

The Greatest Leader Of Guyana

By Albert Boodhoo

AS PRESIDENT OF THE GUYANA AGRICULTURE AND GENERAL Workers' Union, I had distinct honor and privilege of working closely with our late President, Dr. Cheddi Jagan for many years. I used to wonder why he decided to devote his entire life for people. I got the answers quickly. He experienced the terrible and abominable living and working conditions people had to bear in the sugar plantations, in the bauxite industry, in the rice industry, in the waterfront and in the sawmill industry. He experienced the crude discriminatory practices against colored people while he was a student in the United States of America. He was influenced by the liberation struggles that were taking place around the world at the time. He was prepared to make sacrifices of his time and service for Guyanese, in particular, and all people in general.

On his return to Guyana in 1943, he made his intention clear. He, his wife Janet, Mr. Ashton Chase and Mr. Joycelyn Hubbard formed the Political Affairs Committee, the forerunner of the People's Progressive Party which was founded on the first of January, 1950. He was very much involved in trade unions, but soon saw the need for a political party for the political and ideological struggles. He and his party raised the political and ideological consciousness of the people. He became very popular in a very short time because he was talking about a new way to solve the working peoples' problems. He was the voice of all oppressed people. He then organized the people to struggle for independence which was attained in May, 1966. His next move was to consolidate the gains made during his rule between 1957 and 1964 and to proceed with the building of a society in which every Guyanese would enjoy life to the fullest. But this plan was aborted unfortunately by the coming to power by unsatisfactory means of Mr. Forbes Burnham and the People's National Congress party which

remained in power by rigged elections until 1992, when Dr. Cheddi Jagan became President of Guyana by free and fair elections. Outstanding among his many accomplishments in the period 1957-1964 were housing and education.

There was a time in Guyana when only the privileged few were fortunate to receive a secondary and higher education. But Dr. Jagan and his Government began the process of free education at all levels and there was a surge of interest in pursuing secondary and higher education. Even girls and young women began to show interest in education.

In housing, Dr. Cheddi Jagan and his government brought down the "logies" in the "boundyard" and replaced them with comfortable houses in the extra nuclear housing schemes in all the sugar estates by the provision of loans and house lots. Today, these houses stand as testimony of Dr. Jagan's leadership.

Dr. Cheddi was well known as an internationalist. He supported national liberation struggles in every part of the globe. He was a member of the Presidential Committee of the World Peace Council and in his later days he came up with new ideas, such the New Human Global Order and The National Development Strategy, a model for national development for third world countries.

Dr. Jagan used every opportunity and forum, from the grass-root level to the United Nations, to analyze the social, economic and political injustices around the world and to give suggestions to correct these scourges of human society.

He was always hopeful and optimistic. He truly believed in unity as a means to peace, progress and prosperity and never stopped looking for ways and means to unite the working class and the major races – the Indo-Guyanese and the Afro-Guyanese.

Even though some people did not understand his ideological message, they understood clearly his honesty, sincerity, integrity, humility and his deep concern for the poor. They rallied by the thousands behind him in the struggle for independence and the creation of a just society. Undoubtedly, he emerged as the greatest leader of Guyana.

Under colonialism, we, the Guyanese lost our dignity. Under Dr. Cheddi Jagan, we regained it and today we can stand up against those who want to take away our rights and to defend our gains of social justice and democracy. ■