

# THE THINKER

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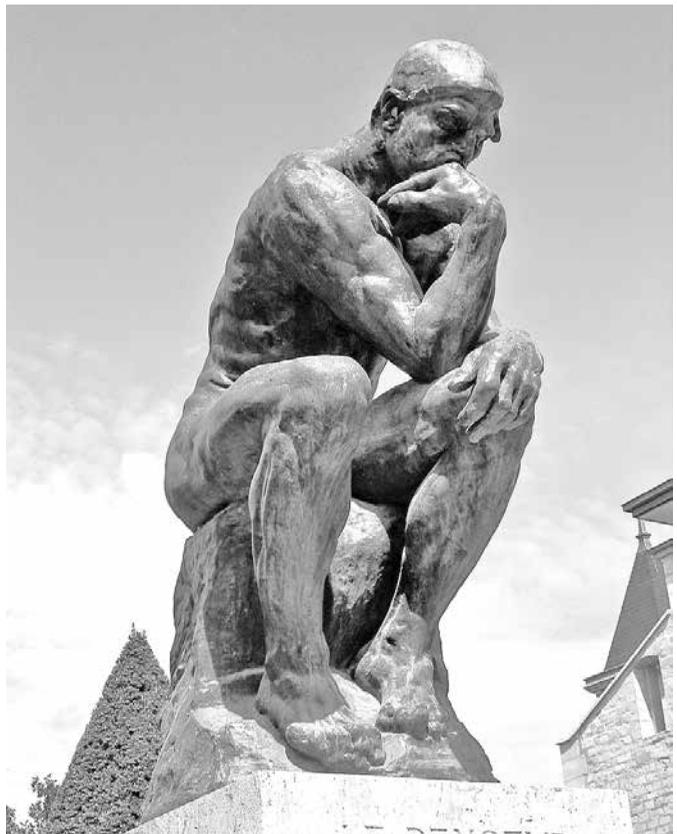
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*The Thinker (French: Le Penseur) is a bronze sculpture by Auguste Rodin.*

# EDITORIAL

This edition of *The Thinker* is dedicated to the memory of Mrs. Janet Jagan, the late, former President of Guyana. Mrs. Jagan was born on October 20, 1920 and had the distinction of having served as the first female Executive President of Guyana among several other 'firsts.' A commemorative stamp was issued by the Guyana Post Office Corporation in observation of the centenary birth anniversary of Mrs. Jagan.

It is significant that her husband, the late, former President Dr. Cheddi Jagan's centenary birth anniversary was observed two years ago on March 18, 2018. Volume I of *The Thinker* was dedicated to Dr. Jagan's centenary. Together, the Jagans gave over a century of dedicated service to the Guyanese people, a phenomenal achievement by any standard. Dr. and Mrs. Jagan were founder members of both the Political Affairs Committee (PAC) and the People's Progressive Party (PPP) which was formed on January 1, 1950. They held the posts of Party Leader and General Secretary of the PPP, respectively.

A number of articles in this edition focus on aspects of the contributions made by Mrs. Jagan including one by Ms. Nadira Jagan-Brancier, in which she writes from a daughter's perspective of her mother. Some articles pay tribute to Mrs. Jagan by various party stalwarts and associates.

Several new developments had taken place since our last edition. General and Regional Elections were finally held on March 2, 2020 which were won by the PPP/C after much political and electoral drama. The Editorial Committee of *The Thinker* wishes to congratulate President Irfaan Ali on being elected as the 9th Executive President of Guyana. Congratulations are also extended to Prime Minister, Brigadier Marks Philips (ret'd) and the entire PPP/C Cabinet.

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to have a debilitating impact on economies and the lives of peoples across the globe. Guyana has not been spared the crippling and deadly effects of the virus. As the planet grapples with the fallout and more loss of lives, it is hoped that a vaccine will soon be available. Persons are asked to practice social distancing, wearing of masks and sanitizing of hands.

The Editorial Committee wishes to thank all contributors for submitting articles for this edition. In 2019 no edition of *The Thinker* was published due to the political situation in the country after the successful No Confidence Motion passed in the National Assembly against the David Granger-led administration. The subsequent plethora of litigation and finally the long awaited March 2, 2020 General and Regional Elections had an effect on our publication. Some articles were penned during that period; however, the Editorial Committee felt they are relevant to current discourse on national events. We take this opportunity to thank our readers for their continued patronage and feedback.

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# JANET JAGAN: A Pioneer and Revolutionary



African Freedom Fighter Oliver R. Tambo award was presented to Dr. Jagan posthumously for his exceptional contribution to the struggle against racial oppression and colonial exploitation. Mrs. Janet Jagan receives the award from then General Secretary of the PPP, Mr. Donald Ramotar who accepted it in South Africa.

## **Centenary Birth Anniversary**

On Tuesday, October 20, 2020 last, the late Mrs. Janet Jagan would have celebrated her 100<sup>th</sup> birthday anniversary. It was an occasion to celebrate the impact she had on Guyana and the world.

Janet Jagan led an exemplary life. Like her late husband, Dr. Cheddi Jagan, she played a leading role in the struggles of the Guyanese people for independence, democracy and social progress. Indeed, since the mid-1940s she stood tall at all the important historical junctures of Guyana's political and social landscapes. Right up to the day she passed she was an active participant in the life of our country.

## **A Remarkable Woman**

Janet had been a positive influence and together with Dr. Jagan, was responsible for the social progress we have made in this country. Undoubtedly, she was a truly remarkable woman. A patriot of Guyana; a true internationalist; and an outstanding fighter on behalf of the working and oppressed peoples in Guyana and the world. From a very young age she identified with the poor and disadvantaged and subscribed to Karl Marx's thesis that it was important to change the world.

## **Early Life**

Born in Chicago, in the United States she grew up during the Great Depression and was inspired to work for the poor. No doubt, she must have witnessed a lot

of sufferings during that period. Chicago was a rapidly growing industrial city in Illinois and the depression had hit it very hard.

Thousands of American workers lost their jobs. The struggle of trade unions and progressive political parties intensified as they tried to protect jobs and to work towards alleviating the suffering caused by the economic crisis. That period made a great impact on young Janet and made her a friend and fighter for working people throughout her life. After the outbreak of World War II, Janet, a trained nurse, contributed to the fight against fascism. She was active in the left movement and was a member of the Young Communist League in the United States. Among jobs she did during that time was proofreading of publications for the American Medical Association.

## **British Guiana in 1943**

In 1943 she married Cheddi Jagan who was studying dentistry and economics in the US. They had a lot in common, particularly politics. Janet joined Cheddi in then British Guiana in 1943. They soon had a good grasp of local politics in the colonies and were convinced that a fight had to be mounted against colonialism.

Like other fighters for national and social liberation at that time, both Cheddi and Janet were greatly influenced



Dr. and Mrs. Jagan with their children, Joey and Nadira.

by the major and leading role which the Soviet Union played in defeating Hitler's fascism. Together with Dr. Jagan, Janet quickly became deeply involved in the social, economic and political life of the colony.

#### **Founder Member of the PAC**

In 1946 Janet along with Dr. Jagan, Ashton Chase and Jocelyn Hubbard founded the Political Affairs Committee (PAC), the forerunner of the People's Progressive Party (PPP). The PAC began publishing a weekly bulletin for circulation in the colony. Janet's journalistic skills qualified her to become the Editor of the PAC Bulletin.

#### **General Secretary of the WPEO**

In that very year, Janet founded the Women's Political and Economic Organisation (WPEO). Winifred Gaskin and Frances Stafford were also founding members. The WPEO was the first political women's organisation in British Guiana and the Caribbean.

Janet became the General Secretary of the WPEO and through dedication and hard work she impacted tremendously on the political life of the colony. It was the first awakening of women to join the struggle for freedom while liberating themselves from the oppression and inequality which they were under.

Those were not easy times. Political life was dominated by

a British Governor and officials from the Sugar Producers Association, who were all British, and by a few rich local persons who were closely tied to the colonial officials.

#### **PAC leaders challenged Colonial Power**

The young leaders in the PAC challenged the powers that existed in the colony on issues related to national life and working people's interests. They boldly declared that one of their objectives was to win political independence for British Guiana. The PAC made a great impact and in 1947. Janet, Cheddi and Jocelyn contested constituencies at the elections, under a reformed, but still restricted franchise.

#### **Waves in GT Constituency**

Janet, who was extremely popular, contested the Georgetown seat. She was widely known and loved by workers and trade unionists. She was the Organising Secretary of the British Guiana Clerks Union (BGCU) and had also helped Ashton Chase and Hubert Nathaniel Critchlow in the British Guiana Labour Union (BGLU).

An old United Force (UF) member, Murtland Williams, recently told me that he personally saw Janet helping to bathe the little children in the Charlestown area, while talking politics with their parents.

She was pitted against Percy Wight, who at that time owned the Argosy newspapers. Wight was the Mayor of Georgetown and also a member of the Legislative and Executive Councils of the colony and a staunch supporter of colonial power.

When it became clear that Janet would beat him, the whole group that supported the establishment ganged up against her. They supported John Fernandes to contest after seeing the writing on the wall for Percy Wight. Fernandes' family was rich and did charitable work in the city area.

Everything was used against Janet, including invoking the anti-communist bogey, religion and money. Janet barely lost and that was no doubt partly due to limited franchise.

#### **Dr Jagan won EC Constituency**

The Jagans and the PAC's reputation kept growing. Dr. Jagan won a seat in the Legislative Assembly, representing the East Coast Constituency. Janet, by that time, had distinguished herself as a fighter, a very good organiser and an able administrator.

She was involved closely with the labour movement. She helped the Guiana Industrial Workers Union (GIWU) organise the sugar workers, and worked closely with the BGLU, representing almost exclusively urban workers. Those unions were the main unions of the day.

#### **Active in the Sugar Industry**

During the strike of 1948 Janet was very active in

organising relief for the strikers and speaking at meetings to keep up the morale of the workers during the 4 months long strike for the recognition of the GIWU.

When the workers were shot, Janet was one of the first prominent persons to arrive on the scene to give leadership, protection and comfort to the workers and their families. She, together with other leaders of the PAC and the GIWU, led the funeral procession from Enmore to Georgetown, some twenty miles.

In 1980, she repeated a similar feat. In showing her and the PPP's revulsion at the People's National Congress' (PNC) sanctioned murder of Dr. Walter Rodney she marched from Buxton to Georgetown in the protest procession with his body.

### **General Secretary of PPP**

By the time the PPP was founded Janet was certainly one of the most outstanding leaders in the colony. Because of her organising ability and her administrative skills she became the General Secretary of the Party.

She held that position until 1970, when the organisational structure of the Party was changed.

### **Her popularity won her a seat on the Municipal Council**

In 1950 she won a seat on the Municipal Council of Georgetown. She was the first representative of the working people to grace the council chambers. She was the only successful candidate of the three PPP candidates that contested elections in that year. The other two were Forbes Burnham and Cheddi Jagan. Her victory showed how popular Janet had become and her reputation for hard work was already becoming legendary. She had won the Wortmanville/Werk en Rust seat, a predominantly working class area in the city. She became the first woman to hold an elected position in this country.

### **Universal Adult Suffrage**

Janet was part of the PPP's delegation to the Waddington Constitutional Commission which gave an advanced constitution in 1953. It was here among other places that the PPP fearlessly, eloquently and effectively represented the cause for Universal Adult Suffrage. This was a major victory for the Party and the people.

### **Member of Legislative Council**

Recognising her dint of hard work, the Party put her in charge of and the candidate for the West Demerara\ Essequibo Coast district. She was the district's candidate in the 1953 Elections. She won handsomely and became a member of the Legislative Council in 1953. She won that seat again in the 1957 Elections and made those areas PPP strongholds. Along with Jessie Burnham and Jane Phillips Gay she shared the honour of being among the first women in the Legislative Council.

### **Great Achievements in Three Ministries**

Janet's portfolio was Minister of Labour, Health and Housing between 1957 to 1961. In that position her work was indeed outstanding. It was the achievements which she made in that period that helped the Party to win the 1961 Elections.

Under her leadership, malaria was practically wiped out in the colony. A mass campaign was launched to wipe out filaria and children were inoculated with the polio vaccine. An anti-typhoid scheme was also launched. New health centres were constructed. Cottage hospitals along with maternity and child welfare clinics were established in all parts of the colony. The Georgetown Hospital was expanded greatly both in buildings and facilities. It was under her guidance that pure water supply spread throughout the countryside.

In housing, great progress was made both in urban and rural areas. The logies on the sugar estates were eliminated. The Rent Restriction Ordinance covered the whole colony, and not just Georgetown. The expansion of housing in Georgetown helped to relieve overcrowding and removal of slums.

Under her leadership, working people made rapid progress both in wages and conditions of work. Domestic, watchmen, quarry workers, rural cinema employees, grocery and retail store workers, etc. were protected by the ministry for the first time. People, to this day, continue to speak of her phenomenal performance in that period. Many of the houses at Lodge, Ruimveldt, Campbellville and in rural areas still stand as a monument to her great love of working people.

### **She fought against all odds**

All was not smooth sailing in her political life in Guyana. Janet had to fight against tremendous odds. She was attacked because of her race. The League of Coloured People (LCP) launched a racist campaign against Whites as early as the 1947 Elections. Jocelyn Hubbard who had done quite a lot for labour faced a racist campaign led by the LCP. He lost the 1947 elections to Dr. J.A. Nicolson as a result.

Ms. Frances van Stafford, one of the founders of the WPEO, a woman who did a lot to promote women's rights, was also attacked by the LCP. Lies were spread that she, a White Guyanese woman, had kicked an African Guyanese servant down her stairs. That nasty lie caused her to lose as well.

### **Janet, Cheddi: Banned from the Caribbean**

Janet faced the same attacks by those who wanted to exploit the working people as her male colleagues. In



Janet Jagan entering jail to service a six months sentence

1949 she was declared a prohibited immigrant in St. Vincent. In 1952 she and Cheddi were the first post-war prohibited immigrants in Trinidad and Grenada.

#### **Jailed in 1954 through Fabrication**

The British press launched a campaign to demonise Janet. She was jailed in 1954 under fabricated charges. She was accused of having an old copy of the Police Regulations in her home. However later when Forbes Burnham was found with a new one, he was not even questioned.

In the 1960s, the PNC following the tradition of the LCP also heaped slander upon her. They spread rumours of all sorts joining the colonial masters in trying to demonise Janet.

The blatant racist characteristics of those who feared her intellect and contributions to the working class, paraded on the streets during her presidency in the 1990s, mainly because of her ethnic background. Racism had always been among the PNC's most effective tool in its politics. Of course, Janet the fighter, brushed those attacks aside. During the anti-dictatorial struggle she fought on several fronts.

#### **Editor of Thunder**

She became the Editor for the Party's organ, the Thunder. As a leader of the PPP, Janet distinguished herself in several important struggles that brought credit to the Party and our country.

#### **Editor of Mirror**

She was the Editor of Mirror newspapers and played a leading role in defence of the press. She led protests against the banning of flour and other essential food items among other struggles.

She returned to Parliament in 1980 at a time when the Party was sending its best to take up the fight in Parliament, after the third successively rigged elections by the PNC regime.

#### **Book exposed PNC Rigged Elections**

She also used her pen to expose the PNC government. Her book on the 1973 rigged elections is still the best exposé of violence perpetrated on the Guyanese people by the PNC. In the opening sentence she stated frankly and dramatically: "In Guyana the word "elections" has become synonymous with "fraud." It was once again on display as the PNC desperately tried to steal the 2020 elections.

Another notable feat was her examination of National Service in Guyana. This was at the time that the PNC was flirting with socialism. Janet showed that under the PNC regime, National Service was used to oppress, discriminate and to militarise the country, there was nothing progressive about it. Indeed, reminiscent of the Luchoo ban on books, a National Service contingent marched on the University of Guyana (UG) campus in 1974 and destroyed the UG Students Society's office, burning books in the process. Cde. Navin Chandarpal was then the President of UGSS.

Throughout all her struggles Janet was always a great caring and loving human being with tremendous strength and courage. Events have often pushed her to the fore even though her preference would have been to be more private. In his book *The West on Trial* Dr. Jagan captured her personality when he wrote: "...Janet is somewhat of an introvert. She does not like being in the limelight. Nor does she care about possessions and is always willing to go out of her way to help others ... It took a great deal of persuasion before she consented to stand for the Georgetown seat ..." (in reference to the 1947 Elections).

It also took a great deal of persuasion to get her to be the presidential candidate in the 1997 Elections. Party leaders worked hard in days of meetings to get her to stand. She never craved power, for its own sake, but only to advance the cause of the working people.

Janet's leadership style was one to be emulated. She led by being knowledgeable, constant study of various issues and offering informed and sober leadership. She also led by example. In January, 1955 when she was about to be released from prison an article in the January 15,

1955 issue of Thunder fittingly captured her personality: "It can truly be said of Janet that her lot has been the hardest in this time of national oppression. Let us for the moment take our thoughts back to those dark days of November and December, 1953 and afterwards. At that time it would be correct in saying that Janet carried the Party and consequently the country with a courage which could only spring from love and admiration. It may be further correct to say, that, at Janet, was directed the main fire of our rulers, hardly a day went by when either the office, her car, her personal belongings were not searched by some police officers or others."

"Then the court case against her started coming with fierce and vicious rapidity. An unflinching Janet – like the militant fighting General Secretary she is – stood her ground. When she was convicted she walked out of court with her head high and on her face was a familiar smile. Our Party Secretary was conducting herself like a Party Secretary. Today Janet is respected by all. Even those who oppose her politically respect her for her strength of conviction and courage."

#### **New era in Caribbean Politics**

It was therefore not difficult for her to hand over the presidency to Bharrat Jagdeo when she felt that due to her health she could not discharge her duty to the country to the maximum, as she would have liked. In so doing in 1999, she opened a new era in Caribbean politics.

#### **First Female Parliamentarian, Prime Minister and President**

Despite the tremendous achievements for the people of our country and personally being among the first female Parliamentarian, the first female Prime Minister and the first female President in Guyana, she remained extremely modest, very easy to talk with and compassionate to the plight of others. Untold numbers of Guyanese and Caribbean people benefited from her generosity and kindness.

#### **Loved by her party; No Personal Envy**

The political struggles she led sometimes created a lot of hostility mainly engineered by the PNC. However, I do not think that she had a single personal enemy. She was loved by the whole Party and the overwhelming majority

of people in Guyana.

As a revolutionary woman she left the most developed country in the world, the United States of America and made her home in one of the poorest countries, giving her all to the working and oppressed people of what was then British Guiana later Guyana. That made her one of the earliest revolutionary to do so. Ché Guevara became famous for a similar act. Janet was truly a citizen of the world.

There are many other facets of Janet Jagan's life that can be dealt with, her internationalism for instance. But all cannot be told in a short article.

For me, I feel greatly honoured to have had the opportunity to know her and to have worked with her. I, like so many others, benefited from her leadership, guidance, counsel and generosity.

On this the centenary of her birth, I say, as was said at Karl Marx's grave side. "Her name and work would endure; I salute a Pioneer and Revolutionary and feel so proud that our struggle produced such a giant."



*Mr. Donald Ramotar is the former President of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana. He also served as General Secretary of the People's Progressive Party. Mr. Ramotar is a graduate from the University of Guyana in the field of Economics. He is an avid writer, and contributes regularly to the Mirror newspaper and other publications.*

# THE NO CONFIDENCE MOTION

## DEMOCRACY AND CONSTITUTIONAL GOVERNANCE ON TRIAL IN GUYANA



PPP/C legal team at the CCJ defending numerous frivolous litigations brought by the APNU/AFC coalition in the aftermath of the No Confidence vote.

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A No-Confidence Motion (NCM) is a permanent fixture in the democratic architecture of constitutions the world over. The first NCM in recorded English history was passed in the House of Commons against Her Majesty's Government nearly 250 years ago. When Britain granted independence to its over 50-odd colonies, it inserted in their constitutional instruments, drafted at Westminster, a power in their parliaments to pass a NCM against their sitting governments with the uniform consequences being that the government would have lost the support of the people and must return to the electorate within a time specified, either for a renewal of its mandate, or for a new government to take its place.

My research informs me that NCMs were passed in India, Canada, the United Kingdom, in several African countries, Australia and of course, right here in the Caribbean. In over 250 years of parliamentary democracy, there is no recorded instance where a government has refused to abide by the constitutional consequences of a NCM being passed, until the 21<sup>st</sup> December, 2018 in Guyana. When Britain granted independence to Guyana in 1966, like the other former colonies, Guyana's Independence

Constitution contained a No Confidence (NC) provision. In order to cement his invincibility as Executive President, then Prime Minister, Forbes Burnham, promulgated a new constitution in 1980, which excluded the NC provision. Two decades hence, under a People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) government, widespread constitutional reforms were undertaken by an independent, broad based, multi-partisan Constitutional Reform Commission, which resulted in approximately two hundred adjustments made to the Constitution. The thrust of these amendments were to devolve power from the executive onto other organs of state, created by the Constitution, for example: the Parliament, Service Commissions, Rights Commissions and the Political Opposition; to augment the Bill of Rights; and to democratize the entire constitutional apparatus, which hitherto, was authoritarian in nature, imposed upon the people of Guyana by virtue of a fraudulent referendum in 1978, which birthed the 1980 Constitution.

Among these reforms done to the Constitution in this 1999-2000 constitutional reform exercise, was the re-insertion of a NC provision. However, when examined against similar provisions existing in other Commonwealth Constitutions, the Guyana constitutional

provisions stand out because of the elaborate way that it sets out the consequences, which flow from the passage of a NCM. For example: the relevant provisions of the Constitution of India, provides:

*“Art. 75 (3)- The Council of Ministers shall be collectively responsible to the House of People.”*

This provision has been uniformly interpreted as being in favour of the House, the right to pass a Confidence/NCM against the Council of Ministers after which, following British traditions, the Council of Ministers is expected to resign and an election is called. Compare that with the relevant provisions of the Constitution of Guyana, expressed in language, whose simplicity and clarity can hardly be disputed by the rational mind:

*“Art. 106 (6) - The Cabinet including the President shall resign if the Government is defeated by the vote of a majority of all the elected members of the National Assembly on a vote of confidence.”*

*“Art. 106 (7) - Notwithstanding its defeat, the Government shall remain in Office and shall hold an election within three months, or such longer period as the National Assembly shall by resolution supported by not less than two-thirds of the votes of all the elected members of the National Assembly determine, and shall resign after the President takes the oath of office following the election.”*

Yet, as I pointed out, Guyana is the only nation in the Commonwealth that suffers the ignominy of a NCM, successfully passed, being ignored. This was so, even though in 2014, the A Partnership for National Unity/ Alliance for Change (APNU/AFC), as the joint opposition, against a minority PPP/C government, submitted a NCM to the Clerk of the National Assembly to be tabled. In their political, public statements, prior and subsequent to the submission of that motion, every major leader of the APNU/AFC opposition articulated, and I dare say correctly, the nature, purport and consequence of a NCM, once passed, under the Guyana Constitution. From their public utterances, it was quite clear that they understood that once such a motion was passed against the government, the government will be defeated, the President and the Cabinet must resign and the government shall remain in office for the purpose of holding elections within three months thereof, unless that time is extended by a vote of two thirds in the

National Assembly; and that the President shall remain in office until a new President is elected by virtue of those elections.

