

Remembering Cheddi - National Unity Should be the Watch Word

by Janet Jagan

The world over, people campaign to change unjust systems or to support a cause that they feel strongly about. In Guyana, Cheddi Jagan was one such person. Throughout his life he fought to create a better world for each and every Guyanese and, in so doing, he made a very significant contribution to this nation's history.

It is the supreme test of man's character to overcome the trials of adversity and disaster. This, Dr. Jagan understood only too well, for his life was an exquisite statement of struggle, first as a child; then as a student; as a nationalist; a political leader and finally, as Guyana esteemed statesman.

In the hostile colonial environment in which the natural progression of his country was first frustrated and subsequently truncated by the Anglo-American Alliance, to the cruel travesty of twenty eight years in the political opposition, Dr. Jagan confronted unquestionable adversity yet he was forever optimistic, convinced that history and time were always on the side of the just.

Six years after his death there are undoubtedly many things on which we might choose to dwell. There was firstly the man himself- committed, honest, and compassionate. Then there was the contemplative scholar and reflective leader, forever thoughtful and analytical, discussing, advocating and, of course, writing. There was also the anti-colonial firebrand and nationalist political leader, ever championing the twin causes of the anti-colonial struggle and the national liberation process. There was, as well, the compassionate internationalist stridently advocating the cause of the dispossessed the world over.

Dr Jagan's philosophical ideas and political actions constituted the foundation on which this nation was originally conceptualized. They were the well spring, the very seminal essence of the great man. Every Guyanese, great or small, understood where Dr Jagan stood. They knew that he felt their pain and their hunger. That he shared their hopes and aspirations and that he was committed to creating a better Guyana for them, their children and their children's children. A society in which all were equal and were treated as equals. A society in which there was a place for the fullest development of their peculiar attributes. In Guyana, Dr Jagan was the most powerful voice for the poor, the dispossessed and 'the wretched of the earth'.

Dr Jagan, has made a distinguished contribution, in theory and practice, to the transformation of the political culture, the termination of British imperial hegemony and the beginnings of the development of a modern independent state in Guyana. While there are other roles and contributions for which he will be revered, it is truly through his political leadership and for the formation of the Guyana state that he will be remembered by future generations in his own country and the world far beyond it.

It is apposite that we also remember his preoccupation with creating, facilitating and sustaining the process of national unity. It was his belief that unity was the primary means of attaining peace, progress and prosperity and he never stopped searching for ways and means of molding the classes and races into a strong and united Guyana. It is a sad but necessary commentary that with his passing this nation has been plunged into the abyss of ethnic rancour and civil unrest.

The issue here must be the continuing quest for national unity. Certainly if we are truly convinced that Dr Jagan deserves the respect of this nation, and there will be few to deny that he does, then certainly Guyana owes it to his memory to redouble our efforts to ensure that national unity once again enjoys the type of priority he would have preferred.

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