

REMEMBERING JANET JAGAN

The passing of the first woman President and one of the most dynamic freedom fighters of Guyana is deeply felt by not only the Guyanese people but all progressive and peace-loving people globally, particularly those in the Caribbean and Latin America and especially members of the PPP.

Her more than six decades of vigorous and courageous struggle for national independence, democracy, human rights, peace, national unity, economic and social justice for Guyana was admired by tens of millions, before, during and after the cold war era. Her dynamic contribution to change for a more humane and better world came at a time when many countries including India, Ghana, Kenya, Barbados, Jamaica, Trinidad & Tobago, to name a few, were also struggling to free themselves from the yoke of colonialism; at the same time the people here in the United States, her birth country, were engaged in the civil rights movement led by the late Dr. Martin Luther King, rejecting racism, sexism, segregation and economic inequality that she had experienced herself, first hand. Further, on the world stage, she vigorously supported the intensification of the campaign against the insane arms race between the two super powers, the USA and the Soviet Union, for détente and disarmament.

The PPP, led by Dr. and Mrs. Janet Jagan, was refused independence from the British Government (1966). Janet, and other stalwarts organized brilliant, courageous, and consistent struggles in Guyana and internationally in support of her husband, Dr. Cheddi Jagan, quests to bring national independence to Guyana.

She was always a deeply compassionate individual and was extremely concerned about the well-being of every person - man, woman and child and traveled throughout the length and breadth of Guyana to meet the people and help solve their problems.

In 1948, Janet and Cheddi served food to striking sugar workers and their families and to the poor at temples on the East Coast of Demarara just at the time of the massacre of the sugar workers at Enmore, where three of the five killed were from Non Pariel (now Enterprise).

In 1954, Janet and her husband were imprisoned for 6 months each, after 133 days in days in office after the great PPP victory in 1953 when the general elections were held under Universal Adult Suffrage. She was not only one of the founders of PPP, the first democratic party established in Guyana, but also the founder of the Political Affairs Committee and the first women's movement in Guyana - Women's Political and Economic Organization.

I remember the encouragement I received from her in the worldwide campaign to support and defend the PPP. In New York, it started in the early 1960's. In 1970, we formed the PPP support group, later the Committee for Democracy and Majority Rule followed by the Association of Concerned Guyanese. At that time many Guyanese were afraid to join the PPP support Group, so I wrote Janet about the difficulties. She understood it very well and responded stating, "Better fewer but better."

I remember receiving correspondence from her every week, sometimes twice. She was a prolific writer and speaker. Like our dear Cheddi she would also send articles, newspapers, magazine, Thunder and small gifts. She visited New York, Canada & London quite regularly. There she met old friends and always informed them of the situations in Guyana.

When we first published the Guyana Newsletter, she edited a number of articles and encouraged

us to move forward and establish relations with groups from the Caribbean, Europe, Asia Latin America, Africa, etc. She said, "Ours is also their struggle."

With her blessings, I was appointed a correspondent of Mirror to the UN. I visited the United Nations three times weekly and collected information from about sixty countries and forwarded to Guyana to Cheddi and Janet.

As President, Janet visited Suriname twice when I was the Ambassador commissioning the Canawaima Ferry Project which operates daily transporting people, goods, and services to both sides and attending the Caricom Inter Sessional Meeting. She was extremely brilliant with remarkable oratory skills and never used notes for her speeches.

I remember visiting Janet at the New Guyana company when she was editor in chief of Mirror when Shree Chand was the manager, around 1978. She excitedly showed me thousands of photographs taken from various events, documenting and emphasizing specifically with the struggles waged on several fronts. I was presented with several copies of pictures including that of our great historian Dr. Walter Rodney, Mr. Ashton Chase and Mr. Martin Carter. I was amazed with her archiving skills and her keen interest in recording these historic events.

I remember one occasion visiting Freedom House presenting sport equipments for the PYO and materials for the PPP, including PA systems, stationeries and medicine. Cheddi was not there, so I sat with Janet in her room. She spoke on various issues. Suddenly, Cheddi arrived. Janet shouted, "Cheddi, Cheddi, look who is here, Comrade Karshan is here." I told him I brought the items and he said that when I finished with comrade Janet to visit him at his office. He gave me some fruits, gooseberries, tamarind and sugar cane. Both Janet and Cheddi were always warm, appreciative and caring.

She and her husband visited the sugar estates and rice districts quite frequently and organized the people. Health, diseases, drainage and irrigation, roads, schools, housing, water, food, women's rights, children's rights, the racial problems, national and working class unity, police brutality, rigged elections, crime, racial and political discrimination, poverty, hunger, mal-nutrition, diseases, illiteracy, unemployment, refugees, wars, among others, were her deepest concerns.

Janet was a beacon of light in the Caribbean. She had fought and won many battles at the regional, hemispheric and international levels for Guyanese. She was an institution by herself, a great theoretician, a magnificent journalist of world class, a realist, who read and wrote broadly. She remained relentless and steadfast to her beliefs for fairness and justice for all to the very end; a champion for the rights of the poor and working class and a staunch advocate and pioneer for women's rights and equality.

The tremendous contributions Janet Jagan made to the Guyanese people are immeasurable. Her selfless and dedicated sacrifices will forever be remembered by the poor and down-trodden people of Guyana. Her fight for Guyana's independence, economic and social freedom against colonialism, neo-colonialism, imperialism, and racism will be remembered for a very long time.

One of the proudest and happiest moments of her life was the great October 5, 1992 PPP CIVIC victory, the first free and fair elections in Guyana for 28 years and the restoration of Democracy. During this 28 years Janet tirelessly and selflessly gave unswerving and unstinting support to her husband, Cheddi Jagan, members of the PPP, and their allies who waged a long, bitter, courageous and successful struggle against the PNC dictatorship.

She will be greatly missed by her children, grandchildren, Party members and all Guyanese. Her legacies will endure through the ages and will continue to inspire tens of thousands of people.

May her great soul enjoys eternal bliss!

Karshanjee Arjun

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Guyana's Ambassador to Suriname