At the National and Regional Elections held on the 11<sup>th</sup> May, 2015, the ANPU/AFC Coalition obtained 33 seats and the PPP/C 32 seats in the 65-seat National Assembly.

On the 15<sup>th</sup> November, 2018, the Leader of the Opposition, **Bharrat Jagdeo**, submitted to the Clerk of the National Assembly, a NCM against the APNU/AFC coalition government, in his name, for and on behalf of the PPP/C. The motion, except with obvious differences, was identical to the one submitted by the APNU/AFC opposition in 2014, against the PPP/C government. The motion was debated on the 21<sup>st</sup> December 2018. After the debate, the vote was taken. The PPP/C received 33 votes and the APNU/AFC received 32. **Charrandass Persaud**, an AFC Executive Member, holding a geographic seat for Region 6 on the APNU/AFC coalition slate, voted in favour of the motion. Consequently, the conclusive Resolution 101 was issued by the Clerk, formally bringing the motion to an end.

Pursuant to the provisions of Article 106 (6) of the Constitution, the government was defeated. This, immediately, triggered the provision that the Cabinet, including the President had to resign. It also catapulted into motion the events outlined in Article 106 (7) of the Constitution. Pandemonium erupted in the National Assembly caused by the APNU/AFC members and their supporters. Heavy presence of members of the Guyana Police Force was necessary to safeguard **Charrandass Persaud's** discreet but quick exit from the precincts of the National Assembly. With the aid of the Canadian High Commission, enlisted by him, in his capacity as a citizen of Canada, **Persaud** was whisked out of the country within a few hours, due to fear for his life and of the institution of fabricated criminal charges. Wild, reckless and unsubstantiated allegations that he was bribed, belloyed from APNU/AFC members and their unruly supporters.

In the Committee Room of the National Assembly, later that night, Prime Minister, **Moses Nagamootoo**, summoned a press conference, at which almost every Member of Parliament (MP) of the APNU/AFC coalition government were present. At that press conference, the Prime Minister conceded that the government was defeated by the NCM, provided for by Article 106 of the Constitution; he indicated that the President and Cabinet will have to resign and that an election will have to be



Chief Justice (ag) of Guyana, Justice Roxane George.

called within the ensuing three months. The following day, President, **David Granger**, made a public statement pledging that he will comply with the relevant provisions of the Constitution. On the 27<sup>th</sup> December 2018, the Deputy Chief Elections Officer of the Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM), issued a public statement that GECOM would be ready to hold elections within the constitutionally stipulated period, that is, three months, if required to do so.

Within the next few days, the coalition government received a legal opinion from a member of the practicing Bar, which advised them that the term “majority” in Article 106 (6) of the Constitution meant “absolute majority” and that the “absolute majority” of 65 is 34. The formula proffered for the calculation of an “absolute majority” was that if the whole is an odd number, you divide the whole by half, you then round it up to the next highest whole number and plus one. Therefore, the “absolute majority” of 65 is  $(65/2) + 1$ , which is 32.5 rounded up to the highest whole number 33 and then plus one, equals 34. A desperate government, prepared to cling to power at any cost, regardless of how preposterous it would appear, embraced this advice with great gusto. Cabinet then met on the 2<sup>nd</sup> January 2019, and the decision was apparently hatched, that the government would do any and everything possible

to derail the Constitution, render the NCM nugatory and remain in office for a full five years term. Over the ensuing months, Guyanese witnessed a series of mind-boggling and vulgar manifestation of actions and public utterances in prosecution of this authoritarian agenda. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> January 2019, the coalition government approached the Parliament, in the absence of the opposition, and attempted to persuade the Speaker to rescind the NCM and the resultant Resolution, on the grounds that the majority required under the Constitution for the passage of such a motion was not obtained; that **Charrandass Persaud** was invalidly elected because the Constitution prohibited dual citizens from being elected to the National Assembly and that **Persaud** held citizenship for both Guyana and Canada; and, that **Persaud’s** vote constituted “crossing the floor,” which they argued, was also precluded by the Constitution. The Speaker rightly ruled that he was, effectively, *functus officio* and advised that they approach a more appropriate forum to ventilate their grievances.

On the 6<sup>th</sup> January 2019, **Compton Reid**, a resident of New Amsterdam, clearly sponsored by the government, through a team of high powered lawyers, launched a legal challenge against the NCM, on the ground that **Persaud’s** vote was invalid because he was not qualified to be elected a member of the National Assembly due to his dual citizenship; and that his vote was illegal as it constituted “crossing the floor,” which was not permitted by the Constitution. A few days later, the Attorney General (AG) **Basil Williams** followed suit with a legal challenge. His ground of challenge was that an “absolute majority” was required to pass the NCM and based upon reasons to which I have alluded above, this “absolute majority” was 34 out of 65 and not 33. Strangely, neither **Reid**, nor the AG named **Bharrat Jagdeo**, nor the PPP/C as a party to the litigation although they were challenging the validity of a NCM tabled and passed by the PPP/C. In their autocratic thinking, the PPP/C ought not to have been heard! This was the level of the absurd thinking which permeated the legal arguments advanced by the team representing the government’s interest to the very end of the litigation, which spiraled all the way to the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ), Guyana’s apex court, seated in Trinidad and Tobago.

Yours truly led a team of lawyers, who approached the court to have **Bharrat Jagdeo**, Leader of the Opposition, joined in both proceedings. An application was also filed by **Joseph Harmon**, in his capacity as Chairman of APNU, to join the proceedings. **Christopher Ram**, a prominent accountant and attorney-at-law, filed



Parliament Building.

proceedings in his own name, seeking Orders directing that the provisions of Article 106 (6) and (7) be obeyed. The matters were all consolidated and heard together by Chief Justice (CJ) (ag) **Roxane George**. The arguments lasted for several days. In short, our argument was that **Persaud's** election to the National Assembly could only have been challenged by way of an Election Petition filed within the time prescribed by the National Assembly (Validity of Elections) Act, that is, twenty-eight (28) days after the official declaration of the election results. Therefore, the court was approached by the wrong procedure and the proceedings were out of time. We further argued that an MP has freedom of conscience to vote as he sees fit and that a vote against the list from which he was extracted did not constitute "*crossing the floor*" under the Constitution. That in any event, the Constitution itself provided that no proceedings in the National Assembly shall be defeated by any defect in the composition of the Assembly at the time when that proceeding took place. Finally, that the word "*majority*" in Article 106(6) of the Constitution must be ascribed its ordinary grammatical meaning and that grammatically and numerically majority meant "*the greater number*"; that it was completely wrong to interpret "*majority*" to mean "*absolute majority*" which is a term not mentioned anywhere in the Guyana Constitution. Therefore, 33 was a majority of 65.

The court delivered its judgment on the 31<sup>st</sup> January, 2019. In a written ruling, spanning over 30 pages, the learned CJ (ag) dismissed every argument advanced

on behalf of **Reid** and the AG and accepted ours. Consequently, the court dismissed both challenges. In relation to **Ram's** case, the CJ (ag) ruled that Cabinet including the President was "*resigned*" by operation of law and that an election ought to be held within three months, unless there was an extension of time by a vote of a two-thirds majority of the National Assembly in accordance with Article 106 (7) of the Constitution. The net effect of all of this meant that the NCM was validly passed and therefore, it triggered into operation the provisions of Article 106 (6) and (7) of the Constitution. The government completely ignored these judicial pronouncements and proceeded to file appeals against the decision of the learned CJ (ag).

The appeals were determined on the 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2019. Three Senior Counsel, two from Barbados and one from Grenada were flown in to bolster the AG's team of local lawyers. In a ruling that many described as bizarre, the Court of Appeal, in a majority of 2-1, overturned the CJ's (ag) ruling, rejecting the validity of the NCM passed on the ground that Article 106(6) requires an "*absolute majority*" for a NCM to pass, which in turn required 34, not 33 votes. Notwithstanding, that the term "*absolute majority*" appears nowhere in the Constitution of Guyana.

Necessarily, this laid the foundation for the litigation to climb to another rung of the judicial ladder by way of appeals to the CCJ. The joint appeals were heard on the

9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> of May 2019, by the CCJ in Port of Spain. The arguments presented in the courts below were essentially restated. Interestingly, some of the arguments presented by the other side provoked reactions of shock, levity and reprimand from the CCJ. In the end the CCJ reserved its decision to be delivered on 18<sup>th</sup> June, 2019. As expected, the CCJ upheld all of our submissions and rejected those advanced by the other side. The appeals were all allowed with costs. The CCJ therefore affirmed the ruling of CJ (ag) **Roxane George** that the NCM was validly passed.

Recognizing that we were dealing with a government consisting of politicians, including the President, who had demonstrated flagrant disrespect for the Rule of Law and the essential tenets of democracy and who had repeatedly trampled upon the Constitution in the discharge of their executive functions, we pleaded with the CCJ for an opportunity to address them on the Consequential Orders they ought to make in order to give effect to the successful passage of the NCM. We were fearful that without such directions from the court, the government would simply ignore the ruling. Our apprehensions were eventually proven to be correct in the end.

The CCJ was kind enough to grant us the indulgence and ordered all sides to put their respective proposals in writing. The matter was then adjourned to 12<sup>th</sup> July 2019, for these consequential directions to be given. On 12<sup>th</sup> July 2019, the CCJ delivered those consequential directions. Perhaps it is best that I set out what I consider to be the relevant excerpts of this ruling:

- *“The judiciary interprets the Constitution. But, as we intimated in our earlier judgment, these particular provisions require no gloss on the part of the Court in order to render them intelligible and workable. Their meaning is clear and it is the responsibility of constitutional actors in Guyana to honour them. Upon the passage of a vote of no confidence, the Article requires the resignation of the Cabinet including the President. The Article goes on to state, among other things, that notwithstanding such resignation, the Government shall remain in office and that an election shall be held “within three months, or such longer period as the National Assembly shall by resolution supported*

*by not less than two-thirds of the votes of all the elected members of the National Assembly determine ...” The Guyana Elections Commission (“GECOM”) has the responsibility to conduct that election and GECOM too must abide by the provisions of the Constitution.*

- *Given the passage of the no confidence motion on 21 December 2018, a general election should have been held in Guyana by 21 March 2019 unless a two thirds majority in the National Assembly had resolved to extend that period. The National Assembly is yet to extend the period. The filing of the court proceedings in January challenging the validity of the no confidence vote effectively placed matters on pause, but this Court rendered its decision on 18 June 2019. There is no appeal from that judgment.*
- *Article 106 of the Constitution invests in the President and the National Assembly (and implicitly in GECOM), responsibilities that impact on the precise timing of the elections which must be held. It would not therefore be right for the Court, by the issuance of coercive orders or detailed directives, to presume to instruct these bodies on how they must act and thereby pre-empt the performance by them of their constitutional responsibilities. It is not, for example, the role of the Court to establish a date on or by which the elections must be held, or to lay down timelines and deadlines that, in principle, are the preserve of political actors guided by constitutional imperatives. The Court must assume that these bodies and personages will exercise their responsibilities with integrity and in keeping with the unambiguous provisions of the Constitution bearing in mind that the no confidence motion was validly passed as long ago as 21 December 2018.”*

The CCJ concluded by issuing the following Consequential Orders:



PPP/C's Anil Nandlall emphasizing a point in the National Assembly

- *“The National Assembly properly passed a motion of no confidence in the Government on 21 December 2018;*
- *Upon the passage of this motion of no confidence in the Government, the clear provisions of Article 106 immediately became engaged.”*

In any other civilized and democratic country, these crystally clear pronouncements, from its highest court, would have galvanized the government into compliance. But not Guyana. Alas, we were dealing with a government of authoritarians. I wrote profusely about this. That was the reason why I pressed for us to put our proposals to be considered by the CCJ after it rendered its decision on 18<sup>th</sup> June 2019. We had proposed that the court direct the President to fix a time frame within which he must name a date for elections. We also proposed that GECOM use the Voters List, used at the November 2018 Local Government Elections, with an appropriate period for Claims and Objections, for the upcoming elections.

The government capitalized on the CCJ's failure to issue Coercive Orders against them and completely ignored and made a mockery of the decision and the Consequential Orders of the court. Cabinet continued to sit and make decisions and the President refused to dissolve Parliament; further, he refused to engage the Opposition for an extension of time of the government's life. Although the government announced that it accepted the *“caretaker”* status, which the CCJ characterized it as, they continued to function as a government having

full plenitude of executive power suffering not a single restraint. So in flagrant disregard and disobedience of the pronouncements from the highest court of the land, the government continued to execute contracts, make appointments, allocate public resources, spend public monies and conduct the affairs of the State, as if it was business as usual.

It must be noted from the excerpts from the CCJ Consequential Orders, referred to above, the court was quite charitable to the government in that it restarted the constitutional clock of three months to start running again from the date it delivered its decision on the 18<sup>th</sup> June 2019. The Court had reasoned that the litigation put the constitutional clock on *“pause.”* I respectfully disagree with that proposition. In my view, time never stopped running from the moment the NCM was passed. No court can suspend a constitutional provision from taking effect when that Constitution is the Supreme Law. The government decided to take up the sword of litigation, and therefore, was liable to live or die by that sword. Six months after the NCM was passed, the litigation concluded with a pronouncement from the final court that it was validly passed. The three months granted by the Constitution had, therefore, long expired. The CCJ's duty was therefore to rectify the constitutional breach not to exacerbate it. At that stage, in June 2019, it was duty bound to direct the holding of elections with every convenient speed. This it did not do. Instead, it granted to a constitutionally delinquent government an additional three months, thereby inviting more *“eye-pass.”* That was exactly what the government did to the Constitution, the Rule of Law and the Judiciary. So by restarting the clock, at 18<sup>th</sup> June 2019, the three months period prescribed for the holding of elections by Article 106(7) expired on 18<sup>th</sup> September, 2019, unless of course an extension was granted by a two thirds vote of the National Assembly. The government did not even attempt to engage the Opposition to secure such an extension.

In terms of fixing a date for elections, the President completely abrogated that responsibility, which the constitution exclusively vested in him, and passed the buck to GECOM, publically declaring that he could not fix a date for elections until GECOM indicated its *“readiness”* to hold elections. GECOM being chaired by retired Justice **James Patterson**, unilaterally appointed by **Granger**, after rejecting 18 nominees of the Leader of the Opposition, in violation of the Constitution, was a willing partner in this diabolical political plot with the Executive, to delay the elections. So the three (3) government's nominated

commissioners, on GECOM, received a willing casting vote from this illegally appointed Chairman on every major decision it had to make, in order to further this conspiracy with the government. This they did for the next ensuing months.

It would be recalled, that I challenged the appointment of **Patterson**, by legal proceedings filed in the name of **Zulfikar Mustapha**, the Executive Secretary of the PPP. This case also went all the way to the CCJ. On the 8<sup>th</sup> June 2019, the CCJ ruled that the appointment contravened the Constitution and that it was, therefore, illegal and unlawful. However, days before he demitted office, **Patterson** did one last favour for his political masters in advancing their agenda to delay elections. For absolutely no good reason, he issued an Order to commence a house-to-house registration process, for the purpose of creating a completely new database from which a new electoral roll would be drawn for the impending elections. To justify this, allegations were quickly fabricated, by the government, impugning the integrity of the current List of Electors and the National Register of Registrants (NRR). It is to be noted that this was the very list and database used for the 2011 elections, in which they won the majority of the seats, for the 2015 elections in which they won the government, and for the 2016 and 2018 Local Government Elections, held under their government, without a single complaint. Suddenly, this list became "*bloated*" by tens of thousands. One of the main complaints was that the list had tens of thousands of Guyanese who were either dead or resident overseas. The fact is that the law does not permit the removal of names from the NRR on the basis of residency. Also, deceased persons are periodically removed from the NRR through engagements with the Registrar of Births and Deaths. The house-to-house registration exercise was, simply, the identified mechanism to delay the elections, remove tens of thousands of legitimate Guyanese voters, from the NRR, thereby denying them the right to vote and to prepare a perverse registration database and eventually, a perverse List of Electors, in order to rig the elections.

Again, we were forced to challenge this house-to-house exercise in court. In the end, we succeeded in obtaining, from the Court, an Order preventing the removal of names from the NRR except in accordance with law. The AG barefacedly appealed this Order.

One minute after midnight on 18<sup>th</sup> September, 2019, the government lost its "*caretaker*" status, lost its constitutionality and lost its legitimacy to govern. This meant that after that date, every contract executed, every decision taken, every appointment made, and every cent of tax payers' dollars spent by the government, was illegal, unlawful and unconstitutional. By operation of law, the 11<sup>th</sup> Parliament's constitutional tenure would have also come to an end. Therefore, in Guyana, from 19<sup>th</sup> September, 2019, only one of the three (3) constitutional pillars of government existed, the Judiciary. And, it was a Judiciary in which the two (2) most senior positions were held by acting appointments. In sum, almost the entire legal order in Guyana, as provided for by its Supreme Law, the Constitution, had collapsed. The country was being ruled, by a grouping of usurpers, through tyranny, not under the Constitution nor by the will of the people. That illicit *status quo* subsisted until elections were held on 2<sup>nd</sup> March, 2020, by a putative president **David Granger**.

In the end, the NCM, the Constitution, national sovereignty, democracy and the Rule of Law were all defeated by the coalition government who shamelessly held on to power by way of a constitutional travesty.



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# THOUGHTS ON MY MOTHER



Commemorative Centenary Stamp issued by the GPOC in honour of Mrs. Janet Jagan's 100th birth anniversary.

Much has been said about my mother in her political life but there were also many other aspects of her life that made her such an amazing and beautiful human being, that many may not know of.

First and foremost, she was a very kind, loving and generous mother who, even though, she had a very busy political life while I was still very young, managed to spend her spare time with my brother, Joey and I. She took us to the Georgetown Zoo and the Botanical Gardens which always held a very dear place in her heart. She also really loved taking us to the seawalls where we would walk on the beach and collect shells and driftwood. She used to use the driftwood to make pieces of art. Later in life she also enjoyed taking all her grandchildren to the same places.

Her favourites at the zoo were the Harpy Eagle, the manatees, the river otters and the cockatoos, some of the very animals she so fondly wrote about in her children stories for her grandchildren: Cheddi, Alex, Vrinda, Natasha and Avasa. She also wrote beautiful stories for my brother's birthday while she was incarcerated and a few personal poems for us, along with political poems.

Our family also spent many memorable and fun days at the black water creeks and on the beach at Bee Hive on the East Coast. Fried chicken was one of Mom's specialties for these trips. She made the best fried chicken. These were times when my parents were able to relax and enjoy time with us and other family members or with friends.

My mother had a great love for the arts, which I learned

began when she was a child of about 11. She told that she would walk far distances and travel alone on buses to visit the art museums in Chicago and to go to the beach. Telling me about it she said she was actually amazed that her parents allowed her at that age to travel around alone.

Over the years she bought paintings and works of art by Guyanese artists, sometimes just because she wanted to help them along financially and to encourage them. She was instrumental in the creation of Castellani House and in acquiring art for the national collection.

My mother had sacrificed many things in her life. I think one of the first that I know about was her decision to get married to my father. She was studying nursing at the time and she told me of her love for surgery and that if she had continued, she would have been a surgical nurse. She gave this dream up when she decided to get married, for in those days you could not be married and be a nurse. I think that's one of the reasons she advocated for women's rights in British Guiana, so women could be able to have any job and also be married. My mother would have been a very kind and caring nurse had she completed her studies. At my father's dental practice, she was his assistant and made toys to give to the kids that were his patients.

When she joined my father in British Guiana in December, 1943 she was introduced to a completely new way of life. She readily accepted my father's wishes to help his brothers and sisters. Many of my aunts and uncles lived with my parents while they attended high school and later with my parents' help, they were all able to attain higher education. Some of them would only have been 2 to 4 years younger than my mom at the time. A very dear friend of my mother, Evelyn Rayman, told me how she remembered seeing this slim, beautiful, white woman and she could not understand how she could take in all those relatives and have to live in such a small place, after coming from such a place as America.

My mother went to jail for 6 months. She wrote about this period: "Jail wasn't easy from the physical point of view. But like my husband, I treasured the quiet of jail from the furor outside. I did a lot of reading after insisting that women, like men, should have a right to have books. I also did handicrafts and my stuffed dolls and animals were sold outside."

My mother was very athletic as a young adult. She was a speed skater, and also loved archery and target shooting

but one of her biggest passions was swimming, which she continued to do until the summer of 2008, the last year she spent with us in Canada. She carried this love for sports into her political efforts in Guyana – she and my father made many private pools available to local swimmers, encouraged youth, both male and female, to participate in all forms of sports. Because these things were so dear to her heart, one of the first things that she did when she became President was to set up a new ministry – The Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports in 1997 separate from the Ministry of Education.

My mother was a very generous person as many can attest to. She loved to send out birthday cards and give gifts to close party comrades and their children. I could not count how many persons she helped over the years – either to find solutions to their problems, to help them get a house lot, to find a place to live, to get a job or even to help them financially in any way she could, sometimes even leaving herself short.

My mother was a very loving and dedicated wife. My parents had a very close relationship and worked very well together. They complemented each other in all aspects of life. Dad was the outgoing one, my mother preferred to be in the background, but really and truly she also did a lot of work in campaigning in the countryside especially in the Essequibo region where she was always very popular.

Mom took care of the finances and the running of the house. She cooked the meals and cleaned the house but my parents also had an equal division of labour in the house. Daddy would clear and wash the dishes and polish our wooden floors when it needed to be done. He also took care of the yard and the planting of fruit trees which was a joy for him. Theirs was a quiet life together in our house at New Haven after my brother and I left home, so many years ago. Sundays, their only day off, if they did not have meetings in the countryside, were spent quietly.

