long as I am in this Government, this Government will ensure that we will fight to preserve the democratic rights of the Guyanese people and all their Trade Union rights.

We didn't come in the government just to have glory, big names, to make big money and to live in high style. We came in the Government with the help of the working people and other democratic forces in this country to see that we have real development, to build a new democratic culture, to make a new ethic, not that one person must live at the expense of others, but an ethic based on humanity and high moral content.

Whatever we do, we are not only preachers of the ten commandments: We are here in Government to see that they are implemented. And I will work with the preachers, politicians and union leaders. I will work together with them as we worked over the last 10-15 years - because our country was sinking and sinking and sinking with the debt rate, lack of democracy, racial and political discrimination, extravagance and corruption. We want unity, but unity on the basis of principle.

First of all, at the political level after the 1985 elections, five parties got together and advanced on what existed before. Prior to that period the PPP was the only party bearing the brunt of the struggle. Unity developed at the political level and at the trade union level. First there was the four-union movement at the time when GAWU had to strike for 137 days for profit sharing which was denied them, even when sugar had the very best price. Workers were not given one penny in profit-sharing. The government collected a sugar levy of \$500 million. As they did until 1975, sugar workers fought for trade union recognition. We remember their sacrifices but as we remember that, we must remember that one of the things they were fighting against was the change of the method of work from cut-and-drop to cut-and-load which meant super exploitation of the workers.

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. The MPCA was bought out so the struggle of the workers was not only for better conditions but also for union recognition and collective bargaining. That was what the struggle was all about in 1940 and it culminated in the shooting of the workers at Enmore.

After the PPP's first electoral victory we tried to make a law patterned after the United States for union recognition. We tried to make it into law in 1953. It

passed the Lower House, but before it could pass the Upper House the British troops came in and out went the law when the Constitution was suspended in 1953. Again in government, in 1963, we tried to reintroduce it but we had an 80 day strike financed from outside against our Government.

We must remember these things. When the PNC came in with Burnham as the head of the Government, although he had led the struggle for that law in 1953 he did not bring in the law. Sugar workers only got recognition, or rather a poll to determine which union they should have, towards the end of 1975 because of a 13 week strike in the Sugar Industry. Workers struck for seven weeks in the sugar industry in the first crop and they didn't get it; and six weeks in the second crop then the Government was forced to hold a poll. That was how GAWU was recognised. This was how the four union movement developed. It developed to a six union movement following teargassing and harassment of bauxite workers. And the whole battle was joined not only for trade union rights but for democratic right to have a free and fair election.

The Bishops, the church people were also harassed because they too saw the degradation of the country. The two Bishops produced a manifesto calling for a restoration of democracy. That is why this year when national honours were given I included their names. These names were not recommended by the Honours Committee because some don't remember those things, but I do.

Let us understand we have come a far way through struggle, not only struggle of all the Guyanese people, all sections, business people, church people, workers, farmers, political leaders, and politicians. We also received solidarity and we must never forget this. International solidarity is a very important concept in the struggle for human progress.

I want to assure all Guyanese that this Government will respect all civil and political rights of the Guyanese people and all elections in the future will be free and fair. As regards to union rights I am glad to see that the two arms of the trade union movement are now united. I hope a time will come when at the political level too, we will have this.

I wish to make it quite clear that we want foreign investment in this country. Investors will be welcomed with open arms. If there is some delay it is because we don't want carpet baggers who want to come and plunder this country, our resources and our people and go away. We want to see that we have agreements in place. We will protect our national right and our people's right. Why should JP Knight in this day and age use delaying tactics in recognising the union of the workers' choice, CCWU! We think this is a deterrent to the hospitality which we have extended to foreign people here.

We don't want the old days to return to Guyana when British Guiana was called Booker's Guiana, when this country was so plundered, the people were left in

poverty. I remember Clive Thomas saying that before nationalisation Bookers McConnel & Company did not bring one penny in 30 years to this country. And in that period they not only built their empire abroad but increased/heir assets in this country. Let us hope those days will never return. Let us hope that we will have a new partnership. I am happy to see that today we have built good relations with the British, American and Canadian governments. I am very happy about that. I don't live in the past but we must never forget the past. The past must be a guide to us on how we move in the future. We must remember the past in seeing what was good and what was bad, to have no more of the bad. I hope that we will have more investment coming from outside. Although we felt so strongly against the sugar plantocracy in the past, we are not against Booker/Tate today.

We stand for justice, through partnership between Government and investors.  
We want justice for workers through unity between labour and capital.

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