

Remembering 1947

by Janet Jagan

This month of November marks the 60th anniversary of the election to the Legislative Council of Cheddi Jagan, a milestone in our country. He became when he died in 1997, the longest serving Member of Parliament in the history of the country. But, of course, he came to represent many other things – change, liberation, freedom, independence, the restoration of democracy and was one of the most beloved figures in Guyanese history.

However, in this article, I wish to give a background to these elections and to present recollections, as far as I can remember, of different aspects of Guyanese life, probably not known to those who were not around at that time. There are not so many left.

The year 1946 was an important year with two organizations of significance being formed – the Women's Political and Economic Organization (WPEO) and the Political Affairs Committee (PAC). I am the only one who served on both bodies. Mr HJM Hubbard encouraged me to form the WPEO, and along with Winifred

Gaskin and Frances Van Stafford it was organized that year and made quite an impact. I believe it was the first women's organization to call for women's rights – politically and in the economic sphere.

The PAC with HJM Hubbard, Ashton Chase, Cheddi

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Jagan and myself set out to educate Guyanese politically, to consolidate the struggle for liberation and to form a political party.

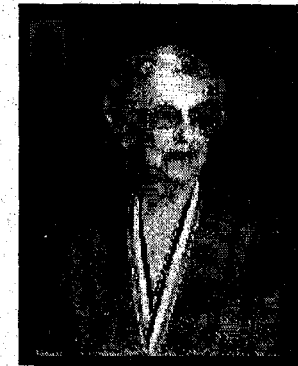
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So, out of these two organizations, PAC and WPEO, emerged four candidates – Cheddi Jagan, HJM Hubbard, Frances Van Stafford and myself – although neither of us was

sponsored by any organization. Cheddi was the candidate for lower East Coast (Buxton to Kitty), Hubbard for North Georgetown, Stafford for South Georgetown and myself for Central Georgetown.

The electoral battles were fierce in some constituencies, and, unfortunately, race issues arose, but not like those of the sixties and up to the present. These were manifested particularly in North and South Georgetown. In North Georgetown, Hubbard faced Dr JA Nicholson, (not to be confused with Dr CC Nicholson, one of Guyana's great health administrators) a member of the League of Coloured People (LCP). As Dr Jagan put it in "West on Trial," "... in North Georgetown, the LCP carried out an extremely unpleasant racist campaign against HJM Hubbard and succeeded in getting Dr JA Nicholson elected despite Hubbard's militant and creditable record as Secretary of the TUC. In South Georgetown, the LCP caused Critchlow to lose his seat on the assertion by its vice president that opposing candidate Frances Stafford, a white Guyanese member of the WPEO, had kicked an African servant down the stairs. The



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Court held this to be a damaging lie."

To better understand the North Georgetown matter, it is necessary to point out that Hubbard was what was then termed "light coloured." He was almost white, and, in fact, some foreign historians mistakenly called him "White." Thus the racism in the 1947 elections was, more-or-less, black versus white.

However, these elements did not enter my Central Georgetown campaign, nor did they enter Cheddi's Central Demerara constituency. I was lucky to have as campaigners three trade unionists from the Transport Workers' Union, Ivo Cendrecourt, (we still correspond. He lives in New York) Frank Van Sertima and Ivan Edwards. I must say, I

enjoyed the campaigning, though I had been most reluctant to contest, and there was great comradeship during the campaign. We had a joke among us, that drove us often to laughter when we would pull on the trouser cuffs of speakers who were too long-winded, as a warning to close down. We literally stood on wooden (soap) boxes when we campaigned. Nevertheless, "Honest" John Fernandes, a popular candidate, won the seat.

The reaction in the two organizations, however, wasn't so pleasant. It created ill feelings between Mesdames Gaskin and Stafford (as Gaskin was on the side of the LCP) and Hubbard, in utter despair, left politics and did not re-enter until years later when Dr Jagan submitted his name to the Governor to fill a nominated seat in the 1957 Legislative Council. In 1961, Dr Jagan made him a Minister.

The WPEO did not survive the dissension and faded out soon after, while the PAC gained two new and dynamic members. Sydney King (later known as Eusi Kwayana) a teacher and Ram Karran a Transport worker and trade unionist.

More on the 1947 elections in my next article.

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