The mornings would begin with Dad in the yard and Mom cleaning the house. Lunch was Mom's Sunday meal of roasted chicken, stuffing and lots of fruits for Dad. After lunch they would both have a nap then they would sit

together on the veranda or go to the seawalls for a walk. They loved to do this and also took my children there many times.

In the evenings after dinner, Dad would end up at his desk where he wrote many of his hundreds of articles, papers and books. Mom would sit and read a book. She loved reading and left a large library of books on all sorts of topics: the classics, foreign writers, biographies, fiction, and politics, to name a few. Sometimes she would be reading several books at a time. She wrote: "By taking me to the library when I was a little girl, my father gave me one of the greatest blessings I have ever had – a love of books. Reading has been one of the great joys of my life and one, which I recognise, has carried me through periods when life was not always what I had hoped for."

This was my parents' life together, a loving couple who were able together to make so many positive changes to the lives of so many in Guyana. I am happy that over the last years when Mom was no longer deeply involved in politics, she was able to spend longer periods of time when she visited me and my family. I got to do things with her that in earlier years we could not do. I would take her out shopping especially to the grocery store where she spent a long time – the choices were many, compared to back home - to plays and museums in Toronto, out for dinners or just sitting around talking about life in general.

She continued to encourage me to design and make jewellery, which she loved to wear, especially pieces that I had made for her. It was out of her love for jewellery that I probably decided to take on that profession.

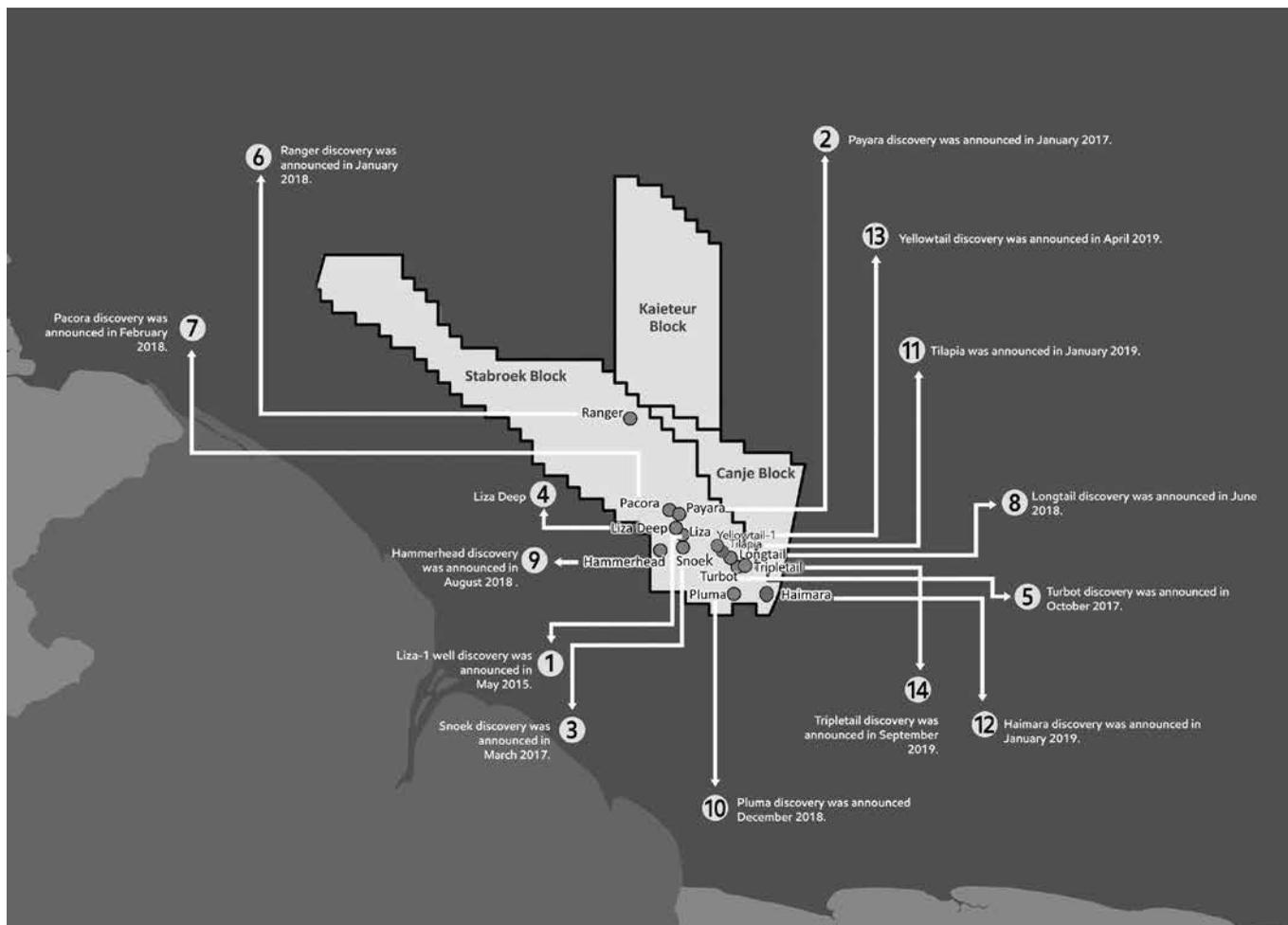
We all miss her terribly. I know anyone who had the joy to have met her and really knew who she was, misses her too.



*Nadira Jagan-Brancier is the only daughter of Dr. and Mrs. Jagan. She is a Trustee and Board Member of the Cheddi Jagan Research Centre (Red House). Ms. Jagan-Brancier resides in Canada and is a jewellery designer by profession.*

# From Raleigh to Liza

## – the quest for riches



Sir Walter Raleigh's 1595 book, *The discoverie of the large, rich and bewtiful empire of Guiana, with a relation of the Great and Golden Citie of Manoa (which the Spaniards call El Dorado)*, created the myth that the fantastical city of Manoa was located in Guiana.

For years explorers combed the interior of Guyana looking for the mythical city of El Dorado. Several areas were identified, with Pirara, in the Rupununi becoming the focus of attention. In 1842, the British sent soldiers from the West Indian regiment to establish a fort (New Guiana) and protect the area. But, alas the search for the elusive golden city remained inconclusive.

Not far from Pirara is the Takatu Basin, and in 1910 another search started there, this time for the 'black gold.' By 1916 the first well was sunk, and so began Guyana's quest to find oil. However, this and much of other onshore efforts remained unsuccessful or commercially unviable. Offshore efforts seemed to mirror this lack of success initially, with failings such as the Shell exploration in the Abary 1(1975), Total exploration in the Arapaima #1 (1990) and CGX exploration at Eagle (2000), and Horseshoe (2005).

However, offshore explorers' fortune changed, when

on 15 May 2015, the ExxonMobil operator found oil at a depth of 18,730 feet (5,700 feet of water), 120 miles off the coast of Guyana. The discovery of oil at Liza 1, was soon followed by others at Liza 2, Liza 3, Liza 4, Liza Deep, Snoek-1, Payara-1, Payara-2, Turbot 1, Ranger, Tilapia1, Haimara 1, Yellowtail and Tripletail. The current estimated total recoverable gross resources for the blocks are more than six billion barrels of oil equivalent. This projection would change as more analysis is done on the reserves, especially given the last two discoveries which are considered among the four most high impact discoveries of oil and gas globally so far for 2019.

These findings have placed Guyana on a fast track to becoming an oil-rich economy. Considering Liza 1 and 2 wells only, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has estimated that the maximum annual revenue at peak production is expected to be \$2.5bn (all figures in US dollars) in 2028 with the total government revenue over the lifespan of the field(s) being \$26.7bn (Liza 1 and 2). A much more conservative projection by Open Oil put this number at between \$7bn (Liza 1 only) to \$18bn (Liza 1 and 2) over the life of the wells. It is estimated that between 2025 to 2028 revenues could peak at \$800m to \$3.9bn per year. This would have the effect of doubling the Guyanese economy.

But are these discoveries a blessing or a curse? The answer to this question is that it could be either; depending on how we manage our resources. There is much that can be learned from the experience of other countries. We have witnessed the pre-source curse; an affliction wherein the government of a country embarks on overspending and borrowing based on the promise of oil wealth, we have seen volatility which occurs when the economy of a country is held at the whim of oil prices, and we have seen the Dutch Disease, where inflation or exchange rate appreciation makes other exports uncompetitive. We must remember too, that these oil and gas resources are non-renewable, and the wealth generated now must be used for this and future generations. If we can avoid these pitfalls, then the funds will surely be a blessing.

For Guyanese to ensure that these resources are utilised wisely, there is an urgent need to develop a vision and a strategy for the oil and gas sector. To produce such a vision would require a multi-stakeholders approach, where everyone with interest can join the discussion to fashion a national position on the oil and gas sector. To implement this vision, we must create new institutions, develop new laws, policies and regulations, train human

resources to work in the industry, and create access to funding and know how to help companies align to produce goods and services for the new sector.

The Government of Guyana needs to develop new institutions for the oil and gas sector quickly. This includes a Ministry of Oil and Gas, which would drive legislation, policies and regulations in the industry. This ministry must have the legal, economic, audit, and scientific capacities to provide expert guidance to government decision-making in the industry. There is a need for the establishment of additional institutions, such as contemplated by new laws, and to monitor activities that are currently ongoing with both explorations, and establishing the prerequisites for future oil.

The country needs to develop a suite of laws and policies for the oil and gas sector. The work required to be done on our legislation varies, in some cases, we may need to simply update existing laws. But in others, the creation of entirely new laws; which detail the specifics of exploration activities, production activities and post-production activities is necessary.

In addition to the laws which will specify the logistics of how oil and gas extracting should be done, there is an urgent need to update the laws which are concerned with the safety of human resources and the environment. We need to ensure that there is legislation that protects the unique aquatic environment that Guyana's waters provide, and we need to ensure that flora and fauna of areas in the vicinity of the drilling are protected as well. We also need to upgrade our occupational and safety standards to comply with international standards. So far very little attention has been given to these types of legislation, policies and regulations.

The government has spent most of its time up to this point working on Guyana's version of a Sovereign Wealth Fund called the Natural Resource Fund Act. Important legislation such as this should have bipartisan inputs and should take into consideration the concerns of the private sector, the Opposition, and key stakeholder groups. While the intent of the legislation is welcome, the devil is in the details such as concerns for the independence of the fund, the membership of the fund, and the fiscal rule that would be used to trigger the fund.

The previous 2015 government enacted this legislation without the participation of the Opposition, which turns it into a subject of controversy. Since the unilateral enactment of the law, the institutions that are required

to be implemented are yet to be established. These issues must be properly sorted out before petroleum funds start flowing to the Natural Resource Fund.

There has been a lack of leadership on local content in the oil and gas industry. This indifference on the part of the then government is hurting local businesses and the country's strategic interests. There is a vacuum where there should be leaders formulating legislation, policies and regulations regarding local content. Experiences around the world have been varied depending on those countries' peculiar context. These experiences must not paralyse us into doing nothing – we need to act to create opportunities for our local businesses. It is critical at this point, to bring together the private sector, the international oil companies, and international consulting experts and government so that we might develop local content for the oil and gas sector.

Through these consultations, a fair balance can be struck where everyone wins. In addition to this facilitation, the government should support companies to realign themselves to work for the oil and gas industry. This support should include access to know how, to capital, and other support services for them to become contractors or subcontractors to Exxon Mobil and its affiliates.

The government should also develop short-, medium- and long-term human resource strategies for the oil and gas sector. In the near term, there should be a policy of encouraging skilled Guyanese from around the world to return home to work in the industry. Additionally, the government should facilitate the establishment of an oil and gas school which can produce skilled persons who are necessary for working offshore. In the medium, to long term, government and the industry should map the human resource requirements, and offer scholarships

to young Guyanese in engineering, accounting, law, economic modelling, geology, etc.

The government needs to urgently establish a fully functioning and equipped oil and gas research institution that would be capable of monitoring activities within the oil and gas sector and to evaluate the country's oil and gas reserves. These institutions will help to ensure better governance and transparency in the industry. It would also allow policymakers to have access to an independent data source to be used when formulating policies and decisions.

Further, the government must improve on their current contract management capacity. There is a need for timely review to see whether the obligations stipulated under the contract is appropriately met. A critical component of managing recoverable expenditures is to have the auditing capacity to handle and interpret the cost recovery submissions and external auditing information. In establishing a new sector, there will always be teething problems. But if there is a willingness to learn, and work in the country's interests, these challenges can be overcome.

While there have been expensive missteps and blunders, we need to learn quickly and put the strategies in place so that this and future generations of Guyanese will benefit from the blessings of black gold. As Raleigh had suspected all these years, Guyana has lots of riches, but in the end, you have to know where to look and how to manage it. Liza, much like gold, shines with the promise of hope to our people. However, it is still anybody's guess whether the black gold will be managed well enough to propel Guyana's prosperity through the 21<sup>st</sup> century.



Dr. Frank Anthony is Minister of Health. He is a graduate from the Russian Friendship University in Medicine and has a Master's Degree in Public Health from the Hebrew University in Israel. He is a Member of Parliament and a member of both the Executive and Central committees of the People's Progressive Party.

# A Remarkable Woman



Mrs. Indranie Chandarpal addressing a forum celebrating Mrs. Janet Jagan's life and work at an anniversary of the formation of the WPO.

October 20, 2020 marked the 100<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of Janet Jagan nee Rosenberg. On the occasion of that important milestone it is my honour and privilege to share some aspects on the life of this remarkable woman.

All of us who had the opportunity to know her, not in a fleeting way but at a more personal level, can attest to the many facets of her personality. She touched our lives in a variety of ways and has left an indelible impression.

Even before she came to Guyana in 1943 she had started to live a challenging life. She was bright, athletic and a young woman of great determination. She was a good

swimmer and even tried her hand at flying a plane. She grew up in a middle class suburb of Chicago and had the opportunity to attend Wayne University where she became involved in left wing politics. Her actions were prompted by the fact that she was Jewish and was passionate about the plight of the underdog.

Her meeting with Dr. Cheddi Jagan and the decision to marry him created quite a stir in her family since not only was she marrying a foreigner but she was going to leave her country as well. It was a tough decision to make which she did with no hesitation.

When she arrived in the former British Guiana she lost no time in joining her husband as they sought to address the various issues confronting the underprivileged and downtrodden at that time. One year after her arrival (1944) she took up the cause of women by penning a letter in the Labour Advocate on the question of adult suffrage.

Women in British Guiana by the mid-forties had already entered the fray of struggle in the working class arena. Those in the middle class were trying to provide assistance to the less fortunate in their midst by working through the charitable and friendly societies that were formed.

The body politics at that period was characterised by male dominance since there was strict demarcation in the public and private spheres of society and women were not permitted to enter that domain. She was not constrained by that situation since she was nurtured in her country through her involvement in left wing politics. While she believed in women's emancipation she recognised how difficult it would have been to obtain emancipation in the environment that existed at that time.

Adult suffrage had to include women and freedom from colonial rule was also necessary. Jocelyn Hubbard, who according to Cde Janet, had political vision and astuteness urged her to form a women's organisation and even

assisted in many aspects of the establishment of the Women's Political and Economic Organisation (WPEO) on the 12<sup>th</sup> July, 1946. The three women responsible for the formation were Mrs. Janet Jagan, Mrs. Winifred Gaskin and Ms. Frances Van Stafford. The mission was to ensure the political and economic organisation of women in order to promote their economic welfare and their political and social emancipation as well as their betterment.

The WPEO set about encouraging women to register as voters for the election in 1947. It was at this election that Mrs. Jagan made her entrance in the political arena. She contested the Central Georgetown seat and although she made a great impact, she lost because of limited franchise.

The WPEO not only encouraged women to vote but also urged women in charitable organisations to exert pressure on the government to create improvements in social welfare in general and housing conditions in particular. Within the first three months it attracted approximately 165 members both working and middle class women.

In 1948, the shooting deaths of five Enmore workers impacted on the lives of the Jagans as well as the events that led to the formation of the People's Progressive Party (PPP) on January 1<sup>st</sup> 1950. The elections under universal adult suffrage saw the PPP winning those elections of April, 1953 when three women were elected to the House of Assembly. Mrs. Jagan was elected Deputy Speaker of British Guiana's first House of Assembly.

On May 27<sup>th</sup> 1953 the Women's Progressive Organisation (WPO) was formed by Mrs. Janet Jagan, Ms. Jane Phillips Gay and Ms. Aukland with the following mission: "The WPO stands for a better educated woman who can bring up her children in surroundings of security; it stands for the raising of our living standards and it stands for peace and friendship among the peoples of the world and for the ultimate liberation of women from colonialism and poverty."

Two days after the formation of the WPO Cde Janet left British Guiana to participate in a meeting in Copenhagen, Denmark, organized by the Women's International Democratic Federation. At that meeting she made a call for British Guiana to become independent.

She was a pioneer of the movement to improve the conditions of Guyanese women by organizing them

in their communities and at the national level to have equal treatment and recognition of their human rights.

She lived to see that vision become a reality when she herself attained the highest office of the land; where girls were excelling in all areas of life and where free and fair elections became a reality.

Janet Jagan played a special role in the formation of the Political Action Committee (PAC) in 1946 and the many actions which helped to light the torch of the popular movement for political independence. She was even jailed for six months because of that activism.

When the PPP was formed she was elected as the first General Secretary, a position which she held for 20 years and was indeed the driving force behind the Party's dynamic organizational efforts for the rest of her life. She witnessed the formation of the Progressive Youth Organisation (PYO), the Mirror Newspaper and the Thunder Journal.

Former President Janet Jagan lived a purposeful life filled with many challenges and triumphs. The challenges were numerous starting from the decision she took when she decided to marry Dr. Jagan and come to the then British Guiana and continuing to the period of her presidency.

Her feats are chronicled in various documents and the one which illustrates her passion and commitment is the reference by Dr. Jagan in his book *The West on Trial* when he referred to her role as a Minister of Labour, Health and Housing in the period 1957-1961.

We are well aware of the various unions she had participated in and from her actions and writings we know that she was a true friend of the working class and a champion for the independence of Guyana.

During the 28 years when the PPP was in opposition she spent a considerable time working at the Mirror Newspaper and also ensured the publication of *Thunder*, the theoretical journal of the PPP. These publications were dear to her heart.

When the struggle was intensifying against the removal of essential commodities in Guyana, Janet Jagan was in the forefront of the demonstrations and other protests. On international issues, she was always a part of picketing exercises whether it was for the release of Nelson Mandela or in solidarity with the peoples of Palestine or Chile.



Executive Members of the WPO during a congress. In picture are Mrs. Janet Jagan, Mrs. Indranie Chandrapal, Ms. Gail Texiera and others.

Her role in the fights for the restoration of democracy was a relentless one, and she used her pen effectively to expose and inform of the infringements as they occurred.

Her position as the First Lady was one of simplicity, humility and decorum. While she was in a position of power she never allowed it to create a barrier from her and other people. That in itself was greatness. When Dr. Jagan passed away she stood there as a tower of strength and provided comfort to all even though her heart was bleeding.

The election of 1997 was a very testing period for Mrs. Janet Jagan. I recall vividly the campaign, the energy she displayed and the support which she received everywhere she went. However, the violent protests by the opposition made her assumption to office a very difficult one. For me, it was a privilege to listen to her reflecting on the early stages of her struggle when she addressed the ceremonial opening of the 7<sup>th</sup> Parliament and declared:

“Today as I address you as the first woman Head of State, fond memories of the long and hard struggles of our people come to mind. I particularly recall the plight of women in the late forties and the early fifties. I remember the courage of many women who came forward in those dangerous times to join the struggle. A momentous occasion was when in 1953, I was among the first three women ever to be elected to Parliament after we had just completed a vigorous election campaign. For me it was doubly difficult since in contesting the Essequibo constituency, which I won, my gender

was a central issue as I had to do battle with two wealthy macho landowners.

Our victory in 1953, and the spirit of oneness and togetherness which accompanied it, was like the end of a long eclipse which had engulfed our nation. That day, May 3, 1953 was a proud moment as the PPP parliamentarians, with Cheddi Jagan and Forbes Burnham at the lead, marched from the party’s headquarters to Parliament Buildings for the opening ceremony. We were all confident of the future and filled with patriotic fervour to start a process of genuine independence and economic and social progress.

The process began but was soon affected by many difficulties. These did not, however, deter us as a nation as we moved from independence to Republican status. Today, as we look back, we understand that there are many interpretations of our history. But at some point, we, as a nation, must have a common approach to our history, our difficulties and where we go from here. As a nation we have to constantly move forward. We cannot turn back. We have to live with our history. It is ours and the most we could do at this point is to learn the lessons that that history taught us. Our past should not divide us but give us strength and deepen our commitment to pursue boldly the interest of the nation and people. We must understand our unique cultural experience and realize that our oneness as a nation transcends the sum of its parts.”

Another issue which I would like to refer to is an interview that was done with President Janet Jagan on the 25<sup>th</sup> January 1998. This interview dealt with issues such as the Herdmanston Accord, constitutional changes, media matters, parliament, government performance and the Rights of the Child. President Jagan in responding to Earl Bousquet on the Accord stated:

“I want the whole nation to know how dangerous the situation was and that it was due to the responsible attitude of the PPP/Civic government that we were able to make what necessary concessions were required to bring about peace to this land. We are hoping that all Guyanese would understand what happened and would also appreciate our contribution has been one of a responsible government; a

government that cares, a government that does not want anything untoward to happen to its people. We want their safety, their future, etc.”

What is important to note is that it was her great sense of character, her dedication and strong organizing ability and commitment which helped her to withstand the assault on her character during her 63 years in Guyana. She was a morally upright and fearless human being who was never afraid to take a position on any issue even though her views may not have coincided with others.

By 1997 she was the longest serving member of the National Assembly and as a debater she argued well and stood her ground on any issue. She was a great role model for the women of the party. She was intensely private yet reached out to people at all times. She promoted the highest moral standards and led by example. While she believed in women's equality she did not encourage mediocrity in women.

Almost all the comrades who worked closely with her can attest to her humanity, her kindness, her thoughtfulness. Members of the public who came to see her weekly would have laid their stories to her and would have received assistance from her or would have been sent to some official for assistance.

She was fiercely independent and always gave a good fight for what she believed in; we saw her on so many occasions standing firm and holding her own. Unfortunately, she was vilified by some who cannot even begin to understand the contributions she has made to this country which became her real home. She never wanted sympathy or thanks since whatever she was doing was on her own accord and for what she believed in.

