

## **‘He never really left the plantation’**

By [Ralph Ramkarran](#) December 5, 2021

Dr. Baytoram Ramharack is a leading protagonist of the view, held by a section of educated Indian Guyanese opinion, that Cheddi Jagan was a plantation idiot. This view is argued with singular clarity in much of Professor Clem Seecharan book, ‘Sweetening Bitter Sugar’ (2005), ostensibly about the life and times of Jock Campbell. While Professor Seecharan did not quote Lloyd Searwar, Dr. Ramharack boldly articulates Searwar’s view, adopted as the headline of this article. This characterization of Jagan is the origin and basis of the racist tropes levelled at him by political opponents for most of his life.

Searwar argues that because Jagan never left the plantation, he could not elevate himself to the level of a ‘statesman’ which was required to deal with a President Kennedy. And how was Jagan going to do this? By deceiving Kennedy as to his real views. Instead, Jagan expressed his opinions in the US with honesty, did not seek to deceive President Kennedy, but sought his support for moderate economic policies. No thought was apparently given on whether Jagan could deceive the most powerful politician in the world, with the best equipped intelligence service and information system at his command, which would have known everything about Jagan, the PAC, the PPP and 1953 and their advocacy of ‘scientific socialism.’ These critics never remarked on the fact that Cheddi Jagan was not, and never offered himself, for sale, unlike the ‘statesmen’ who ‘outmaneuvered’ him, adroitly deploying ‘Machiavellian’ tactics, while paying obsequious homage to their now exposed paymasters (Memorandum of the 303 Committee)

There will always be a struggle by some to ‘prove’ that Cheddi Jagan betrayed, not only Guyana, but also the Indians of Guyana, by his unwavering adherence to Marxism-Leninism. This view of Jagan’s role, in different forms, started even before 1947, in which year he won a seat in the Legislative Council. He had opted before then to join the Man Power Citizens’ Association, representing sugar workers, rather than the British Guiana East Indian Association, representing the interests of the Indian middle class. Accusations of the betrayal of Indians started since that time and persisted throughout his life.

Eusi Kwayana responded bitterly to Jagan’s 1956 paper to the PPP Congress, with scattered accusations of racism. Significantly, he made no comment, at least at that time, on Jagan’s proposal to reach out to the ‘progressive’ section of the Indians, which attracted controversy later as the cause of the ‘second split.’ One of the fiercest critics of Jagan for several decades on many grounds, including being a beneficiary of Indian racism, if not a purveyor thereof, Kwayana told him in a letter of June 6, 1990: “If I survive the victory over the dictatorship as I hope you will it will be my self-appointed duty to give the country a full description of the positive role you have played in the development of politics – an extension of my speech in the Assembly in 1987.” By 1990 both Martin Carter, a former editor of Bookers News and a PNC Minister of Information, and Eusi Kwayana, a former General Secretary of the PNC, leaders of the PPP up to 1953, had long become prominent opponents of the PNC dictatorship. Could it be that by that time, they were finally convinced that Jagan’s enduring commitment was to the elimination of poverty and injustice in the world, whatever vehicle he may have chosen?

The anti-Jagan narrative has other, oft-repeated, elements. Innocent remarks by Martin Carter and Eusi Kwayana that Jagan’s had no literary inclinations and had abandoned Hindu religious beliefs (Carter was a widely read poet and Kwayana was a serious student of Hindu philosophy) were interpreted to conclude that Jagan’s soul was an empty void, which provided a fertile vacuum for the ‘virus’ of Marxism-Leninism to take root and multiply!

Jagan knew that the US government had played the dominant role in the removal of Arbenz in Guatemala, Mossadegh in Iran and in the assassination of Lumumba in the Congo, all moderate politicians who merely sought to address poverty and exploitation in their countries. He understood that what would have been required of him to obtain US support was a complete denial of everything he had ever advocated, including moderately progressive economic policies. And even if Jagan had succumbed, what guarantee existed that February 16, 1962, would not have occurred anyway? Subversion by US trade unions in British Guiana had started since 1953, according to Stephen G. Rabe (2005). The US had already laid the groundwork for 1962.

I should like to add an additional portion of Lamming’s remarks to the few words that Dr. Ramharack’s quoted:

“Jagan created an environment” that “set the tone of intellectual discourse and influenced [its] mood and themes...This is the soil from which the work of the poet, Martin Carter, blossomed. And if we look at the major intellectual figures in literature and history in the contemporary Caribbean: the example of Walter Rodney in history and one of the most illuminating and original critics of literature, Gordon Rohlehr; it is not by accident that their particular thrust or emphasis is what it is. They were, in a particular sense, the product of that environment which had been created by the PPP...And in my own personal experience, I know no other Caribbean leader with whom sharp and wide disagreement could also be the occasion for a warm and fraternal embrace.”

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