

PARTY LIFE:

Working With Overseas Guyanese

by Janet Jagan, M.P

A very special feature of Party Life is our work among overseas Guyanese. This began many years ago in the '60s and led to the formation of the United Kingdom Branch of the PPP. In those years, emigration to England was greater than to North America. This was before the UK government began tightening up its immigration laws.

The UK Branch of the PPP, as it was then and still is called, was made up of Guyanese, who although they had taken up permanent residence abroad, kept their close ties with Guyana and were concerned over the fate of their home country.

Thus, the members of this branch worked at many levels representing the PPP. They distributed our literature, they raised funds for their own operations and to make important purchases for the Party at home. They sent the Party many gifts, including a movie projector, duplicating machine, buttons and pens for Congresses, and many other valuable things.

In the UK, they made representation on dozens of issues for the Party, establishing good relations with Members of Parliament and with various support and solidarity groups and movements. Members have represented the PPP at Labour Party Conferences, at various solidarity meetings for South Africans, for Vietnam, for peace and so on. They have joined demonstrations in support of other peoples struggling for their freedom and have led protests and vigils for Guyana's liberation.

Members of the UK, PPP Branch have represented the PPP at conferences abroad, in France, Portugal, Italy, and at the **World Marxist Review** meetings in Prague.

Besides these activities, they have cared for our members travelling abroad via London, meeting our passengers at the airport and sometimes putting up as many as 10 members. And in the case of the General Secretary, they have taken full charge of his visits through the years to London, arranging accommodation, transporta-

tion, public meetings, press conferences and meetings with Members of Parliament and others.

They have published for many years a journal called "Guyana Voice" which carries news of Guyana.

During the period in which the PNC used overseas voting as one of its methods of rigging, the PPP UK Branch did a lot of the slugging work, overlooking the phoney overseas voters lists, examining them, checking on false names and exposing the fraud to Members of the British Parliament and the press.

They have also kept the Party abreast with clippings and literature published in Britain which are of use to the Party for publicity and research. They have kept in touch with the PPP at all times, at all levels. Their love of their homeland comes through in all their actions.

As the exodus from Guyana grew following the installation of the despised UF/PNC Coalition, more and more Guyanese began flocking to the USA and Canada. And out of this came strong support groups in both countries, two of which call themselves the Association of Concerned Guyanese (ACG), one in New York and another in Toronto.

The Canadian-based Association of Concerned Guyanese has followed closely in the footsteps of the United Kingdom Branch of the PPP, working among Guyanese immigrants, distributing literature, addressing meetings of Guyanese to update them on what is going on, organising them in protest demonstrations for free and fair elections and on many other issues.

Fund raising has been a big success with dances and dinners and picnics and other outings, raising substantial sums and bringing Guyanese together in social events.

A very special feature of the activities of the Canadian Association of Concerned Guyanese has been its work to protect the rights of many immigrants who were harassed by the authorities. This has endeared the Association to the Guyanese community.

Another very special feature of the activities of the Canadian group has been its "hotline" service which gives, over the telephone, the latest news on Guyana, 24 hours every day. This service is highly respected in the Guyanese community and thousands use it weekly.

It, like its UK associates, puts out a periodical, a very popular paper known as "Guyana Current", which

carries excellent up to date news on Guyana and is widely distributed.

The ACG has given support to the PPP in many ways, materially, in finding spare parts for machines and vehicles, in providing bags and buttons for Congresses, not only of the Party, but of the youth and women's arms, as well as a wide range of other gifts.

It has led delegations on human rights issues to Ottawa, met leading Canadians, especially those in the trade union movement and in other influential organisations, to present the views of the Guyanese people and has lobbied at several forums for the rights of all Guyanese.

The ACG has worked with a broad cross-section of organisations in Canada ranging from those involved in the Caribbean Community, making representations on problems faced by Caribbean immigrants to those involved in solidarity work with Chile, South Africa, El Salvador, Nicaragua, taking joint action on these issues, giving solidarity, giving support to trade unions and showing in no uncertain terms its solidarity with the Canadian people on many important local issues.

Again, the ACG has shown its hospitality to Guyanese travelling through Canada and has also prepared tours, lectures, discussions, press conferences, radio and TV interviews for the PPP leader, Cheddi Jagan.

In New York, the Association of Concerned Guyanese carries out its work among Guyanese, having a 'hot line' similar to that in Toronto and putting out two publications "Guyana News" and "Caribbean Affairs".

It has a steady fund-raising campaign with dances and picnics, the latter attracting thousands of people. The ACG-NY has been a constant participant in the Labour Day celebrations in that City with a booth selling hot curry and roti. They have gone in for sports, too, in a big way, fielding a cricket team that is quite popular among Guyanese overseas.

They have helped the Party in many ways, sending literature, spare parts, office material and sports equipment to the youths. The ACG, New York has worked with a number of support and solidarity groups and committees in New York; joining picket lines and marches.

It has hosted many Party leaders who have visited

New York, for speakers' engagements, lectures and other activities. Many of its members have returned home to attend PPP Congresses and the Association's generosity in helping in Congresses and in most events is phenomenal.

Both the Toronto and New York based ACGs have done the leg work in checking on phoney overseas voters lists before overseas voting was removed in the 1985 elections, and exposed in every manner the electoral rigging by the PNC.

And both, from time to time, have collected clothing which they have sent, at great expense, to Guyana for distribution by the WPO to the needy, particularly to children and in the interior areas of Guyana.

Until quite recently, there existed another valuable support group. The Committee for a Free Guyana, which worked among Guyanese living in New York, put out a publication, "**Bourda Report**", raised funds, sent many valuable gifts to the Party, and fought to end elections rigging and all human rights abuses by the PNC regime. This group built many important friends for the Party and was active with many solidarity groups in New York.

At the end of the last few Party Congresses, opportunity has been taken to hold discussions among all the support groups. Before this, meetings were held in Toronto and New York of the support groups. A meeting is planned for Georgetown in December of this year.

Altogether, these support groups have shown the need to work among Guyanese who have moved to other countries, to garner their energies and love of homeland in the struggle to win our rights and rebuild our nation.

This work has a greater purpose than merely the organisation of Guyanese, keeping them informed, forming them into solid units to give support for the struggles in their homeland. It also has the purpose of maintaining the patriotism of these hundreds of thousands of overseas Guyanese and hope that one day some will return to their native land and give their best to the restoration process that will be so important when we have won our freedom and shall have returned to democratic life.