As General Secretary of the party from 1950 -1970 she managed that office, helped the WPO, wrote for Mirror, represented the PPP at special forums, visited groups

and managed her home and family. When asked about her ability to perform such diverse tasks on a daily basis she would always respond “you have to know how to manage time and for women they need to know how to balance family life with public and professional life.”

Janet Jagan was the comrade many had gone to in times of doubt and uncertainty. She was always willing and was never afraid to give advice. Cheddi and Janet Jagan came onto the political landscape at a critical, historical period and having completed the most difficult tasks have passed on. It is now left to us to build on the legacy they have left us.

We must all be proud of this daughter, this mother, this friend and comrade who lived a life of service to humanity and the liberation of man and womankind. She was a pioneer in politics and the struggle for independence and women's rights, being among one of the first women members of the Legislature in Guyana, the first female to be made a Deputy Speaker in 1953, one of the longest serving members of the National Assembly, the first female Minister in Guyana, the first female Prime Minister and the first female President of Guyana; Recipient of the Order of Excellence and the Gandhi Gold Medal for Peace, Democracy and Women's Rights by UNESCO. In 2012 Times Magazine nominated her among the most rebellious women in history.

The greatest legacy of all is the PPP which Cheddi and Janet dedicated their energies and total commitment to build and solidify. While we have all helped individually and collectively to strengthen it, had it not been for their vision and their dedication, the PPP would not be what it is today.

As we observed the 100<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of Janet Jagan we do so with great reverence and respect for a woman whose life was characterised by service, compassion and fearlessness.



*Mrs. Indranie Chandarpal is the President of the Women's Progressive Organisation (WPO) and a member of the Central Committee of the People's Progressive Party. She is also the Chairperson of the Women and Gender Equality Commission and the Administrator of the Cheddi Jagan Research Centre.*

# The People's Progressive Party: Track Records in **Free & Fair** General Elections in Guyana



Members of the PPP picketing outside GECOM for free and fair election (L to R Robeson Benn, Anil Nandlall, Donald Ramotar).

The People's Progressive Party (PPP) was formed on 1<sup>st</sup> January, 1950 with Dr Cheddi Jagan as Leader, Mr Linden Forbes Sampson Burnham as Chairman and Mrs Janet Jagan as the General Secretary. The PPP replaced the Political Affairs Committee (PAC) which was formed by Dr Jagan et al in 1946. The PAC had commenced the struggle for changes in the eligibility of voters, for which momentum was increased after the formation of the PPP. The constant agitation, lobbying and demonstrations resulted in the abolishing of all property qualifications for voting and the introduction of Adult Suffrage by legislation in March, 1952. This was an extremely significant victory, which is enjoyed by all Guyanese to this day, the right to vote, once you have attained the age of majority.

It is against this background that **the PPP contested its first General Elections on April 27, 1953**. The Electoral System in 1953 was that of First Past The Post, (FPTP).

There were 28 seats in the House, 24 to be occupied by "Elected Members" and 4 for "Selected Members". The PPP contested 22 of the 24 seats because it was unable to garner the necessary finances to contest the two hinterland constituencies. The PPP won in 18 of the constituencies it contested, and so it won 18 of the 24 Seats. Notwithstanding that, the British suspended the Constitution on 9<sup>th</sup> October 1953 and removed Guyana's first Premier, Dr Cheddi Jagan and his government from office and installed an interim government to manage the affairs of the country until General Elections were held again in 1957.

**Prior to the holding of the 1957 General Elections**, there was a split in the PPP with two factions emerging, The Burnham PPP and the Jagan PPP. The 1957 General Election was held on 12<sup>th</sup> August, with the country comprising of 14 seats using the FPTP electoral system. Both the Jagan and Burnham factions of the PPP

contested 13 of the seats. The Jagan PPP won 9 of the seats while the Burnham faction won 3 seats, The National Labour Front (NLF) and the United Democratic Party (UDP) winning a seat each. The UDP later merged with the Burnham PPP to form the People's National Congress (PNC).

Dr Jagan's excellent leadership of the 1957 PPP government brought immense benefits to Guyana and the Guyanese people and so he intensified the struggle and demands for an Independent Guyana. Amidst budget constraints, non-support from the colonial officials and unhelpful legislations Dr Jagan successfully marshalled the party's supporters to work for a better Guyana for all.

**The 21<sup>st</sup> August 1961 elections** were the first to be held under the 1961 constitution, which had created a Bicameral Legislature with an appointed Senate and an elected Legislative Assembly. The 36 members included 35 members elected in single-member constituencies and the Speaker, who was elected by the other members. The 13 members of the Senate included eight nominated by the ruling party, three by the opposition and two by the Governor. The PPP won 20 seats, although it only contested 29 of the 35 seats, the PNC won 11 seats and contested all 35 seats and the United Force (UF) won 4 seats while it contested 34 of the 35 seats.

Dr Jagan and the PPP continued lobbying for Guyana's Independence, several rounds of discussions and meetings were held both in British Guiana and in the United Kingdom. Numerous acts to destabilize the PPP government were committed and mass demonstrations, riots and violence were orchestrated against the citizens in the country, but Dr Jagan continued to engage all stakeholders in the interest of peace and stability.

**General elections were held in British Guiana on 7<sup>th</sup> December 1964.** The elections followed constitutional reforms and the re-establishment of the House of Assembly, which had been abolished in 1953, replacing the bicameral legislature. The House had 54 members; the Speaker and 53 members elected by Proportional Representation (PR) changed from FPTP. The Speaker was elected from amongst the original elected members and then gave up their elected seat to be replaced by a member of their party. The PPP won 24 seats, PNC 22 seats and UF 7 seats of the 53 seats. While the PPP won the highest number of seats, it fell short by three seats to form the government.

Immediately after the official results were announced, Dr Jagan tried to obtain the support of Burnham and the PNC to form a coalition government. He showed that the PPP and the PNC together polled 87 percent of the votes and that the Guyanese people would overwhelmingly

support such a coalition. At the same time, such a coalition would be a giant step in the efforts to build national unity. Dr Jagan even offered Burnham the position of Premier, but the PNC leader refused to budge from his fixed position that he would not cooperate with the PPP.

Consequently, Dr Jagan was not invited to form the government, but Burnham was, hence the PNC collated with the UF and formed the government. This was the beginning of Guyana's destruction and the removal of democracy at the level of the ballot box. Subsequent **General Elections were held in 1968, 1973, 1980 and 1985. All were massively rigged with the worst being in 1985 after the death of Burnham.**

Local pressures for free, fair and transparent elections, led by Dr Jagan and others, supported by the international community "bore fruit" when the Carter Center intervened, and several changes were made in the electoral system:

1. Restriction on non-residents balloting;
2. Counting of votes at the place of the poll;
3. Declaration of results at the place of poll.
4. Accrediting Observers.

General Elections were constitutionally due in 1990, but the voter's list was in shambles and deemed as highly unacceptable so the elections were **finally held on 5<sup>th</sup> October 1992.** Eleven (11) parties contested the elections. The PPP which had accepted a partnership with civil society contested the Elections as PPP/C and won 32 seats; the PNC won 31, The Working People's Alliance (WPA) and the UF won a seat each.

Voting procedures were monitored by foreign observers, including a large Commonwealth team and one headed by former US President Jimmy Carter. Following a somewhat violent campaign, polling day itself was disrupted by incidents such as looting. The observers nevertheless characterized the process as "free and fair" for the first time since independence. Dr Jagan, as the nominated candidate of the party receiving the most votes under the PR system, was sworn in as President on 9 October and, the following day, he appointed Mr Samuel Hinds, an Afro-Guyanese industrialist who was not a member of the PPP, as Prime Minister. The formation of the Cabinet was completed on 15 October. The new government stated that its priorities included addressing the problem of the country's significant external debt, reducing the cost of living and improving social services.

After the death of Dr Jagan in March, 1997 Prime Minister



GECOM Secretariat

Hinds acceded to the presidency and announced the date for the constitutionally due General Elections. The PPP presidential candidate was Mrs. Janet Jagan, widow of President Cheddi Jagan who became Prime Minister following his death. The PPP/C won 29 seats, PNC 22, Alliance for Guyana and the UF won a seat each.

General and presidential elections should have been held on **17 January 2001**, as stipulated in the Herdmanston Accord, an agreement between the governing PPP/C and the opposition PNC signed in January 1998 to end months of political violence following the 1997 election. Nevertheless, in November 2000, the Elections Commission announced the postponement of the elections until 19 March 2001.

Out of the 13 parties that were registered to take part in the elections, only four secured representations in the National Assembly. Results released by the Elections Commission gave the incumbent PPP/C 34 of the 65 seats, as against 27 for the PNC, GAP/WPA 2, ROAR 1 and the UF 1 seat.

**On 2 May 2006**, President Bharrat Jagdeo dissolved the National Assembly. Elections were subsequently held on 28 August 2006. Six (6) parties contested the elections.

The final results gave 36 seats to the ruling PPP/C, two more than in the 2001 elections. The PNCR-1G took 22, the AFC won five, while the GAP/ROAR won 1 and the UF 1 seat.

**On 9 October 2011**, President Bharrat Jagdeo called parliamentary elections for 28 November. The PPP/C, which was seeking a fifth straight victory, was challenged by an opposition coalition, A Partnership for National Unity (APNU), led by Mr David Granger, a retired army brigadier. The APNU included the PNCR and the Guyana Action Party, among others. The AFC, the UF and the East Berbice Development Association (EBDA) were also vying for seats in the National Assembly.

The PPP/C remained the largest party with 32 seats but failed to secure a parliamentary majority for the first time in 19 years. The APNU took 26 seats and the AFC, seven. The UF and the EBDA failed to win parliamentary representation.

On 3 December 2011, Mr. Donald Ramotar was sworn in as the new President, announcing that he would form a minority government - the first since Guyana gained independence from Britain in 1966.

Early general elections were held in **Guyana on 11 May 2015**, alongside regional elections. In January

2015, President Ramotar announced the holding of early parliamentary elections, stating that the prorogation of parliament had not eased tensions between the parliamentary parties. Six (6) parties contested the elections. APNU/AFC was awarded 33 seats and the PPP/C was awarded 32 seats. There were several irregularities in the elections, including fake Statements of Poll, non- approval of requests for recounts etc. An Elections Petition was filed by Mr Ganga Persaud on behalf of the PPP/C, interestingly the Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM) moved to the Courts challenging the validity of the petition. The GECOM's challenge was thrown out, yet the Petition has not heard to date.

As can be seen from the Table below the PPP and subsequently with its Civic partners was the most successful political party contesting General Elections in Guyana.

**TABLE REFLECTING THE PPP/C PERFORMANCE IN GENERAL ELECTIONS IN GUYANA 1953 - 2015**

DATE OF ELECTIONS	TOTAL # OF SEATS	SEATS WON BY THE PPP/C	% OF VOTES WON BY THE PPP	TOTAL # OF LISTED VOTERS	% OF VOTERS' TURN OUT
27 April 1953	24	18	51.04	208,939	74.7
12 August 1957	14	9	47.5	212,518	55.7
21 August 1961	35	20	42.6	246,120	89.4
7 December 1964	53	24	45.8	247,604	96.9
16 December 1968	53	ELECTIONS WERE RIGGED WITH THE 1985 ELECTIONS BEING THE MOST MASSIVELY RIGGED.			
16 July 1973	53				
15 December 1980	53				
9 December 1985	53				
5 October 1992	53	28	53.5	384,195	73.8
15 December 1997	53	29	55.2	461,481	88.4
19 March 2001	65	35	52.9	440,185	91.7
28 August 2006	65	36	54.6	492,369	69.3
15 November 2011	65	32	48.6	475,496	72.9
11 May 2015	65	32	49.8	583, 444	72.2



*Mr. Ganga Persaud is a commissioner of the Public Service Commission. He is also a member of the Central Committee of the People's Progressive Party and a Lecturer of the Guyana Learning Institute. He is the holder of a Master's Degree in Management and Supervision, Bachelor's Degrees in Public Management and Education.*

# JANET JAGAN: REBEL 'WITH' A CAUSE



Mrs. Janet Jagan (President of the WPO) acknowledging delegates during a march-past at the commencement of a WPO Congress.

October 20 marked the 100<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of Mrs. Janet Jagan. This was indeed a significant milestone in our political history. Mrs. Jagan was the first female President of Guyana in addition to her several other "firsts."

Janet Jagan stands tall among the great women of history. The prestigious and widely circulated TIME Magazine named her as one of History's Most 'Rebellious' Women.

It is important to put in perspective the term 'rebellious' which did not in any way convey negative connotation but was meant to recognize the role played by those women in challenging the then prevailing status quo which was, in the main, oppressive and anti-people. The other salient point to note is that the recognition by TIME Magazine is not limited to this decade or century. It went back to time immemorial which makes the citation all the more historically significant.

The People's Progressive Party (PPP) and the entire

country for that matter have been given a lift by such recognition and not just Mrs. Jagan. It is unfortunate that she did not live long enough to experience how the world felt about her and her role in the liberation of Guyana from poverty and undemocratic rule. Mrs. Jagan ranks among great women of history including the celebrated Joan of Arc, a 15<sup>th</sup> century French peasant girl who fought against the British and played a key role in the lifting of the siege of Orleans. She was eventually burnt at the stake by the British for heresy and witchcraft but later canonized by the Vatican.

Other popular names mentioned in the TIME Magazine citation included Burmese opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi who spent 15 years under house arrest until recently when she was set free by the military junta and Jiang Qing, wife of former Chinese leader Mao Zedong. These are 'rebels' with a cause; most of whom championed the cause of the poor and the down-trodden at tremendous odds, as in the case of Phoolam



Chairman of the Cheddi Jagan Research Centre, Mr. Hydar Ally, handing over the Janet Jagan Centenary First Day Cover Commemorative Stamp to H.E. President Irfaan Ali at State House.

Devi, who became famous for taking up the plight of India's 'untouchables' and earned in the process the nickname of "Bandit Queen."

In the case of Mrs. Jagan the citation read as follows:

"For Chicago born Janet Jagan, the vibrant labour struggles in the mid-20th century of her own country was not enough. After falling in love with Cheddi Jagan, a Guyanese dentistry student at Northwestern, Jagan followed her future husband, with Lenin's writings in hand, to his homeland in 1943. Setting up shop as a dental assistant, she set on a path that would lead to her becoming Guyana's first woman president.

In 1950, she and her husband formed the People's Progressive Party which sought to promote Marxist ideals as well as decolonization from the United Kingdom. Strikes in what was then referred to as "British Guiana" by domestic workers in the late 1940s had been inspired by the Jagans and the movement attracted the ire of British Prime Minister Winston Churchill who put the Jagans in jail. But Jagan proved to be a political survivor, remaining in the game despite

various attempts to politically purge her from leadership posts.

An impolitic public relations campaign singing the praises of the Cuban revolution attracted the attention of John Kennedy in the 1960s that in turn targeted the country's labour movement. Relegated to the sidelines, after a leftist government flopped in the 1960s Jagan took to the pages of the Mirror newspaper and became its editor. By the time she was elected the country's president in 1997, the country achieved complete independence from Britain that she had sought and nationalized much of its economy."

This citation by TIME Magazine provides a panoramic view of the epic struggles waged by Mrs. Jagan and her husband, Cheddi Jagan, for the liberation of Guyana from the yoke of colonialism and neo-colonialism and for a free and democratic Guyana. This is why the PPP, of which they were founding members, remains wedded to the ideas and ideals that they passionately embraced and defended throughout their political life which together surpassed a hundred years, quite a remarkable contribution by any political couple.

The fact that Janet Jagan was identified as one of the outstanding women of history by an international magazine with a readership that run into millions is, in my view, a fitting tribute to someone who had dedicated her entire life alongside her husband, Dr. Cheddi Jagan, for the cause of humanity. For a small developing country with a population of less than a million people, Mrs. Jagan's contribution had to be extraordinary and outstanding to have gained the notice of the directorate of TIME Magazine.

Despite her undoubted bravery and extraordinary courage, there is also that human side of Mrs. Jagan that is not often given the prominence it deserved. She was a people's person who very often would go out of her way to help persons in need. The list is long of people who have been touched by her outpouring of love and compassion. It was not uncommon for people to take advantage of her generosity by narrating all manner of sad stories but it was never her business to probe into individual's circumstances. She gave what she could afford.

Those of us who had the honour and privilege of knowing her at a personal level can attest to her generosity, integrity and high moral and ethical standards. I had the accolade of sharing the centre-spread of the Mirror newspaper for several years with her and I cannot recall her missing an edition. What I found very useful as a columnist was the encouragement and support she gave me from time to time which served to enhance my confidence as a columnist. She served as Editor for both the Mirror and the Thunder, the theoretical organ of the PPP and ensured that the publications went out on a timely and regular basis, an indication of her disciplined approach to work.

It speaks to her creativity and ingenuity that she managed to effectively multi-tasked and combined her several roles of mother, wife, politician, journalist and writer into a seemingly integrated whole. As far as I can recall she never missed an assignment be it an article for publication or any other task assigned to her. She was

never late for meetings and was intolerant of mediocrity or indiscipline.

Apart from her numerous articles she also wrote several books including children's stories. These are all stories about the virtues of good over evil, honesty and kindness to others which in fundamental ways reflected her own personality and character.

I remain indebted to her for encouraging me to keep on writing. She would from time to time send me handwritten notes in which she would commend me for my articles in the Thunder or the Mirror. She was at the same time not shy in pointing out areas of perceived deficiencies, all of which when taken together helped to improve my writing skills. She even took it upon herself to put together a selected number of my articles in the Thunder and Mirror in a booklet titled 'Insightful Views on Guyana' in which she was kind enough to write the Foreword.

Like all mortals, age in the end had taken its toll and slowed her down. She resigned from the presidency before the end of her tenure due to failing health but she remained committed right to the very end to the things she loved doing most, writing for and editing the Mirror and the Thunder. During that period, I had the opportunity of interacting with her on a regular basis where she would share with me stories and experiences some of which will remain confidential.

To say that Mrs. Jagan has made her contribution to Guyana would be an understatement. She helped to shape the political and social landscapes of Guyana in fundamental ways and in the process transformed the lives of countless Guyanese positively. She can truly be considered a role-model for all Guyanese and for women in particular. As mentioned earlier, she faced a number of challenges but she took them all in strides without malice or ill will.

A Guyanese, indeed a world icon had departed the world stage but her vision of a better and more humane society continues to live on and inspire future generations.



*Mr. Hydar Ally is currently the Chairman of the Cheddi Jagan Research Centre. He is the author of two publications: "Pragmatism or Opportunism? Guyana's Foreign Policy Behaviour 1966-1985" and "Insightful Views on Guyana." He is the holder of a Master's Degree in Political Science and also Graduate Diploma in Developing Studies. He serves as a member of the Public Service Appellate Tribunal.*

# Between Two Important Anniversaries of the Chinese Revolution

We are in between observing the 70 anniversary of the People's Republic of China, which was observed in October of 2019 and the centenary of the Communist Party of China (CPC), which will be celebrated in July, 2021.

These dates are linked. The founding of the CPC in 1921 was indispensable to the victory of the progressive forces in China in October, 1949, twenty-eight years after the formation of the CPC.

The progressive and peace-loving people everywhere joined with the Chinese people in observing the anniversary of the great victory in October, 2019. They are also ready to mark the birth anniversary of the CPC with the same gusto.

As mentioned, these events had a tremendous positive impact globally. The revolution of 1949 destroyed the feudal, semi-feudal economic relations and the semi-colonial relations in China. Millions of people were liberated from thousands of years of oppression and for the first time could straighten their backs.

Over the past seventy years, China has chalked up great advances in every aspect of life and work.

At the time of the revolution, China was one of the poorest countries in the world. Poverty was all pervasive affecting the vast majority of people. It had very few industries and its agricultural base was backward, even primitive.

Socially, the people were also in desperate straits. Illiteracy affected more than 80% of the population. Economic figures in China began to be kept from 1952 and that showed the country had a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of just US\$30 Billion.

In 2018, China's GDP grew to US\$13.61 Trillion. This is a remarkable achievement by any standard, an increase of more than 450 times.

The whole country was transformed from being an agricultural society to an industrial one. Now China is in the post-industrial stage where technology and innovation have become more important drivers of the economy. This incidentally is one of the features of a developed economy.

Added to these impressive gains is China's services sector. It has become one of the strongest in the world.

These include all kinds of services and financial services. It is the largest holder of a foreign currency reserve.

Unlike many developed capitalist countries where we find tremendous wealth coexisting with great poverty, China's distribution of its wealth is impacting on the whole population. This can be gleaned from some of the figures in the social sector. It is determined to put an end to poverty.

Life expectancy in 1949 was just 35 years. In 2018 it was 77 years, more than double. This is obviously due to far better nutritional foods and improved medical services. In fact, China has the largest social security network today where 941 million people are covered by pension insurance and 1.3 billion are covered by basic medical insurance.

In the sphere of education China has progressed from a state where 80% of the population was illiterate in 1949, to a position of universal literacy. The country has achieved both universal secondary and primary education while tertiary education is almost 50%. The goal is universal tertiary education as well.

China's investment in its people has enabled it to build a highly innovative society with a very educated work force. It was able to create a complete industrial system with all of the industries in the United Nations classification criteria. It leads the world in many pioneering endeavors. For instance, it is experimenting with producing flying motor cars and innovations and technology are being used to modernize all aspect of life in China.

The agriculture sector has experienced a phenomenal change. In 2018 the country had 22.38 million tractors, including 2 million combine harvesters in its fields. Today it is almost totally self-sufficient in food production. No mean feat when we consider that the size of the population is some 1.4 billion people.

The great progress that the country has made in a relatively short historical period has had a very beneficial impact on the world at large.

China's contribution to the global economic growth is now 30%. That has made her the strongest driver in the international economy. This is a leap from 1.1% between 1961 to 1978, 15.9% between 1979 to 2012, and 28.1% from 2013 to 2018. By any yardstick this is a tremendous achievement.



President Xi Jin Ping and Former President Donald Ramotar during a CARICOM/CHINA meeting in Jamaica in 2015.

China has also become the largest trading partner and largest export market for some 130 countries. The Belt and Road Initiative which was the brain child of President Xi Jin Ping and launched in 2013 will accelerate global progress and will have tremendous benefits for the whole world. This is the single most important international initiative and is most likely to become the major driver of the international economy.

China's massive progress was not always smooth. Since 1949 it had periods of progress and setbacks. It is important to examine and learn from the experience of China on how to build a prosperous society in which the wealth would be more fairly distributed to benefit all.

