

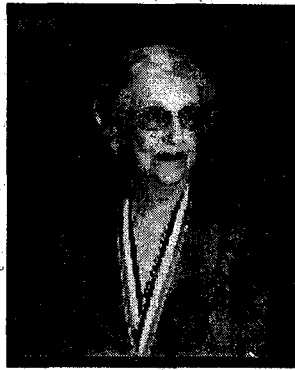
# November 1947 – “A People’s Victory”

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by Janet Jagan

*In the 1947 elections 60 years ago, Cheddi Jagan declared himself a candidate for Central Demerara (Buxton to Kitty), which was held by John D’Aguiar (no relation to Peter D’Aguiar) who had represented that constituency since 1939. Mr D’Aguiar was a member of the Executive Committee (something like a Cabinet), Chairman of the Rice Marketing Board, Managing Director of J.P. Santos and Co. Ltd. and held top positions in many Boards and Committees. Other candidates for that seat were Frank Jacobs, a lawyer and member of the Labour Party, and H.L. Palmer, an elderly village leader.*

One of the main contestants at the 1947 elections was the newly formed Labour Party. However, according to Dr Jagan in “The West on Trial” ... “with only 14 elected seats to share it could not accommodate all the ambitious individuals who wanted legislative honours.



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Consequently, this jockeying for position left the LCP (League of Coloured People) and the BGEIA (British Guiana East Indian Association) still dominant.”

According to Cheddi Jagan in his book: “So certain of victory were his (John D’Aguiar) backers in the Catholic Church and in business circles that they concentrated their power, influence and propaganda not against me, but against my wife” (referring to my campaign in Central Georgetown).

Cheddi Jagan won the Central Demerara seat by a close margin. He put this victory to his regular visits to the area over a period of time, working in the sugar estates and villages.

As he noted in “The

West on Trial”: “And so I was in the legislature, an end of sorts, yet in fact only the beginning of the long, hard struggle ahead.” How right he was!

Further he noted: “I regarded my victory at the 1947 general election as the people’s victory. In a brief post-ballot-count speech, I said: ‘We the people have won. Now the struggle will begin.’”

He was only 29 years old at the time and he had entered a Legislative Council made up of 4 ex-officio members including the Governor, 7 nominated non-official and 14 elected members. It was a traditional colonial parliament; fearful of granting too much power to the people being governed under colonial rule. And as I had noted in my previous article, the franchise was restricted to property or income qualifications, as well as literacy.

Again, it is useful to refer to Dr Jagan’s book which in reality, is a history of our country. He wrote about his early experiences in the Legislative Council: “I brought a new dimension to

the politics of protest, a continuity between the legislature and the street corner; the legislature was brought to the “streets” and the “streets” to the legislature. The Legislative Council was no longer the

not support positions arrived at. A crucial break came when the issue of Universal Adult Suffrage came up, with Mr Kendall and Dr Nicholson of the Labour Party voting with the colonial government side.

hours doing research and gathering material for his speeches. But the aristocrats of the Legislative Council could not believe that a product of plantation life, the son of a “coolie”, could be so knowledgeable and

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He joined forces with the Labour Party which had won 6 of the 14 seats. He describes some of the problems of that party which worsened as party decisions were flouted and members did

After this debacle, the Labour Party faded out and never revived.

There is always a humorous side to many aspects of life and the Legislative Council and Cheddi Jagan produced one. Cheddi, as those who knew him or heard him were aware, was a speaker who spoke at length on many issues, bringing out all the facts and statistics to prove his points. This was his style and he spent many

fluent. To them, it was an impossibility, so they began the rumour that his white wife wrote all his speeches and he memorized them. Even though they detested me, I was still of their colour.

But after a while, it became clear that no one could memorize all he had to say, and Cheddi had a lot to say in his almost one man battle to fight for the rights of the oppressed, the poor, the neglected, and the exploited.