

SALUTE TO COMRADE JANET

by Savitri Lall

Happy Birthday Cde Janet! This wish and others such as 'congrats', 'many happy returns of the day', 'may you live to see many more years' were showered upon this simple but great lady Mrs Janet Jagan, who celebrated her 79th birthday on Wednesday, October 20, 1999. Gifts of flowers, hugs and kisses and other birthday memorabilia were given to her as a token of love and appreciation at a simple ceremony where well-wishers gathered to celebrate with her.

Janet Jagan, well-known as JJ by her comrades, came to this country as the wife of the late President Dr Cheddi Jagan in the 40s. Leaving a land of opportunities to start a new life in a country of colonial dictatorship shows the love she had for her husband and her willingness to face any hardships she might encounter.

Cde Janet made the most of what limited resources were available to her and because of her humility and gentleness, she fit in well with her in-laws. She worked as a hygienist in her husband's dentistry in Georgetown. Having had the opportunity of getting a College education and knowing

unselfishly helped to educate Cde Cheddi's brothers and sisters — some are doctors, lawyers and other professionals.

During her husband's agitation for political reforms — Independence which would put an end to colonial rule and for trade union rights in then British Guiana, Cde Janet gave her full support and solidarity to Dr Jagan. She became more politicized after seeing the hardships and sufferings women and children bore at the hands of the colonial masters. This culminated in 1946 in the formation of the Political Affairs Committee (PAC) of which she was a founding member. In the same year she became general secretary of the Women's Political and Economic Organisation (WPEO) now known as the WPO, which impacted immensely on the lives of all women.

Cde Janet stood steadfastly behind her husband and saw him through victories at elections. She was liked very much by the people of Georgetown. They gave her the support she needed to champion the cause of human rights in this country. All this bore fruit for the working class.

During the PPP gov-



Bibi Jamela Muneer (left), General Council member of the Guyana Rice Producers' Association presents a birthday gift to Mrs Janet Jagan, while looking on is RPA General Secretary Fazal Ally (right). (George Lee photo)

ing the premier— she served as Minister of Housing, Labour, and Home Affairs. However, in 1953 the Constitution was suspended and Cde Janet was thrown in jail for about six months. She was the mother of little Joey then.

None of these adverse setbacks daunted her spirits to continue the struggle with her husband and comrades of the PPP when in opposition for almost three decades. Cde Janet held the position of Editor-in-Chief of the **Mirror** and continued her political career by meeting and listening to people's problems at Freedom House. She is still active in this field.

came upon us when the PPP teamed up with the Civic grouping, hence the PPP/Civic, to fight for free and fair elections and democracy. The PPP/Civic became victorious at the gen-

eral elections in October, 1992. Cde Cheddi became the first democratically elected President and Cde Janet, the First Lady. She played this role until 1997, when her companion of



over 50 years passed away.

Cde Janet became Prime Minister and in December, 1997, after she contested the general elections and won convincingly, she became the first woman president of this country and the Caribbean. Very deserving! She demitted office a little after 18 months, which shows good sense, judgement and leadership qualities.

Bravo Cde Janet! For us, you are the Mother of this Nation. May you continue to inspire us as you live on. Once again, Happy Birthday!