After the victory in 1949 China forged close relations with the then Soviet Union and other Eastern European socialist states. That helped to start her on the road to progress. It was this cooperation that led to the beginning of the industrialization of the country. Most of the projects were heavy industries. Light industries were not given priority at that time.

The steady progress was interrupted by mistakes made internally. Buoyed by the early successes, the leadership of the party took a decision to accelerate economic progress even more rapidly. That led to the "Great Leap Forward" policy. That decision proved to be a very costly mistake. Added to the internal problems, involving the stagnating economy, were the disagreements that emerged between the Soviet Union and the Eastern European countries on the one hand and China on the other, these led to a rupture of relations in the 1960s.

The CPC leadership recognized the problem and began a process of rectification. The new policy which was adopted respected economic laws. It began to show much progress and the socio-economic conditions improved during the mid-1960s. However, once more internal mistakes were made. The launch of the "Cultural

Revolution" during the last part of the 1960s arrested that progress and a reversal took place once again. Within the CPC, many discussions began about a way forward. That led to a struggle in the party that came to a head soon after the death of Chairman Mao Tse-Tung.

The group that emerged victorious was led by Deng Xiao Ping. This group was very strong theoretically and saw the need for change. It recognized that there was need to free up the productive forces, to remove the impediments to production. This group proposed a line of opening up to the world, recognizing that China was at a very early stage of transition to socialism and it needed to build a strong working class to advance the process. Changes had to be made in the organization of production both in agriculture and in industry, to respect the stages of the society's development.

This was really an example of the creative application of Marxism- Leninism to the concrete conditions that existed in China at the time.

It was also a total break with the Soviet Model of building Socialism. The Soviet Model was based on a closed society and a closed economy. This was probably forced on the Soviet Union due to the hostility it faced from the west since the inception of its revolution in 1917. To protect the young Soviet State they more or less isolated themselves from the world economy. That was the model that other countries that were attempting to build Socialism followed. China's new line in 1978 was a complete break with that method. In pursuing a new line, the Chinese leaders came under heavy criticism from many left parties. It was even accused by many Communist parties of departing from Marxism-Leninism and retreating to Capitalism. This was because most, in that period, were sold on the Soviet Model, which undoubtedly had great achievements as well, but which began failing at the beginning of the Scientific and Technological Revolution in the early 1970s.

At this juncture, too, the Cold War was at its height. The US, recognizing the division between the Soviet Union and China, sought to use the situation to its advantage. The then president of the US was President Richard Nixon who was one of its most intellectual presidents and one of the most knowledgeable in international affairs. Nixon obviously thought that by cooperating with China he would be pushing China towards Capitalism, while isolating the Soviet Union, which was regarded as the main opponent of the west during the Cold War.

The Chinese leadership, on the other hand, recognized the dangers and was clearly aware of the motives of the US. However, they saw in that relation, a chance to end its own isolation and saw an opportunity to use it for the purpose of building Socialism in China.

In a way, the Chinese position was quite similar to

Vladimir Lenin's New Economic Policy (NEP). Lenin's thought process was taking him on the same path which the Chinese took. China managed the situation skillfully and its model of building Socialism stands out for all to see. In the process, some of what was considered very reactionary, when looked at objectively, tells another story.

For instance, China attracted a lot of foreign capital and many huge multi-national corporations took advantage of the opening up to maximize their profits.

China saw multi-national corporations as Capitalism at its worse but also as an organizational form of the productive forces at this new stage of development in the world.

China itself has developed huge corporations, both state-owned and privately owned. What, however, is important is the content of these mega-institutions. China has succeeded in making them serve the general good of the country and to enhance its people's quality of life, materially and culturally.

In passing, I would say that the process which began in 1978 turned out to vindicate Lenin's change in the 1920s to the NEP which was aborted by Joseph Stalin.

In today's world China's great successes have not only gained her new friends but new hostilities as well, particularly from the US. The US clearly fears the growing influence of China internationally. The US, in particular, and in the west generally are trying to retard China's growth. The US has generated considerable hostility towards China. A lot of slander, half-truths and lies have been heaped on China's assistance to the developing world. The real reason is the fear of China's growing.

The trade sanctions and other economic aggressions point to the goal of slowing or even halting the progress of China. In so doing some of the principles of Capitalism itself are being trampled upon.

For instance, free competition is being jettisoned. A case in point is that of Huawei and TikTok. Having no companies to compete with these Chinese hi-tech companies, the Donald Trump administration is using state power to damage Chinese companies or to have them taken

over by US corporations. This is violating all the rules of international trade and also one of the foundations on which Capitalism itself has been built.

It should be noted that the US had overthrown governments who tried to deal with its companies in a similar way. To justify this blatant violation of international trade, the fig leaf of national security is being resorted to. In so doing China is being demonized in western media.

Of course, none of the accusations can stand up to any unbiased examination. China, philosophically, does not have any intention of aggression.

Marxism, which is the guide of Chinese state policies, promotes solidarity, peace and unity. Objectively also China needs peace. It is only within the atmosphere of peace and security in the world that China can continue to grow.

It is peace that will give it the opportunity to engage with more and more countries in the world. It does not seek to promote its weapons industry but to promote civilian companies instead. Therefore wars are not in China's interests. The fear, artificially generated, against China is very irrational and without any real basis. It can be nothing other than an attempt to force the Chinese government on the defensive in its international engagements.

China has always advocated a peaceful foreign policy. It has always advocated the settlement of problems by dialogue and constantly searches for peaceful solutions to international problems. There is simply no real evidence of Chinese aggressive intentions.

The contributions of the Chinese people to their own development and to that of the world are great indeed. It has all been to promote and develop the countries which they have these relations. It has always been on the principle of mutual benefits to all parties.

These were made possible by the two anniversaries, the formation of the CPC in 1921 to be celebrated next year and the victory of the Chinese Revolution in 1949 which was celebrated in 1919.



*Mr. Donald Ramotar is the former President of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana. He also served as General Secretary of the People's Progressive Party. Mr. Ramotar is a graduate from the University of Guyana in the field of Economics. He is an avid writer, and contributes regularly to the Mirror newspaper and other publications.*

Janet Jagan, Phyllis Coard and Claudia Jones

# Three Caribbean Women Punished for their Beliefs!



Claudia Jones



Janet Jagan



Phyllis Coard

***Tribute to an Amazing Caribbean Communist Triplet in Commemoration of Janet Jagan's Centenary Birth Anniversary.***

***What do Janet Jagan, Phyllis Coard and Claudia Jones have in common? They're among a small group of Caribbean women whose contributions were simply great, but were tormented for life for their political beliefs and their progressive roles were suppressed by those falsely documenting Caribbean history, all three being eternally dog-tagged by ideological detractors and opponents with 'communist' labels.***

***The three also made their greatest political contributions to nations and countries they were not born in and each contributed to the protection and defense of the right of the people they served to universal access to information.***

***As the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Janet Jagan's birth was commemorated on October 20, 2020 and with Phyllis Coard and Claudia Jones also celebrated in London, it's worth recalling a few snippets of this amazing Communist Triplet.***

## **Janet Jagan**

Janet Rosenberg, born in Chicago, USA, married Cheddi Jagan in 1943 and joined him forever in his native Guyana, giving-up her US citizenship in the 1960s and eventually becoming, upon his death in 1997, the longest-serving elected Member of the National Assembly (Guyana's Parliament), with an unbroken record: 55 years representing the People's Progressive Party (PPP) that she and her husband had helped form in 1950.

Apart from her daily political routine with the PPP and as President of the Women's Progressive Organization (WPO), Janet spent five decades as Editor of 'Thunder' (the PPP's theoretical journal), as well as Editor in Chief of the 'Mirror' (the PPP's newspaper), where I worked alongside her as Editor from 1993 to 1999.

A journalist and writer of several books who was also President of the Union of Guyanese Journalists (UGJ), Comrade Janet reluctantly vacated her table and ribboned typewriter in the main office among the Mirror editorial staff and was virtually uplifted to the Office of Prime Minister to replace Sam Hinds, who, as Prime Minister, had constitutionally acceded to the Presidency following

Cheddi's death in 1997 at the Walter Reed Military Hospital in the USA.

Janet, as Prime Minister and Vice President, was equally reluctant, at first, to replace her husband as the PPP's presidential candidate and only conceded after being convinced she had the best chance of leading a united party into its first post-Cheddi presidential election.

Despite fierce People's National Congress (PNC) opposition, Janet was elected President of the Republic, but the political leadership in the PNC mounted a violent campaign to prevent her from being sworn-in, on the basis that 'She was not born in Guyana' – and in many cases, with the purely unadulterated and undisguised racist argument that despite all her qualifying political records, 'She is White!'

The PNC remained resolute in opposing Janet as the new President Jagan even after she was constitutionally sworn-in, mounting daily protests that eventually resulted in loud and overwhelming calls for CARICOM's intervention through a 'peace-keeping mission.'

The result: a politically unfair conclusion that Guyana's first freely and fairly elected woman President should forego her five-year term and shorten it by more than two years - and with fresh elections that she would not contest - resulting in Bharrat Jagdeo becoming the youngest elected President of the Republic at age 36.

After it all, Janet would return to the Mirror until her sight and other frailties of old age (that she had so gracefully side-stepped) started catching-up with her at paces too regular to allow for continuity.

Janet wrote several books, including a series of children's story books; and she continued writing opinions and maintained a weekly Mirror advice column called 'Dear Portia' answering weekly letters from troubled persons about troublesome relationships.

But through it all, she maintained the newspaper would not carry advertisements encouraging Guyanese to seek 'domestic' or other forms of low-paid employment in the USA 'that exposed them to racism, exploitation and violation of their rights...'

While Cheddi was the first declared Marxist-Leninist to be elected to lead a government in Latin America and the Caribbean (1953), Janet became the first known Communist woman to be elected as a Head of Government in the Caribbean Community (CARICOM).

But, like the Salvador Allende government in Chile (1971-1973), the Grenada Revolution ended in similar mortality, disastrous circumstances and the second Jagan Presidency in Guyana was forcibly ended in August, 1999.

Janet died quietly in March, 2009 at the ripe young age of 89, after serving as First Lady, Prime Minister, and President of the Republic.

## **Phyllis Coard**

Phyllis Coard led the National Organization of Women (NOW) during the Grenada Revolution and was Minister of Information in the People's Revolutionary Government (PRG). She also contributed greatly to the introduction of laws protecting women and children, encouraged women to form cooperatives, promoted and ensured equal pay and job opportunities for women.

As Information Minister, she also helped create the conditions for the state media to develop in ways that guaranteed flow of truthful information to the people of the three-island state of Grenada, Carriacou and Petit Martinique.

Phyllis laboriously penned her life's story in a colorful memoir entitled 'Unchained: A Caribbean Woman's Journey Through Invasion, Incarceration and Liberation' featuring her experiences during and after the Revolution, her arrest, detention and being jailed as a political prisoner for 17 years before being released on 'compassionate' grounds after developing cancer in prison.

She laboured with others to establish the New Jewel Movement (NJM) and was a member of its Central Committee, hence being collectively accused of ordering the death of the Revolution's leader Maurice Bishop, following the disastrous internal division in the party that eventually led to the Revolution effectively committing suicide.

Phyllis would live for 20 years nursing her cancer with Bernard Coard at her side every day after his subsequent release, but even on her dying bed she was treated as a *bete noir* by those who accepted the unproven story that she and Bernard (and members of the Central Committee) actually plotted Maurice's death.

However, she lived to see and hear her own account of her life accepted and appreciated by increasing numbers of people worldwide and across the Caribbean who belatedly cared to read and listen. Just as Bernard has penned a volume of five books explaining the accused Grenada 17's telling version of what really happened in Grenada before, during and after the Revolution.

Phyllis died in hospital in her native Jamaica on September 6, 2020, aged 76 – with 'Nightingale' Bernard still at her side.

## **Claudia Jones**

Claudia Jones (1915-1964) was a Trinidadian who migrated to the USA in 1924 with her family. She eventually joined the Communist Party to promote the causes of Black and White Women and agitate for the rights of immigrants and minorities.

A Black feminist in the age of Marcus Garvey and the United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), she agitated for respect for Black Women across America and authored her best-known work entitled 'An End to the Neglect of the Problems of the Poor Negro Woman.'

As an immigrant, never mind her legal status, Claudia was incessantly harassed in America, arrested and jailed more than once and eventually deported in 1950.

But since the colonial authorities in Port of Spain would not allow her back into her own country, she ended up as a refugee in London, where she contributed greatly, while battling sickness, to organize among West Indian, African and Asian immigrants, while also supporting African struggles and calling for Nelson Mandela's release.

Claudia Jones' main celebrity achievement in London, however, was a series of West Indian carnival events in 1958 that led to establishment of what is now the Notting Hill Carnival in 1959.

Claudia's main role though, was as a journalist who launched the 'West Indian Gazette and Afro-Asian News' in 1958, which newspaper promoted and defended the rights of Caribbean, Asian and African people in the UK.

Claudia died aged 49 on Christmas Eve in 1964. In January, 1965 she was buried next to the tomb of her political icon, Karl Marx, at Highgate Cemetery in London, in a funeral addressed by Paul Robeson.

### Common Denominators

Never mind their valuable personal contributions in countries they were not born in, Janet Jagan, Phyllis Coard and Claudia Jones paid the highest political costs for their demonstrated commitment to representation of people and in the case of the first two, faced cruel punishment for the persons they chose to marry and accompany for the rest of their lives.

All three contributed supremely to the politics and history of their adopted homes, as well as in separate and different but largely similar ways. Their shared common denominator being their lifelong commitment to creating positive, progressive and revolutionary change in lands they adopted – or that adopted them.

Each, before they departed this planet, had different but similar perspectives on the radical differences between the social and political changes they fought for and contributed to, the political parties they built and the legacies they bequeathed in and out of office.

### Women of Substance

Their worth as women of substantial substance, like the everlasting beauty of their contributions, will be valued in the eyes of the beholders, whether focused or wide open.

But in all three cases, their respective contributions in writing and to the universal access of citizens of the Caribbean, the USA, the UK and the world to accurate information will be eternal, as they've left more to be discovered about them than would have been recorded from the utterances and scribbles of even their self-confessed eternal critics.

Their nihilistic critics only saw Phyllis and Janet as their respective husbands' wives and never respected them as firm women, each with demonstrated ability to independently stand alongside, hand-in-hand, in partnership with - and not behind - the men they married.

They were only regarded as 'Communists' for the sole negative purpose of using those labels against them, not for their rightful roles of promoting equality, defending rights and actively pursuing revolutionary and progressive political change.

But, like all before them likewise branded correctly but for incorrect and devious reasons, yet who survived despite the contrived hostilities, Janet, Phyllis and Claudia all survived the odds to be proven correct and consistent in (voluntary or involuntary) flexible application of their respective beliefs and philosophies.

They remained themselves to the very end and departed proud to have made their respective contributions, over time, to the political and organizational processes that engaged their entire lives.

**POSTSCRIPT:** October is the month to remember all three women.

Janet Jagan's birthday was October 20 and she would have been 100 this year, with appropriate celebrations being organized by the Red House Foundation established in memory of Cheddi and Janet, in Guyana, where her party, the PPP, is back in office after yet another effort to steal an election it won fairly.

Phyllis Coard was definitely remembered during the annual Grenada 1983 commemorative and memorial events held during October, 2020 in London, which this year was done mainly online and in keeping with observance of COVID-19 protocols.

And the National Union of Journalists' Black Members' Council in the UK held its prestigious, annual Claudia Jones Memorial Lecture in October virtually, during Black History Month, to honor and celebrate her contribution to Black-British journalism.



*Mr. Earl Bousquet was a former Editor of the Mirror Newspaper. He was Chairman of the Board of Directors for the television station GTV and a Director at the Guyana Broadcasting Corporation. As a veteran Journalist, Mr. Bousquet served in various capacities in a number of regional and international organisations including the International Organisation of Journalists (IOJ).*

**Editor's Note: Mr. Komal Chand passed away prior to the publication of this article. He was a past contributor to The Thinker and other publications.**

# National Elections and Issues for the Working People



From left to right Cdes. Komal Chand, Dharamkumar Seeraj, Frank Anthony and Ganga Persaud at a workers' forum.

By the time this article is published, our country will be about three (3) months away from the March 02, 2020, National and Regional Elections. It should not be lost in this presentation though that there is a real fear that a distinct possibility exists that certain shenanigans may be pursued to thwart the date of the election. Time will ultimately answer this question. The elections, of course, as is now well known, are about one-year overdue. The Government of David Granger after initially accepting the consequence of a No Confidence vote, approved by the majority of the National Assembly, quickly back-peddled. There was a lengthy and costly delay after there was a legal challenge to the No-Confidence Motion (NCM). The courts decisively answered that question. However, other hurdles were thrown in the way and thus, ultimately the date in March, 2020 was set, so far that is.

We should remind ourselves that the election of a country's leadership is an essential tenet in the process of democratic renewal. It allows citizens an opportunity, through their franchise, to play a decisive role in deciding not only their future, but their children's, and possibly grandchildren's, future. Electors are expected to be rational and make a choice for those who have

championed their interest and have their well-being at heart and in mind. Elections in Guyana, at the same time, have always been viewed with a great degree of skepticism and an atmosphere of anxiety has tended to grip the nation. Such feelings, of course, are not unfounded. We have had a sordid past filled with electoral malpractices aimed at undermining the will of the people. This author himself has first-hand knowledge. In the 1973 election, as an agent of the People's Progressive Party (PPP), I observed ballots different from those cast at the Kawall Government School being delivered to the Army Headquarters to be counted. Former President Janet Jagan documented this observation in her book *"Army Intervention in the 1973 Elections in Guyana."*

Coming back to contemporary times, the March 2020 elections are being deemed by several as the 'Mother of all Elections.' It is hard to disagree with such a description. Our country is on the precipice of possible political transformational changes and expectedly economic prosperity. The discovery of hydrocarbons offshore Guyana has placed a substantial focus on our small nation. It is said that we can very well experience our Gross Domestic Product (GDP) expanding by over 80 per cent next year. For our country, this will be unprecedented. This perception may not be an idle one as management of the proceeds from our oil and gas resources must be of central interest to all our people, especially our working people.

This promise of great wealth has fanned the belief that this factor will impact our upcoming elections. We cannot be unaware that a decisive and, possibly, the largest bloc of voters will come from among our nation's working people. Given what has already been revealed in the oil and gas sector they have certainly much to be concerned about as well as a right to show great interest as to who will manage the proceeds.

Regarding this aspect, additional importance is, therefore, attached to Elections 2020. To get a better understanding of how much of an impact the working-



Members of the PPP/C Cabinet at the swearing in of the historic government in August, 2020.

people will make in the elections, let us consider that there were some 570,000 eligible voters in the 2015 elections. This must be juxtaposed to the labour force which, according to the most recently available Guyana Labour Force Survey, stood at 280,148 persons. In other words, the nation's workers represent just about half of all the nation's voters. Their vote clearly has a critical sway in this as in all free and fair elections. It is, therefore, disheartening for me, as someone who has been associated with the working-class for the greater part of my adult life, to see the scant regard that has been given, in recent times, to the troubling matters that have beset the nation's workers and their families.

Workers and those near and dear to them have been literally expected to fend for themselves given the general deterioration of services, level of joblessness, burdensome taxation, rising cost-of-living and so on. The embrace of neo-liberal economic policies has been more harmful and has only served to exacerbate inequality in our country as more hardships are experienced by our ordinary people. A recent statement by the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Guyana (FITUG) drives home, vividly, the seriousness of the situation. The country's largest trade union umbrella body, pointed out, that in spite of successive pay rises to public sector workers there still is a massive void between the haves and the have-nots. According to the Federation, *"...a Junior Minister month's pay and benefits would be equivalent to the pay of nearly 25 public servants at the new minimum pay; for Cabinet Ministers it would be almost 27 persons; for Vice Presidents, it would be almost 28 persons, and for the Prime Minister it would reach an astounding 39 persons."* It appears that the hope of a living wage is out-of-reach, at least under current

political leadership that is now illegally occupying the office.

Of course, the stark disparities should not be disconnected from other actions of the regime that promised a "Good Life for All Guyanese." Let us recall that one of their first acts after getting into office was the dismantling of the Ministry of Labour. The workers' ministry, as it were, has been subsumed under the Social Protection Ministry as a mere department. To better understand the significance of this decision, let us remember that the last time there was a Department of Labour was in 1953. At that time, the first Government of the PPP, elected under adult suffrage, among its many noteworthy achievements, despite its truncated tenure, established a Ministry of Labour. It was the first time, in our history that the workers of Guyana had a full-fledged ministry to safeguard their rights and to advance their protections. That tradition continued into independence with Presidents Forbes Burnham, Desmond Hoyte, Cheddi Jagan, Samuel Hinds, Janet Jagan, Bharrat Jagdeo and Donald Ramotar all upholding the Labour Ministry as a full-fledged ministry. That is, of course, until Mr. David Granger and clan came along and overturned decades of tradition and practice that was supportive of our workers.

The dismantling of the Labour Ministry also should not be seen as an isolated event. Mr. Granger, as Opposition Leader, in 2014 had deemed that year as Year for Workers. January 01, 2014, Stabroek News reported Mr. Granger to say the year *"...must be one in which our working people should be able to look forward to a good life. It should be one in which they could look forward to living in safety, to working for 'living wages' to cope with the cost of living and to enjoying adequate social protection in their old age."* Granger continued, *"...workers can feel free to join trade unions of their choice; in which collective bargaining agreements between their employers and their unions will be respected and in which the state will enforce labour laws fairly but firmly to protect them from adversity and from delinquent employers."*

Good language, but the Granger government has abandoned that mask and all the lofty promises he made. Notably, the coalition's term in office has seen no labour-centric legislation enacted. It has not even seen the wisdom of even enhancing workers' rights through amendments, though they are more than a few that are required. Instead, it has, without any shame, disobeyed, disregarded and disrespected the lawful rights of workers.

In the sugar industry, the union has had to resort to the court to uphold workers right to severance. In the public sector, the commitment to collective bargaining remains just that, a commitment. And, the talk of a living wage remains more elusive than the Golden City of El Dorado. The government professes its love for workers but hardly demonstrates this affection in any credible way.

But the undermining of workers' rights is not the end of the sad tale. Today, workers are being weighed down by an unbearable cost-of-living. Workers must contend with a litany of tax measures which has seen them now paying taxes on previously exempted and zero-rated goods. To get a better understanding of how taxes have impacted on the ordinary people, I refer to another public statement by FITUG. The Federation, in responding to the Finance Minister, pointed out that *"...taxes per person have risen from \$181,088 in 2014 to an estimated \$300,809 in 2019. In other words, taxes per person have gone up by over 66 percent in just five (5) years."* Apart from that reality, as disturbing as it is, workers must swallow, bitterly, increased costs for water, telephone and public transportation. Given the harsh realities of life in our day, workers must find innovative ways to survive for them and their families. Today, workers may be required to assist their retired parents whose water and electricity subsidies were taken away. For the workers, the rule of the coalition has not been easy with hopes for a bright future shattered. Of course, the worries have not abated. The Finance Minister recently disclosed that some 15,000 – 20,000 public sector workers might be fired presumably if his government is re-elected. As my union pointed out, the threatened layoff from the public service is mind-boggling. As we head into the election, these issues undoubtedly will come to the fore and again the defences which would certainly be offered by the incumbent, now caretaker; administration will be assessed against the painful experiences faced daily by our workers and their dependents.

It should also cause us to question if this is the grouping we wish to entrust with our future and the future of

our country. Are these the individuals who are best able and capable to manage our economic affairs at this crucial time in our political and economic history, given, importantly the appearance of the oil and gas industry?

As the Guyana Agricultural Workers Union (GAWU) raised with the IMF, in an engagement earlier this year, there are real possibilities *"...of inequality between the oil and non-oil sectors of the economy..."* this the union added has *"...ramifications for wider societal issues."* So far, the government hasn't answered how it would address this 'elephant-in-the-room.' One of the mechanisms employed in other countries facing similar circumstances has been through unconditional cash transfers. I hasten to add that this is an idea that requires more significant consideration as it can also have, still unforeseen consequences.

Clearly, they are many weighty issues which require focused attention and clear thoughts at this time. There is much to gain and there is much we stand to lose as well. The stake of our lives, our children, our grandchildren and the generations of tomorrow must be borne in mind. These are matters which, I believe, require skilled and capable hands at the wheel. We must ask ourselves, can we continue along this path – a path which has seen us retrogress rather than progress? Ultimately, the answer will be given on March 02, 2020, at which time the working people will have their decisive say. I remain optimistic that the coalition, given their unenviable record over the past five (5) years, will be rejected in the elections.



*The late Komal Chand was a long standing executive member of the People's Progressive Party (PPP), a Member of Parliament and President of the Guyana Agricultural Workers Union (GAWU). He was a strong advocate for workers' rights and a defender of democracy.*

# The Other Side of Cde. Janet



Sadie Amin and President Janet Jagan at a wedding of a member of the 1997 PPP/C government.

October 20, 2020 was the centenary of the birth anniversary of the late, former President Janet Jagan, OE. The Guyana Post Office Corporation issued a commemorative stamp to mark the occasion and it was launched at State House under the patronage of His Excellency, President Irfaan Ali. In keeping with COVID 19 measures, the event was controlled as to numbers of attendees. I was in attendance and couldn't help but think the crowd size would have met with Mrs. Jagan's approval. I smiled when I reflected on how she abhorred what she perceived as fanfare being made over her. I could imagine her saying: "Ah, why all the fuss? I don't need such an accolade." But she would have been wrong as such recognition is well deserved.

The name Janet Jagan conjures all kinds of response from all segments of society, locally, regionally and internationally. Some loved her. Some hated her. She was a heroine or a villain, a friend or a foe. Only history can absolve or condemn her. I will not delve into the debate on her public or political life. There is enough recorded information to read and make conclusions. Good, bad or indifferent, Guyanese have to admit that Mrs. Jagan has had a tremendous impact and influence on our nation since her arrival on our shores in 1943 up until her death in 2009. That is the public persona. What

most people didn't know much about was the private side of Janet Jagan. Her kindness, her fierce loyalty, her generosity of spirit, her care and consideration for those less fortunate, her grudges, her wit and charm but most of all her positive, upbeat attitude to life in general.

My sojourn with Cde. Janet (as she was respectfully referred to by party comrades) started in the lead-up to the 1997 General Elections up until her death. It was a relatively short period of time as some of her associations and friendships spanned in excess of fifty years. But I got to know her during a significant period: her brief tenure as Guyana's first female Prime Minister, a reluctant presidential candidate, the hectic campaign trail, the vicious opposition strategies to deny her the presidency, her swearing in as the first female Executive President, the post-elections strife and mayhem, the statecraft and diplomacy of accepting a reduced term of office, her resignation as president and the post-presidency and private life of this remarkable woman.

Like many party comrades, I initially knew Cde. Janet from going to Freedom House. She was pleasant but reserved, almost aloof. One day I was wearing a chunky necklace consisting of semi-precious stones. She came up to me and complimented me on "pulling off" such an exotic piece of jewelry and "in the day time no less." I wasn't sure if she was being sarcastic. But it was the longest conversation I ever had with her. More than the customary three minutes or less. She told me she didn't have the confidence to wear such bold jewelry but that she loved semi-precious stones and had a book on gems and that her daughter and son-in-law were jewellers in Canada.

Two weeks after I received a call from the receptionist at Freedom House saying she had a package for me from Cde. Janet. It was her book on gems. Attached was an almost incomprehensible hand-written note saying: "Sadie, here's my book on gems. Check out the part on smoky opals (one of my favorites). Also my birthstone. I have one in a lovely setting. Will show you the next time I see you. Make sure you return my book. Cdes have an awful habit of not returning books." After a delightful read of the book I promptly returned it as I also harbored a gripe about non-return of my books. Therein began our exchange of books and notes. It took me a while to figure out her handwriting at a first reading.

After the death of President Cheddi Jagan in 1997 I decided to volunteer my time at Freedom House. I was assigned the position of Secretary to the General



President Janet Jagan and Sadie Amin on vacation in Barbados. In the background is the historic Sam Lord's Castle.

Secretary, Donald Ramotar. At the start of the 1997 campaign a letter written by a disgruntled party comrade disparaging Cde. Janet was widely circulated. In the missive, a statement was attributed to me, which was a lie. Cde. Janet, on seeing how upset I was, comforted me. She quoted Eleanor Roosevelt to the effect that women in politics had to have skin as tough as a rhinoceros. She shared some insights on some character assassinations on her. The next day she invited me to accompany her to a political meeting. Thereafter I became her informal aide.

By the time she was sworn in as president, we had experienced many unusual situations: at a meeting in Buxton someone threw an egg at the podium she was speaking at. Without batting an eyelid, Cde. Janet responded: "The PPP has improved the country so much in the last five years that you can't even find a rotten egg to throw at me." Later a small pebble was thrown at her resulting in a small cut to her hand. She dismissed that as "small potatoes." I witnessed first-hand the adoration of the masses for this undaunted woman. At functions and rallies she was heavily garlanded with fresh flowers sometimes with ants still in them. She endured the small inconveniences and always insisted on disposing the garlands in running water. This was her sensitization to religious and cultural norms. I learned more about being Guyanese from a person who was considered foreign yet knew more about local customs and traditions than most. After she assumed the presidency I was formally appointed Special Assistant to the President with the grand salary of \$1 per year.

I enjoyed working with Cde. Janet. She was a hard but

rewarding taskmistress. Short on patience for slackers and chronic complainers but high in praise for hard work and commitment. This woman was a stickler for punctuality, meeting deadlines and keeping her word once she gave it. If she held herself out to do something for a member of the public she doggedly called every public official until the end was attained. She rarely openly criticized when others showed weakness or failure. The presidency was grueling in terms of time yet her attention to party work and in particular, the Mirror newspapers, never diminished. Later when I became the editor of the Mirror I dreaded the red mark-ups on the papers at the weekly editorial board meeting. Happy were the days when there were no red pen scrawls. The Mirror was her pride and joy.

Some lesser know things about Cde. Janet was her love of reading and keeping up with current events worldwide. She had a voracious appetite for books, magazines and anything in print form. With a hectic schedule of official duties it was amazing that she found time to read as much as she did. She was an avid patron of the arts and had a substantial collection of paintings and artifacts. In her zeal to support "poor starving artists" she would occasionally purchase pieces she wasn't particularly fond of in order to help out. Cde. Janet and I served on the management committee of Castellani House, the National Art Gallery, where she actively pursued the repatriation of Guyanese art that were in other countries. Her intervention was necessary for the preservation of the murals at the Cheddi Jagan International Airport which almost met a disastrous end.

Cde. Janet was a person who remembered birthdays,

gave significant mementoes as gifts, wrote encouraging notes, sent flowers or visited sick or shut-in comrades and friends. She brushed off attention to herself but ensured the well-being of others. Her generosity was manifest in many ways. Most Saturdays when she met members of the public at Freedom House there were a number of persons who she gave charity to. It was always done in private, never letting the person lose his/her dignity. On days when she was absent, her driver or I were tasked with taking the money to the recipients. Her disregard for security concerns when she was president was somewhat challenging to the guards. She insisted on going to the market and personal shopping, making unscheduled stops, picking up persons who needed a ride en route. Once when we were on a private vacation in St. Kitts she wanted to travel incognito. It took quite an effort to get her to accept a security detail as a sitting head of state. She did not care for pomp and ceremony.

After she demitted office in 1999 Cde. Janet continued to engage in party and public life. She went daily to Freedom House, never missed submitting her weekly article to the Mirror, and kept engagements that would tire a much younger person. Her family meant the world to her especially her five grandchildren. In addition to her proliferation of political writings she wrote children's books with Guyanese themes. She was keen on promoting the rights and works of women particularly rural women whom she considered unsung heroines. Although she had a few medical conditions her wit and faculty were sharply intact. Her independence and zeal for life made one marvel at her ability to keep up her strenuous workload. Even a broken arm once did not disrupt her

daily routine unaided. She enjoyed swimming and going out to restaurants and the occasional late night coffee shops. She did not anger easily but held an occasional grudge. We had quite a few heated debates and periods of silence albeit not too often. A friend once told me that Cde. Janet didn't like her because she got the "crocodile smile." I laughed but I knew that smile was reserved for a few. Cde. Janet's take on the friend turned out to be sound as we later fell out.

A fuller, more all-encompassing life could not be attributed to anyone more deserving than Janet Jagan. She was larger than life and her impact on people was awe inspiring in her simplicity. My years with Janet Jagan have shaped me in ways I never expected. She was a friend and mentor who made me want to be my best. Her centenary birth anniversary was celebrated just the way she would have wanted: low-keyed without much fanfare. Her spirit lives on in many of us. I'm proud to have known Cde Janet and to have experienced her as my "once in a lifetime" occurrence.



*Sadie Amin, Attorney at Law, former Special Assistant to President Janet Jagan and former President of the Guyana Association of Women Lawyers. Ms. Amin is a rights advocate for women and children.*

# BIG OIL AND SMALL NATIONS



Guyana on the way to becoming an oil rich economy

The largest publicly traded oil companies operating in the United States and those with the greatest influence on US policy-making are ExxonMobil, Shell, BP, Chevron, Conoco-Phillips, Valero and Marathon. These companies are Big Oil.

In his election victory speech in 2008 President-elect Barack Obama forcefully declared that he would free the United States once and for all from the “tyranny of oil.” The ‘tyranny of oil’ powerfully encapsulates not only the feelings of Americans but of people the world over. Without viable and accessible alternatives, entire economies suffer when increasing proportion of national budgets must be used to purchase oil. And on an individual level, families, facing the same lack of alternatives, forgo necessities when gasoline prices skyrocket. Communities that live where oil is found – from Venezuela to Nigeria to Iraq –experience the tyranny of daily human rights abuses, violence and war. Environmental pollution, public health risks and climate destruction are created at every stage of oil use – from exploration to production, from transport to refining, from consumption to disposal. And the political tyranny exercised by the masters of the oil industry corrupts democracy and destroys our ability to choose how much

we will sacrifice in oil’s name.

The masters of the oil industry, the companies known as Big Oil exercise their influence throughout this chain of events: through rapidly and ever-increasing oil and gasoline prices, a lack of viable alternatives, the erosion of democracy, environmental destruction, global warming, violence and war. Big Oil is renowned for both the ruthlessness and illegality of their business methods. A classic example is a lawsuit filed against ExxonMobil in New York in October, 2018: *Investigations into ExxonMobil’s business practices uncovered an alleged fraudulent scheme to systematically and repeatedly deceive investors about the significant impact that future climate change can have on the company’s assets and value.*

ExxonMobil has been alleged to have facilitated a wide-ranging deception in a landmark lawsuit brought against it by the State of New York. The company stands accused of misrepresenting the effects climate change would have on the cost of its operations.

It was also sued by the State of Massachusetts for allegedly hiding its early knowledge of the climate crisis from the general public, and misleading its Massachusetts investors about the future financial impact of global warming, two days after the trial started on similar claims in New York. The suits raise major questions for a country like Guyana, as the country is about to become a major oil-producing nation, with ExxonMobil at the helm of the budding sector.

The most daunting of those questions is: If Exxon is willing to lie to its own investors what would it lie about to a country like Guyana, which is severely underprepared to bring the oil giant to its heels? (*Kaieteur News: US lawsuits against ExxonMobil raise serious questions for Guyana, Oct 29, 2019*)

The oil industry has perfected the art of obfuscating its investments and expenditures. Transparency International, a London based anti-corruption research organisation, evaluated forty-two leading oil and gas

companies operating in twenty-one different countries around the world. It found that only a handful of companies report on their payments to the government where they operate, particularly for resource extraction rights. Big Oil thrives on secrecy, lack of transparency and control over information. ExxonMobil is rated one of the least transparent companies in the world.

A troubling disappearance of records vital to New York's investigation of oil giant ExxonMobil could lead the New York Supreme Court to assume that those files held content that could have been damaging to Exxon's case and its record on climate change. It has also led a Canada-based engineer to question the implications the deletion of those files could have on Guyana's ability to verify the US\$460M pre-contract cost the company has hoisted on the backs of the Guyanese people. (*Kaieteur News: Exxon's records and e-mails before 2015 vanish – US court told, Nov 03, 2019*)

In 1911 the US federal government used the Sherman Antitrust Act to break up the Standard Oil Company into thirty-four separate companies. From around WWI to 1970 the three largest post-breakup companies, Standard Oil of New Jersey (Exxon), Standard Oil of New York (Mobil) and Standard Oil of California (Chevron) joined with Gulf, Texaco, BP and Shell to form a cartel, earning them the nickname the "seven sisters." These seven companies owned the vast majority of the world's oil and controlled the economic fate of entire nations.

Over the decades, many strategies to rein in the power of the seven sisters were proposed, debated and attempted in the United States. These included reducing the flow of oil the companies can bring into the US, state-owned refineries, a national oil company and massive antitrust action against the oil companies. Some of these efforts were successful, but most were not. It was the oil-rich nations operating as their cartel, which ultimately brought down the corporate cartel. In 1960 the oil companies faced a global oil glut. Jersey Standard (Exxon), always the leader, announced that it would cut the price of Middle East oil by ten cents per barrel. The rest of the companies followed suit. "This historic decision", wrote Sampson in *The Seven Sisters*, "which so drastically diminished the income of the chief Middle East countries, was taken inside the board room of a private corporation." The decision provided the "proverbial straw that broke the camel's back" to galvanise the oil-rich countries. One month later a meeting was convened in Bagdad, Iraq attended by representatives from Saudi Arabia, Iran, Kuwait and Venezuela, at which they decided to form a cartel to confront the Seven Sisters. The Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries(OPEC) was formed to

allow the oil-producing countries to stand together in their negotiations with the oil company cartel to achieve better terms for their oil.

As described in *Fortune* magazine in 2005, ExxonMobil was the most powerful US corporation by just about any measure. It surpassed General Electric to become the most valuable company by market capitalisation (US\$135 billion). It pumps almost twice as much oil and gas a day as Kuwait, and its energy reserves stretch across six continents and are larger than any non-government company on the planet.

With over US\$40 billion in pure profits in 2007, ExxonMobil is the most profitable corporation both in the world and in world history. Its profits are larger than the entire economies of ninety-three of the world's nations ranked by GDP. (*Antonia Juhasz : The Tyranny Of Oil, 2008*)

Big Oil does not only wield its financial purse at election time but it also impacts daily policy-making through its unprecedented spending on lobbyists. There is simply no comparison between the financial reach of the oil industry and that of organisations working on behalf of consumers, the environment, public health, communities living near oil production or refining facilities, and groups working in support of alternative energy, antitrust enforcement or the protection of human rights.

According to their 2007 annual reports, ExxonMobil, Chevron, Conoco Phillips, Marathon, Shell and BP hold approximately 40 billion barrels of oil reserves among them. Were these six companies one country, Big Oil would rank among the top ten most oil-rich nations in the world. Ranked above Big Oil are Saudi Arabia, Canada, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, the UAE, Venezuela and Russia. Big Oil is tied in ninth place with Libya and has more reserves than Nigeria, Kazakhstan, the USA, China, Qatar, Mexico, Algeria, Brazil, Angola, Norway and Azerbaijan – the rest of the countries rounding out the world's top twenty.

Big Oil has simple needs. It wants to explore for, produce, refine and sell oil and gas wherever possible without restriction. It wants laws that allow it to expand all of its operations. It wants to prevent laws that stand in its way and roll back those that already exist. Big Oil wants friends in office and enemies out of office. It wants friendly regulators in government and unfriendly regulators out of government. Big oil does not want to pay taxes, fees or fines. It does not want to be slowed down or financially burdened by government bureaucracy, environmental laws, protection of public health, workers' safety, or concerns for human rights.

Big Oil has a simple formula for getting its needs met: get bigger, get richer, spend money to dominate the political process and drown out the voices of those who seek

to constrain, regulate, oversee, or erase its footprint. The more money oil companies have the more power they wield and the more they can achieve their goals. Through lawyers, lobbyists, elected officials, government regulators, conservative think tanks, industry front groups and full-force media saturation, the oil industry uses its wealth to change the public debate and, more often than not, achieve its desired policy outcomes.

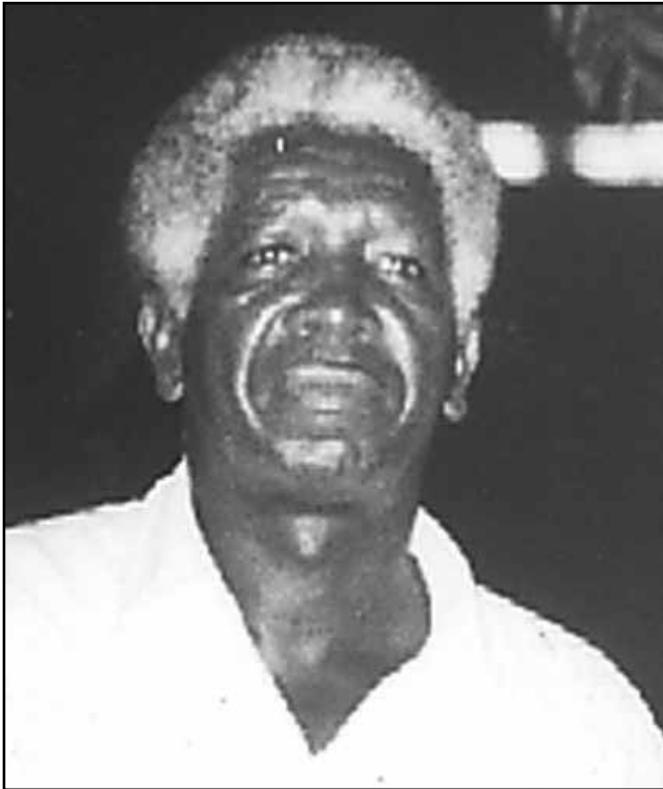
**Big Oil is deeply committed to remaining Big Oil and is putting all its considerable resources behind this effort. Small nations like Guyana have to beware.**



Badrie Persaud, MSc. Eng, MBA

Mr. Persaud was the former Managing Director of the Guyana Oil Company, Former Chairman of the Guyana Rice Development Board, Former Director of the Guyana Energy Agency and Former Commissioner of the Public Utilities Commission.

# DEATH OF A COMRADE



Veteran trade unionist Cyril Belgrave

When Martin Carter sat down and scribbled on a sheet of paper, 'For a dead Comrade' and sent it to Janet Jagan, he was doing two things at the same time. First, he was recording history by way of poetry and secondly, he was paying homage to a Barbadian trade unionist and comrade by the name of Ivan Edwards who had died by drowning. Carter's original title 'For a dead Comrade' was eventually changed to 'Death of a Comrade.'

With the passing of a comrade or trade unionist, high or low, it is this poem that comes to mind. And so it must be with the passing of Cyril Calvin Lewis Belgrave, a stalwart of the People's Progressive Party (PPP), leader of waterfront workers, outspoken City Councillor, outstanding Member of Parliament (MP) and veteran trade unionist. Cyril, as he was popularly called, passed away at the age of 82 on October 10, 2019.

Cyril Belgrave was 'Born in the Land of the Mighty Roraima' but died in the 'Land of the Free and Home of the Brave.' A committed family man, after shuttling for a while between Georgetown and New York, he finally left Guyana in 2014 to settle permanently with his wife and

children in the USA.

Comrade Belgrave was one of the thousands of Black supporters of the PPP who 'went through hell' with the People's National Congress (PNC) because they joined the 'coolie' PPP. But Belgrave never wavered nor did he bend. He stood firm. Cyril joined the party in the late 1950's and was witness to, and participant in, the many challenges his party and country faced. Deeply convinced about the progressive programme and policies of the PPP as well as its strong ideological groundings Cyril rejected all manifestations of racism, Black nationalism and ethno-centrism.

During the CIA financed 80-day strike by trade unions hostile to the Cheddi Jagan government of the 1957-1964 periods, Cyril Belgrave along with many of his stevedore colleagues, notwithstanding the pressure from others, refused to join the strike against their government knowing that it was part of a general plan to bring down the PPP government.

Belgrave was an ardent supporter and follower of H.N. Critchlow and Ashton Chase, one a labour leader, the other a politician and attorney-at-law, who defended the rights of waterfront workers in particular and the working class in general.

Belgrave became an outspoken and outstanding member of the Guyana Labour Union (GLU). He participated in all the congresses and other activities sponsored the union. He was elected an executive member of the Waterfront Branch of the GLU and later, to its National Executive Council.

Intellectually and practically, Belgrave proved he was capable of navigating the intricacies of the trade union struggle combined with the political struggle. It was while speaking from the floor at GLU or other trade union activities held at the Critchlow Labour College that Belgrave clashed verbally with Forbes Burnham and later Desmond Hoyte, on labour related matters and in their respective capacities of Honorary President of the GLU. Belgrave was a 'roots man.' He could be depended upon to articulate anywhere and at anytime the burning issues affecting working people and to fight for the rights of working men and women. These outstanding attributes together with his political courage and audacity were recognized by the PPP. From a long standing member of the Central Georgetown PPP Group, to the District and

Regional committee levels, Cyril was eventually elected to the Central Committee of the party where he served for many, many years.

Cyril was a seasoned campaigner. Together with other Black comrades in the party including E.M.G “Coco” Wilson, Clinton Collymore, Shirley Edwards, Gladwin Levius, Maurice Herbert, Harold Snagg, Charlie Cassatto, Clement Snell, Edwin James and Louis Mitchell, they formed a powerful team who, knowing Georgetown ‘like the back of their hands’ did their political work in every nook and cranny of the city but more particularly, in the Black dominated neighborhoods.

Belgrave stood out as the primus inter pares and was selected along with Narbada Persaud to serve as a Councillor in the Georgetown City Council. Later, both men became MPs, one to shadow the then Minister of Finance, Frank Hope, the other along with ‘Boysie’ Ram Karan to shadow the then minister of Labour, Winslow Carrington.

Cyril served in Parliament for thirty years, from May 24, 1976 to May 2, 2006. As an MP Cyril contributed to debates on the Labour Amendment Bill, the Working Conditions of Domestic Workers Bill, the Old Age Pensions Bill, the Housing Lots in Linden Bill, the Working and Living Conditions of Workers Bill, the Holidays with Pay Bill and in numerous budget debates.

His last contribution in the National Assembly was on November 30, 2005 when he spoke in tribute to Hubert Nathaniel Critchlow.

During the 1974-1976 period, when Forbes Burnham was ‘head hunting’ using the carrot and the club as a means of pressuring the Black PPP MPs to cross the floor, MP

Belgrave stood tall, he rejected Burnham’s overtures and resisted immense pressure to abandon his party to cross over to the PNC benches. While Burnham succeeded with some boasting, “every man has his price” he could not win over Belgrave.

Belgrave was the first Chairman of the Trade Union Recognition Board (TURB). His main task was to set the tone and direction for the work of the board. The Guyana Trade Union Congress (GTUC) had objected to Belgrave’s appointment using the spurious argument that his appointment was a ‘departure from the original understanding and spirit of the law to insulate trade union recognition from party political interference.’ The argument was rejected for lack of merit and Belgrave continued with his stewardship of the TURB until he was called upon by the PPP to serve as an MP.

Although not a member of its board, Cyril gave yeoman service to Food for the Poor, under the leadership of the then CEO, Mr. Leon Davis. He provided guidance to the charitable organization in areas hitherto unexplored by the organization.

In the year 2000, under the presidency of Bharat Jagdeo, Cyril was awarded the Cacique Crown of Honour (CCH) ‘For long service of an exceptionally high quality in the field of trade unionism and as a parliamentarian.’

Cyril Calvin Lewis Belgrave was, along with others, a consensus builder in the party, the union, the City Council, the parliament and the country he served with dedication and commitment. May his soul Rest in Peace.



*Clement J. Rohee was former Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of Foreign Trade and then Minister of Home Affairs. Mr. Rohee is an Executive and Central Committee Member of the People’s Progressive and was a former General Secretary. He is the President of the Guyana Peace Council.*

# The Promise of Oil and the ‘Dutch Disease’

## ‘Oil don’t spoil’ or does it?



As a Russian proverb declares, it is better to be healthy, wealthy, and safe than sick, poor, and insecure. Who can disagree?

Will oil wealth threaten democracy, as many experts warn? Will it result in confusion, corruption and coups as the experience of many other countries indicate? Oil and gas is never the panacea for removing the existing social ills as the experience many countries rich in oil and gas resources have shown.

The discovery of oil and gas in abundant commercial quantities just offshore of Guyana’s continental shelf promises a brighter tomorrow for present and future generations. But who will benefit from ‘**profit oil**’ remains a burning question to be answered?

The world is rapidly changing, virtually before our eyes with unprecedented scientific and technological progress never before experienced or witnessed in all of human history. Referred to as the ‘Fourth Industrial Revolution’ we are living in exciting times.

A major concern continues to be **Climate Change and Global Warming**. This is undoubtedly, the number one challenge confronting the International Community and the future of humanity in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Guyana is no exception as it confronts these major challenges.

Climate change **concerns** and **impacts**, some experts argue, could reduce global demand for hydrocarbons and hydrocarbon-based products, such as, oil and gas, considerably in the near future. The ‘flaming’ of significant quantities offshore of the Guyana coastline by the multinational company, Exxon Mobile, is cause for concern as Guyana has failed to achieve a viable local content policy in its interest so far. While this is ongoing as monitoring by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and other credible organizations in developing a viable Petroleum Policy **the search for alternative sources of clean energy must remain our major concern as much as we continue to explore the benefits of the emerging oil and gas sector.**

*How this will eventually impact, in the case of Guyana remains largely uncertain at the moment. But in spite of the ongoing debate the fact remains that Guyana will benefit immensely in the near future and the long term from its oil and gas resources.*

But what will it take for Guyana to survive in the present international climate since the struggle for political and economic survival is paramount and since we live in new and exciting times? Many questions remain unanswered and many people are demanding answers.

What happens in the event of an oil spill? Will off-shore



(From the Guyana Agricultural Workers May Day handbill)

oil exploration impact our billion dollar fishing industry? Or will ‘fracking’ result in earth tremors, earthquakes or even tsunamis as is occurring in some other countries? Who knows? The controversies rage on.

These questions and many more require careful consideration. It is only through **prudent management** of the emerging oil and gas sector that we can be able to confidently move forward.

*‘Oil don’t spoil’* was first coined by the late Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, Dr. Eric Williams, a former leading Caribbean statesman. The experiences of many Middle East countries, rich in oil and gas resources, have led to many internecine conflicts and proxy wars while countries, like Nigeria continues to be plagued with poverty and corruption, reaching unprecedented heights in such resource rich states. This is known as the curse that oil brings to many states. This oil curse is referred to as the ‘Dutch disease.’

The example of Norway is one we may want to emulate. Through its prudent management of its oil and gas resources Norway provides valuable lessons, we can learn from, especially with regards to its ‘Sovereign Wealth Fund.’ This fund provides for future generations’ well-being in such areas as education and medical benefits to citizens in their quest for a better life and livelihood.

The success of Guyana’s **Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS)** clearly demonstrates how international funds can be accessed while preserving our vast pristine rainforest resources which we cannot afford to lose. The LCDS was first introduced by the People’s Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) administration under President Bharat Jagdeo who is regarded as an expert in this field of economic development.

**The Big Question remains: Who benefits from ‘profit oil?’** The experts warn that oil poses a big threat to democracy.

Will democracy, dialogue and commonsense prevail in a world of growing inequality and uncertainty where irony, parody, confusion and consternation continue to define our lives even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? The return of the PPP/C following the March 2<sup>nd</sup> 2020 National and Regional Elections with its unbroken record of political and economic development promises a bright future for the generations to come.

In today’s context the ‘golden rule’ takes on a new meaning. Gold in this case refers to ‘black gold’ or oil and gas. The attempt to destabilize the democratically elected PPP/C Government must be combated on all fronts. History has a way of repeating itself. We need to be extra vigilant. The discovery of oil, in commercially viable quantities, once managed credibly and prudently, can ensure the Guyanese people of a bright and prosperous future.

Is the dream of Guyana as the ‘bread basket’ of the Caribbean about to be realized now the PPP/C is back on track? This was the dream of the late president, Dr. Cheddi Jagan, the architect of Guyana’s struggle for democracy and freedom. Many of the projects started by the PPP were stymied by the Peoples National Congress (PNC) government after the PPP was removed from office in the 1964 ‘virtual coup’ by the unholy alliance of the PNC in collusion with the United Force (UF), a small right-wing party engineered by Anglo-American imperialism. Declassified Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) documents confirm this truth. The agriculture sector, once vibrant under the PPP, was devastated under repeated PNC rule and horribly neglected.

One such project was the Del Conte Project which was initiated over some fifty years ago under the stewardship of Dr. Cheddi Jagan, the then Premier of British Guiana. This project had been subject to a litany of criticism by the PNC forcing it to be abandoned even after the PPP administration had made significant investments in it. There was a proposal for a road to be constructed along the eastern bank of the Essequibo River linking Parika with Makouria, another community on the mainland, some fifty miles up the Essequibo River.

So, where do we go from here? The road to the future is not going to be an easy one. New plans will have to be drawn up. There is no blueprint which can be followed. The neglect of agriculture at the expense of oil and gas can give rise to the ‘Dutch Disease’. Like the experience of so many others, for example, Nigeria, Venezuela and Trinidad and Tobago, a neighboring Caricom State, can prove to be disastrous as corruption can become a major factor to be reckoned with in the process of governance. The absence of a viable Local Content Policy is highly troubling.

Another worrying concern is ‘flaring’. Flaring is the burning of gas which has not been harnessed or piped inland to provide much needed energy to reduce the

high cost of energy from fossil fuels. Already these issues are being reviewed to make the changes necessary. The earlier Liza 1 contract signed by the former PNC-led Coalition Minister of Natural Resources is deficient in this respect. The 'Payara Contract' has been reviewed by the PPP/C administration and necessary changes introduced in the country's interest.

How **does flaring look like on an FPSO unit?** FPSO is a Floating Production Storage Off-loading unit. Why is so much gas going up in flames? What are the implications? Does it matter once profits are secured? **News Flash:** ExxonMobil's flaring releases 1 kilo of carbon dioxide for every man, woman and child daily...Thanks to ExxonMobil... Guyana is believed to be among the world's top ten oil producing countries releasing toxic chemicals into the atmosphere.

Is Guyana slowly being transformed into a carbon bomb, one report asks? Wasteful and harmful gas flaring is just one more way some experts argue can make this happen.

Already oil production offshore threatens the ecosystem. A thriving fishing industry has already been affected. This will result in billions of dollars lost to the economy. A major source of concern also is the availability of fresh, potable water. As fresh water resources decline due to climate change and unchecked pollution of the environment around the world the unlimited fresh water supplies in Guyana will be in great demand in the near future. Water not oil, it is predicted, will be one of Guyana's greatest resources in the near future.

Experts warn that oil wealth has inherent dangers. The biggest danger however, remains the control of our natural resources, cheap labor and markets brought about by globalization and failed neo-liberal policies of the past administration.

The battle for profit oil has begun. The profits from oil must be prudently managed otherwise it can result in chaos, confusion, corruption and coups as has happened in so many countries around the globe.

There can be no peace without justice. 'Justice for all' must be based on economic justice for the many and not only for the few. While there is enough to meet the needs of the people there is certainly not enough to satisfy the greed of the few.

With prudent management of the economy Guyana is poised to be one of the richest countries in the world. With the PPP/C back on track with its unbroken record of achievements the prospects for the future of the oil and gas industry remains promising.

It is the legend of 'El Dorado' the city of gold about to be realized? Only this time it is 'Oil Dorado'. Even though oil and gas is certainly not a panacea or 'cure all' for many of the social ills plaguing many societies today it certainly is a catalyst for change. The many existing social ills plaguing our society: unemployment, unbridled crime and corruption, hunger and disease are factors to consider as we struggle to narrow the inequity gap and rebuild a country plagued with broken promises of the 'good life' by the former failed PNC- led Coalition regime.

The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is predicted to grow to some 51% of the economy as projected by the International Development Bank (IDB). The prognosis looks good. What this means to a developing country like Guyana is hard to imagine. It is only through prudent management of the economy can this be achieved. The PPP/C is committed to achieving this goal of taking Guyana through the 21<sup>st</sup> century and beyond. This is the legacy we dare not squander.

A new day is already beginning to dawn following victory at the March 2<sup>nd</sup> 2020 polls. A bright future once again beckons.



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# Religious Leaders in the Caribbean: Unlocking the Barriers of Stigma and Discrimination

Religious leaders play a vital role not only in engaging, inspiring, consoling communities and individuals but also in educational, health, the social and spiritual welfare of citizens throughout the Caribbean and indeed the world. This article focuses on the role of religious leaders in the AIDS response in the Caribbean, the importance of their activities, the challenges and the prospects of collective action within and across religious denominations. It illustrates the more recent developments through the establishment of national and regional faith leaders' networks that through the Pan Caribbean Partnership against HIV (PANCAP) have fostered collaboration and respectful dialogue intent on achieving the aspirational goal of ending AIDS by 2030.

Since its inception in 2001, PANCAP has engaged Faith Leaders in the accelerated approach to prevention, treatment, care and support for people infected and affected with HIV. PANCAP has collaborated with the Caribbean Council of Churches and the World Council of Churches among others, conscious of the important work of religious groups in pastoral care and guidance and the widespread respect and impact that religious leaders command from their varying communities. Since its landmark Champion for Change Conference in St Kitts/Nevis in 2004 and the follow up regional consultation of religious leaders in 2005 in Guyana, PANCAP has convened fifteen (15) national and four (4) other regional consultations involving Faith Leaders under the auspices of its Justice for All (JFA) program initiated in 2013. These activities have resulted in a JFA Roadmap, as a living document, with fifteen (15) actionable recommendations around the following five (5) principles:

- Enhancing family life and focusing on those in need.
- Increasing access to treatment and affordable medicines.
- Reducing gender inequality, including violence against women and girls.
- Promoting prevention with special reference to sexual and reproductive health and rights, including age-appropriate sexual education.
- Implementing legislative reforms for modifying

AIDS-related stigma and discrimination.

Among the most significant outcomes from the JFA process has been the Caribbean Faith Leaders Declaration, resulting from the Port of Spain consultation (February 1-2, 2017) with ten (10) actionable recommendations. The most pertinent include:

- Establishing a Regional Faith Leaders Steering Committee chaired by Canon Garth Minot of Jamaica.
- Including a representative of the LGBTI key populations in the Faith Leaders Steering Committee.
- Institutionalizing national Faith Leaders networks/religious organisations.
- Recognising that according to scientific evidence, the AIDS epidemic can be ended, but the major barrier is the persistence of stigma and discrimination.
- Fostering partnerships with developing agencies and other stakeholder groups are critical to achieving positive outcomes.

There are parallels between PANCAP's **Justice for All** programme and **Project Equality** developed by the Judicial Education Institute of Trinidad and Tobago and other partners that are worth noting. Project Equality is based on evidence produced by socio-legal concepts of equality and non-discrimination and is promoted through judicial dialogues to secure equality for all in the administration of the law. The Justice for All programme is predicated on the scientific 90-90-90 targets for testing, treating and defeating AIDS and on eliminating stigma and discrimination as fundamental human rights. In the first instance, the biomedical-scientific conclusion is that AIDS can be ended by 2030, if by 2020, 90 percent of people living with AIDS are tested and know their status; 90 percent of those tested are on treatment; and 90 percent of those on treatment have the virus in their blood low enough as not to transmit the disease. Secondly, the results of behavioural studies illustrate that the persistence of stigma and discrimination is a major barrier to achieving the 90-90-90 targets.

In addition to the consultations, Faith Leaders across the Caribbean have undertaken a series of studies to inform actions intent on responding to both scientific

and behavioural tendencies required to end AIDS.

In Jamaica, a 2017 mapping exercise by the Jamaica Council of Churches and the World Council of Churches aimed at determining the nature of the response to HIV among faith leaders, churchgoers and other religious groups. The exercise provides a model for other countries and has led to several recommendations, including:

- Broadening the curriculum of established theological institutions to include awareness of FBOs on stigma and discrimination.
- Innovative approaches to counseling by FBOs to those infected and affected by HIV.
- Encouraging research to guide policies and programmes of FBOs.
- Developing a comprehensive strategy for the approach of faith-based communities to HIV/STIs and reducing stigma and discrimination.

In Barbados, a 2006 survey on awareness of pastors and youth leaders (including Sunday School teachers) in the Evangelical denomination showed that the attitudes and practices to sex and sexuality of churchgoers vary only slightly from the general population. The conclusions, all still relevant, pointed to a series of suggested actions to be considered by religious leaders:

- Dealing with sexuality in a holistic manner while placing it in the context of 'biblical discipleship.'
- Providing empirical information along with a biblical perspective so that young people get their information and form opinions and behaviours with a Christian viewpoint.
- Disseminating information on sexuality and HIV/AIDS from the pulpit in a manner that enables Evangelical Christians to make responsible choices.
- Advocating for behaviour change through public education and training based on the evidence from research and scientific information.
- Reviewing youth and children's ministries in light of the findings of the research, making necessary changes and implementing them without delay

Activities of Faith Leaders Networks in Trinidad and Tobago and Guyana have resulted in declarations intended to guide action. Similar networks in Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, The Bahamas, Belize, Grenada, St Kitts/Nevis, St Vincent and the Grenadines and Suriname have designed policies and programmes in keeping with

the Justice for All Roadmap and in accordance with their respective religious principles and practices. The basic reservations among 15 actionable recommendations of the Justice for All Roadmap revolve around the abolition of buggery laws, comprehensive sexual education and sexual and reproductive health and rights.

In October 2017, The Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network and Anglicans for Decriminalization hosted a two-day conference in Jamaica examining the role of the Church in anti-sodomy laws across the Commonwealth. A book, titled **Intimate Conviction** was published as a report from this engagement that brought together activists, church officials, and politicians from around the world. One of the main features of this volume is a biblical survey by Dr John Holder, former Anglican Archbishop of the West Indies. It illustrates that 'homosexuality' is addressed only five times in the Bible, and they provide the context and driving force of its interpretation. In all cases, according to his conclusion, it is treated as 'nontraditional sexual encounters' that are not condemned. Hence, the conviction of the writers of the Bible is that there is space in God's relationship for the non-traditional. Dr Holder concludes that "our journey through the Bible does not provide us with any overwhelming rejection of homosexuality. Given the varied contexts within which the practice is rejected, it is difficult to treat these as providing any universal condemnation." That this view conflicts with other interpretations of biblical pronouncement requires religious networks to continue the dialogue. Notwithstanding this difference in interpretations, faith leaders are united in the goal to contribute toward ending AIDS.

In 2013 Sir George Alleyne and Professor Rose-Marie Belle Antione edited **HIV and Human Rights: Legal and Policy Perspectives on HIV in the Caribbean** that grappled with answers to the outstanding issues of human rights. Their conclusions were the outcome of a pathbreaking symposium of legal, public health and civil society practitioners. They illustrated that HIV attracts a wide variety of human rights abuses and the social and legal issues faced by protagonists in the HIV challenge and viewpoints of policymakers. They recommended that these contending views could lead to new and more rights sensitive laws, but required that consideration must be given to societal prejudices that militate against transformational change.

What has emerged is that faith leaders and FBOs are by no means a homogeneous group. There are many contending ideas, different responses, levels of understanding and manifest convictions especially around the issues of abolishing discriminatory laws. As a result, efforts within the PANCAP JFA programme have attempted to foster an aura of respectful dialogue on the essence of human rights among factions within the

national religious organizations and between religious leaders and other stakeholders. PANCAP Forums bring together various combinations of stakeholders: religious leaders, key 'LGBTI' populations, youth, and parliamentarians. These have mainly achieved the objective of reducing tensions and challenges that impede progress to end the AIDS epidemic. A joint forum between religious leaders and key populations in Trinidad and Tobago (April 2018) led Faith Leaders to identify priority areas for action and issues that require clarification. Since that time, PANCAP has been involved in clarifying terms in common usage, updating the Justice for All Roadmap and examining the proposals for rolling out Comprehensive Sexual Education in accordance with the concerns of Faith Leaders and in line with CARICOM's Health and Family Life Education.

Another joint forum between Faith Leaders and Key LGBTI populations in February 2017, agreed that Faith Leaders should "create spaces of hospitality" and welcome "the other in their otherness" while making efforts to reach out to the marginalized. At the same time, key populations are required to show appreciation for differences among religious leaders and denominations and engage in respectful dialogue. In short, the PANCAP JFA programme has evolved with due regard for the differences within the religious communities and in recognition of their vital role in reducing stigma and discrimination.

Indications are that litigation in the courts based on the principle of equality for all is most likely to rule that criminalizing same sex relations between consenting adults is unconstitutional. This has already been the case in Belize, and Trinidad and Tobago in the Caribbean, and increasingly in Africa and recently, India. The judicial process may yet act as a catalyst for either accelerating factionalism among religious denominations or reconciling these differences through the principles of Justice for All.

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# The Inevitable Demise of the APNU/AFC Dictatorship



There is no shortage of reasons to which can be attributed the inevitable collapse and unavoidable demise of the 2015-2020 A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance for Change (APNU/AFC) dictatorship. One could argue that the rank opportunism that underlay the original foundation of their fragile coalition, to begin with, was bound to unravel sooner rather than later. One of the two main coalition partners, the AFC, was in fact founded on the basis of individual opportunism by over-ambitious and disgruntled discards from other political parties, the People's Progressive Party (PPP) included. History will record that the respective parent parties did well to shed themselves of these self-serving individuals whose characteristic behavior carried over into, and was on full display during, their brief and disastrous sojourn in government.

One could also argue that the inherent dictatorial tendency of the main coalition partner, the People's National Congress (PNC), was unavoidably bound to resurface and undermine any hopes they might have had to remain in government in a modern world that is increasingly intolerant of dictatorial behavior. This behavior reared its head in the earliest days, first with the relative innocuous but clear dictatorial obsession with pomp and ceremony rather than real work and substance. History will long remember the images of David Granger being paraded around Georgetown with horse guards bearing pennants, and of cardboard cutouts of him being mounted at the national stadium for adulating members of his party to pose with and take selfies to preserve that great moment when they were privileged enough to stand near to a cardboard cutout of the Great and Green Leader Himself. In later days, the dictatorial predisposition of the PNC was on display in

their refusal to respect the will of the people in the most brazen display on an attempt to steal an election in living memory, anywhere in the world.

Similarly, one could argue that the then government's obsession with triviality and aversion to things of substance was bound to result in their undoing. The messianic zeal and urgency with which public buildings around the country were painted in green, with which logos, symbols, stationery, and all other things were made green, while more important matters like national policy and sectoral strategies languished as non-priorities for attention.

In much the same manner, the manifest arrogance and brazen pomposity of members of the government will forever be etched in the memory of the Guyanese people. It will take generations to forget the images of a government minister leaping out of her vehicle to hurl to the ground a no parking sign placed legitimately in the parking lot of a popular restaurant.

And, many more reasons abound. But, foremost amongst the multitude of reasons that could be proffered, is the gross incompetence with which the economy was managed, and the resultant destruction that was wrought on the country as a result of bad economic policy. The following provides just a few examples of the ineptitude that characterized APNU/AFC economic policy from their earliest days in office.

To put things in context, however, it is important to recall that the APNU/AFC came into office and met a Guyanese economy that was at its strongest in the country's history. They assumed office at a time that the Guyanese economy was on a 10-year stretch of uninterrupted growth, defying the global financial crisis as well as several episodes of turmoil in the commodity markets. Guyana's external debt was at its lowest, below 40 percent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), while our foreign reserves provided almost 4 months of import cover. More than US\$500 million had been secured in concessional financing for development projects, ready for implementation. Over \$200 million of resources under the Guyana-Norway partnership was also available to fund projects under the Low Carbon Development Strategy.

Additionally, major international private sector activity was poised for a historic takeoff. These included Exxon

Mobil and several other companies on the verge of commencing production of oil. Beyond oil, Guyana Goldfields and others in gold mining, new manganese and bauxite mines were all to begin production, as well as large scale agriculture, all providing a strong foundation for the non-oil economy. With this background in mind, one could be forgiven for wondering how the APNU/AFC could possibly have gotten it so wrong.

The first point that needs to be made is that the APNU/AFC had no economic policy whatsoever. At no point in time did they ever outline a coherent economic policy by which their actions in government would be guided. Instead, typical of dictatorships around the world, they mistook sloganeering for policymaking. The fabled “good life for all” soon to be followed by the equally fabled “decade of development” were accompanied by the three Bs (Buses, Boats, and Bicycles, apparently) followed in the administration’s twilight hours by four Cs (Constitution, Court, Commission, and CARICOM, apparently), all mythical, airy-fairy, empty and meaningless words with no substance.

In the absence of a coherent (or, indeed, of any) economic policy guiding the government as a whole, an incompetent and reckless administration was left to run amok and roughshod over the economy.

The destruction of the productive sector was the first major economic nail on the dictatorship’s proverbial coffin. In a direct and frontal assault, motivated by vindictive and racist politics, the dictatorship closed the sugar industry in one fell swoop, mothballing billions of dollars worth of factories and heavy field equipment that were in perfectly fine working order, and reducing them overnight to scrap metal to be cannibalized by the scrap metal dealers. In an instant, an industry that earned hundreds of millions of US dollars in export earnings annually and that sustained the livelihoods of tens of thousands of households, grounded to a halt, catapulting vast swathes of rural Guyana into instant poverty and desperation, with a harsh domino effect throughout the national economy.

At the same time, a treasury that was hungry for cash to fund the growing demands of the dictatorship removed all tax concessions enjoyed by rice farmers, gold miners, and all other operators in industry, and imposed Value Added Tax (VAT) and other taxes on heavy equipment. The effect was an instantaneous skyrocketing of the capital costs faced by these industries, plunging many of them into a position where they could no longer retool. Industries like gold and diamond mining found it near impossible to operate, bringing these once thriving industries to their knees. At the same time, clumsy and inept foreign policy resulted in the loss of major rice markets, sounding the death knell of the rice industry also.

A classic case in point of how the ineptitude in economic policy-making affected the productive sector is the poultry sector. For years under the People’s Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) administrations, the sector had grown and was able to meet domestic demand. In a display of what could only have been either callousness or incompetence, the APNU/AFC dictatorship removed the zero-rated status that the industry enjoyed for VAT purposes, as a result of which the cost of production for the industry soared to unaffordable levels.

This pattern repeated itself across all sectors, with the result that private investment and real production grounded to a virtual standstill. This in turn put pressure on the balance of payments through a collapse in export earnings, which in turn put pressure on the exchange rate. In its infinite incompetence, the government then responded by running down the foreign reserves in an attempt to defend the exchange rate, threatening the country’s external sustainability, instead of making an attempt to fix the underlying problems affecting the country’s export earning industries.

Alongside its destruction of the productive sector which led to vast unemployment across the country, the APNU/AFC dictatorship also went on a rampage almost as if to deliberately impose hardship on the Guyanese people. In a display of equally inept, or non-existent, social policy, the dictatorship removed a wide range of social transfers to the most vulnerable sections of society, including the subsidy on water and electricity for the elderly, and cash grants for school children.

VAT was introduced on education and medical supplies, water and electricity, and items that were previous zero-rated were moved to exempt status, resulting in an immediate increase in cost of living with disproportionate impact on the vulnerable. The impact on disposable incomes in the household sector was sharp and swift.

At the same time, government revenue from taxes and non-tax sources such as fees skyrocketed. This further drained the household sector of disposable income and also put the liquidity and profitability of the corporate sector under severe pressure and threatened the very existence of many businesses. The result was a severely overtaxed economy, widespread bankruptcy, and further unemployment.

The dramatic increases in government revenue collected, instead of being used to reduce public debt or to increase government saving and investment, were channeled into inefficient and wasteful government consumption. The government wage bill soared; as a result of thousands of APNU/AFC cronies recruited for jobs and paid exorbitant salaries from the public purse.

Additionally, other areas of wasteful government

consumption were evident. Extravagant spending in such unproductive areas as overseas travel (with a dramatic increase in ministerial overseas travel allowances being one of the first acts approved by the dictatorship as soon as they came into office, alongside an increase in ministerial salaries), refreshment and meals, and repainting and rebranding of every government asset in sight to ensure the supremacy of the dictatorial green.

The inefficiency of the spending choices made was compounded by the dominance of corruption in government spending. While some scandals were discovered early in the dictatorship's sojourn, such as the drug bond scam, other have only come to light more recently, such as the barber chair scam and the birth certificate scam. The latter examples which attracted considerable attention during the recently concluded debates on the 2020 budget, are by no means exhaustive but instead are symptomatic of the level of widespread and deep-seated corruption that had infested all of government spending.

The combined result was a budget that was dominated by unproductive, wasteful, and corrupt spending, fuelling high fiscal deficits and rapid accumulation of public debt, pushing the country's indebtedness to its highest levels in decades, exceeded only by the PNC's previous tenure in office.

The absence of any economic and social policy was further exacerbated by gross incompetence, best characterized by the fact that throughout its five years in power, the APNU/AFC dictatorship did not initiate a single significant new project that was not inherited from the PPP/C government. Whether it is the Cheddi Jagan International Airport project, the East Coast Road, the East Bank bypass road, the West Coast Road, the new Demerara Bridge, every single major project that the APNU/AFC implemented or said they would implement was a project inherited from their PPP/C predecessors in office. The result is that when they demitted office, finally and reluctantly, there was absolutely no evidence of any tangible initiative being implemented to the benefit of the Guyanese people.

Perhaps the worst dent to the economy came from the dictatorship's apparently deliberate efforts to intimidate

and threaten the private sector. From their earliest days in office, they bombarded the private sector with belligerent threats of prosecution and expropriation of their assets. This was followed by systematic intimidation using the arms of the state such as the Guyana Revenue Authority and GOINVEST, which were very quickly transformed from service oriented institutions to highly feared and weaponised arms of the state, deployed to punish detractors and reward conformists. This led to a rapid drying up of private sector investment and expansion, and the complete disappearance of private sector confidence, except for a few cronies of the APNU/AFC dictators who enjoyed the largesse of the state.

The combined result of all of this was a complete dissipation of investor and consumer confidence to an all time low, an economy whose productive sectors were in complete collapse, high levels of unemployment and poverty, an overtaxed private sector and population, a budget dominated by wasteful expenditure, high fiscal deficits, rising debt, and a completely bankrupt treasury.

It is beyond doubt that a wide range of factors led to the rapid disillusionment of the population with the APNU/AFC dictatorship from their earliest days in office. It is also beyond dispute that their management of the economy was characterized by a complete policy vacuum, gross incompetence, vindictiveness and callousness, as well as dishonesty and widespread corruption. It is, therefore, an unavoidable conclusion that the destruction of the economy that resulted was a major factor in their ultimate collapse and removal from government.



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# LEST WE FORGET



AFC Members of Parliament Charandass Persaud (right) and Haimraj Rajkumar (left) in the National Assembly.

By August, 2000 Guyanese both at home and in the diaspora and indeed others in the Caribbean took note of the political and legal gymnastics that took place by the “Guardians of Democracy” on one side and the motley group of desperate men and women on the other.

The successful passage of the No confidence Motion (NCM) during a parliamentary session in December, 2018 caught the APNU/AFC with their pants down (and quite a few, possibly well and truly soiled). Then Leader of the Opposition, Bharrat Jagdeo, had moved the motion early in December, 2018 but the APNU+AFC government refused to debate it until the budget for 2019 was out of the way.

The debate on the NCM finally commenced on December 21, 2018 and I remember vividly where I was: having dinner with my family and following the proceedings, without too much appetite for food.

Had it not been for the constitutional implications brought about by the defeat of the government, it would have been an award winning comedy show (which may still be in the making) to reproduce the antics of the government to evade those consequences.

From the confident exhortations by ministers of the government, led by its vocal Chief Whip and General Secretary of the PNC, Amna Ally and “Boom out” Brooms, to BRING IT ON, and after it was “brought on.”

The paralyzing/shocking YES vote by one of its own; the pathetic pleading by his AFC colleague on his right (rewarded with a ministerial portfolio soon after) to change his vote to NO; The physical assault and use of expletives (seen and heard by all, both in and out of parliament) by the PNC MP on his left; The crying refrain of “NO CHARANDASS, NO!” The nonsensical and ridiculous request by the Chairperson of the PNC, Volda Lawrence, for a “time out; (it appears she was urged to do so by Raphael Trotman, a lawyer and former Speaker at that). I’m sure it took some amount of guts for the actual Speaker to frustratingly remark that there is no such thing as a “time out” in Parliament. They obviously thought they were at a basketball game.

The mysterious and unprecedented re-start of re-taking the votes of the government side (obviously with the hope of getting Charandass to change his YES vote) which in MY opinion, both the Speaker (another lawyer)



Justices of the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ) sitting in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago.

and the long serving and very experienced Clerk of the Parliament MUST have been aware was highly irregular and could have been the cause for litigation.

The almost immediate announcement by the Prime Minister, another lawyer and surrounded by almost all his parliamentary colleagues, apparently still shell shocked, that the government was defeated and as a consequence would have to comply with the provisions of the Constitution.

The very next day, the President repeated the same statement and pledged that the Constitution would be respected. Lo and behold, before one could say "ELECTIONS IN THREE MONTHS" these commitments, publicly made, by the President and Prime Minister, were dishonored.

Firstly, the Speaker refused the government's request to agree to the unbelievable notion that the NCM required 34 votes and not 33 to be successful. The government, having been defeated a second time by the Speaker's ruling, with the caveat that the courts should be approached to determine the matter. They then used this as the "excuse" to start the ridiculous, extensive, delaying and frustrating process of countless litigation.

The government AGAIN lost when the learned Chief Justice (ag.) Roxane George determined that the government was 'resigned' when it lost the NCM. The appeal to the Court of Appeal, caused consternation. Teachers scurried for cover, being afraid and embarrassed to face their students to explain how 34 was the majority of 65. Guyana became the laughing stock of the sensible judiciary at home, in the diaspora and the world at large.

Naturally, the matter was appealed to the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ) and after the nation was made to hold its collective breath. The CCJ delivered what I considered a "cop out" decision which allowed both sides to claim victory and further delayed the inevitable. It was difficult for lay people like me to understand why a ruling could not be given in a definitive way. EITHER that the elections MUST be held in 90 days from their ruling OR that the government had "won" and they could continue for as long as they wanted.

The PPP claimed that the ruling had started "the elections clock" ticking, while the government argued 'no way Jose.'

And while all these delaying tactics were being used, the CCJ gave a definitive ruling that the appointment of James Patterson was improperly done, resulting in his “resignation” and paving the way for the appointment of Justice (Retd.) Claudette Singh as Chairperson of GECOM.

After her appointment, the elections machinery got into first gear. The decision to stop the house to house registration, approved by her predecessor, and which could have resulted in thousands of eligible voters being left off the Final Voters List (as the PPP had taken a decision to boycott the exercise, and had no scrutineers accompanying the registrars) AND allowing thousands of ineligible persons to be put on the list, clearly a “Double Whammy” intended to secure an advantage for the “resigned” coalition.

The elections date was set and contesting parties started to spread out with the two behemoths vying with each other to reach every “valley and creek” to deliver their messages. The crowds at these rallies especially, reminded me of the 1992 elections, when the PPP won the popular support. The eventual result of the elections proved that I was correct. The “decoration” of the country with parties’ flags, banners and other paraphernalia was evenly matched, whereas the PPP’s manifesto, the forerunner to others was clearly the more superior, with its well thought out programmes and policies for the recovery of the nation.

After vigorous campaigning, elections were held on March 02, 2020. The activities on elections day was relatively peaceful, with sporadic upheavals in mainly “mixed” areas, which at times became frightening with the potential for violence. In my opinion, on the East Coast Demerara, where I was for the entire day, the security forces and electoral machinery were mainly responsible for the calm that prevailed.

The results, like in previous years, were expected within a few days. However, on this occasion we were destined to go into the Guinness Book of World Records. It took exactly FIVE MONTHS for the President-elect, Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali, to be sworn in, on August 02, 2020.

These FIVE tortuous months, in fact were properly described as the nation’s “collective necks being under the knee of the APNU/AFC.”

Beginning on March 05, when the first blatant attempt to “fix” the elections results was tried, to the day before

the actual swearing in of the PPP’s presidential candidate, the APNU/AFC, defied the world in trying to cling to power, figuratively, even by their finger nails.

At every turn of every corner, when there seem to be some glimmer of “light at the end of the tunnel” the APNU/AFC resorted to the courts, in the hope that by some miracle they would be given the proverbial nod to stay in government. Despite EVERY international and local observer mission insisting that attempts were being made for the elections to be blatantly, shamelessly and barefacedly rigged.

In the opinion of many, had it not been for the honest, courageous and determined positions taken by ALL the accredited observer missions, the people of Guyana would have been AGAIN bullied/terrorized as was the case of past elections. In fact, when Guyanese saw the initial attempts to rig the elections, sporadic peaceful demonstrations took place in “pockets of resistance,” which unfortunately resulted in one person being shot to death by the police and many injured.

However, calls for patience by the PPP succeeded in quelling the people’s anger. These actions were definitely as a result of the Returning Officer of Region 4, Clairmont Mingo, proceeding to make a declaration, based on number of votes cast which was a figment of his infertile imagination and his cronies at GECOM. Importantly, the signature of the Chairman of the PNC, Volda Lawrence, mysteriously accompanied one of the “declarations,” that was the subject of a court action.

While in circumstances such as these it is not advisable to mention names, it would be remiss not to mention the teams representing CARICOM, the OAS, the Commonwealth, the EU and the ABC countries, whose ambassadors/ high commissioners led from the frontlines and as a result were vilified by leading members of the APNU/AFC. In addition to consistent exposure of the attempts to “barefacedly rig the elections in front of the eyes of the world” repeated calls were being made to GECOM and its Chairperson to comply with the requirements of the Constitution and the applicable electoral laws, particularly with respect to the count and tabulation of votes using GEOM’s Statements of Polls (SOPs). The former Prime Minister of Jamaica, Mr. Bruce Golding, a representative of the OAS team could not have put it better when he said words to the effect that in all his life he had never seen such a transparent attempt to rig an election, in the clear view of the eyes of the world.

When the masquerading Minister of Foreign Affairs, in the usual thuggish behavior of the PNC threatened to revoke the credentials of the observers, the former Prime Minister of Barbados, Arthur Owen, in disgust, attempted to return his credentials. Mr. Owen informed the minister that he would relay the threat to the Secretary General of the Commonwealth as he was part of the Commonwealth team of observers. A hasty but feeble retreat citing misunderstanding and miscommunication was proffered by the minister.

Despite the court ruling that only the SOPs should be used in counting votes in District 4 which consists of the largest bloc of voters the now infamous Returning Officer tried to pass off the now infamous spreadsheet. All and sundry knew that the only acceptable form of voters' tally had to come from the SOPs which were signed off by GECOM staff after the counting of votes at each polling station.

This shameless act by Mingo at the behest of his handlers and probably in collaboration with some GECOM staff was again taken to court. Despite a firm ruling by the CJ that the SOPs must be used, Mingo moved to the High Street office of GECOM and this time proceeded to magically display what was described as a "bed sheet" (and a dirty one at that) with new numbers of votes cast. This was again vehemently objected to by the political parties of the opposition and the observer corp. During these "infamous five months" court case after court case were filed. And on every occasion the APNU/AFC embarrassingly lost.

Fast forward to the high level CARIOM mission comprising former heads of states which came to Guyana to broker a resolution to the crisis. After discussions with the APNU/AFC and the PPP/C it was agreed that there would be a re-count of ALL the votes cast in all the districts for both the national and regional elections.

However, before the re-count could have gotten started, and to the absolute consternation of ALL, a candidate of the APNU/AFC, filed court proceedings to stop the re-count. One wonders how unhinged and desperate the coalition must have been to resort to this clear sham.

The world again saw the nature of the beast we were dealing with. Fortunately this vile attempt to delay the inevitable was thwarted by the courts and after unnecessary delays, the re-count got underway.

Despite the urgency for the declaration of the final results of the elections, GECOM, in its wisdom, decided to limit to three, the districts being counted simultaneously. The exercise started and continued on a relatively uncontroversial trajectory until the APNU/AFC realized that their game was up. Districts 1 to 3 were showing votes as per the PPP's SOPs. Naturally their panic button was pushed and with the vehemently daily concurrence of their three GECOM commissioners, invented the most ridiculous scenarios to disrupt the re-count. The main refrain was that persons who voted in PPP strongholds were either dead or not within the jurisdiction on March 2. Even though this was dispelled by persons showing evidence to the contrary.

After a frustrating 33 days re-count, the numbers showed the PPP/C securing 233,336 votes (50.69%) entitling them to 33 seats and victory, APNU/AFC 217,920 votes (47.34%) with 31 seats and the combined votes of the 'Joiner Parties' (ANUG/TNM/LJP) 5,214 votes and 1 seat. Guyanese for generations to come will never forget the torture the nation was put through by the rascality attempted by the APNU/AFC ably assisted by their henchmen in the elections apparatus. It is important for us to be reminded of the attempted willful acts of deceit used to steal the elections and disenfranchise a person's right to select the government of their choice. LEST WE FORGET.



*Harry Narine Nawbatt is a former High Commissioner to Canada and former Minister of Housing and Water. Mr Nawbatt was associated with SIMAP.*

# Biographical Summary of Janet Jagan

1963: On the death of the Minister of Home Affairs, Claude Christian, she became Minister of Home Affairs and a member of the Senate.

1964: Resigned as Minister in protest over incidents in Wisimar .

1967: Opposition member on the Elections Commission. She warned the nation about elections rigging.

1970 - 1997: Mrs. Jagan along with fellow journalists at the "Mirror" - Clinton Collymore, Moses Nagamotoo and Kellawan Lall, founded the Union of Guyanese Journalists (UGJ) and she became its first President.

1973 - 1997: Editor of the Mirror Newspaper.

After PPP ended a boycott of Parliament to protest against the rigging of the elections in 1973, she returned to the House as an opposition MP. She served in the House continuously, and was returned in 1980, 1985 and 1992. In April 1997 she was the longest serving member of Parliament

1992: After Guyana's first free and fair elections in post-independent Guyana, she was designated First Lady of the Republic. She continued her work as Editor of Mirror.

1993: Three-month stint as Ambassador to the United Nations when Guyana's Permanent Representative, Dr Rudy Insanally was elected President of the General Assembly.

Appointed Chairperson of Castellani House Committee of Management - home of the National Art Gallery Collection; and Chairperson of National Commission on the Rights of the Child from 1992-1997.

Mar. 17, 1997: Janet Jagan was sworn in as Guyana's first woman Prime Minister and First Vice-President.

Dec. 19, 1997: Janet Jagan was sworn in as the first woman President of the Republic of Guyana and Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces. She resigned on August 8, 1999 due to ill health.

March 2000: she poured her energy into the establishment of the Cheddi Jagan Research Centre.

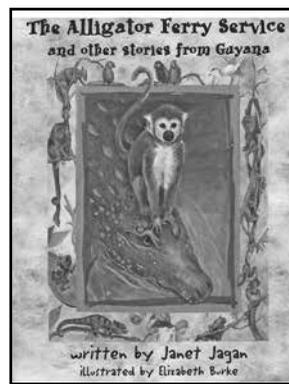
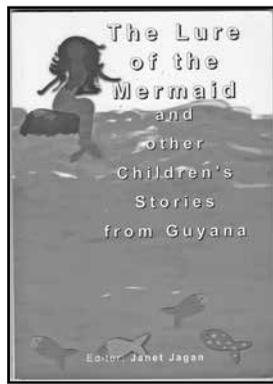
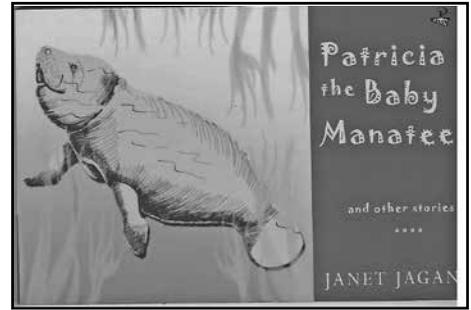
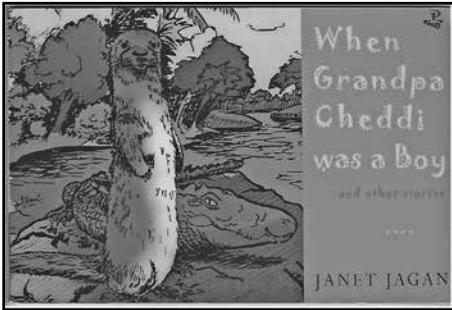
Publications: Author of several publications including works on the history of the PPP and Rigged Elections in Guyana; and 5 children's story books among which are "When Grandpa Cheddi was a Boy", "Children's Stories of Guyana's Freedom Struggles" and "Alligator Ferry Service".

Honours: Janet Jagan is recipient of the Nation's (Guyana's) highest honour - Order of Excellence (O.E.)

Woman of Achievement award from the University of Guyana

In 1997 was awarded the Gandhi Gold Medal for Peace, Democracy and Women's Rights by UNECSO.

# Books by Janet Jagan







The Cheddi Jagan Research Centre is dedicated to making available to the Guyanese and international communities the Legacy and Work of the Late President of Guyana Dr. Cheddi Jagan through research and education. The Centre is a non-governmental, non-profit organisation located at the Red House. (picture below)

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