

# Dr Jagan 60 Years Ago

## — A Voice Calling for Justice

by Janet Jagan

We commemorate on December 18th the 60th anniversary of the entry of Cheddi Jagan to the Legislative Council of the then British Guiana (BG) after the elections of November 24, 1947. The year before, he, along with three others, had formed the Political Affairs Committee (PAC) which set out as its goal, the formation of a political party to lead the country in its quest to end colonial rule by Britain.

Cheddi Jagan's spirited and positive advocacy of the rights of the Guianese people helped prepare the ground for the formation of the People's Progressive Party in January 1950. His forthright, able and consistent stand in the Legislature gave him an unusual status and acceptance as a leader in many parts of Guiana, through which he and the members of the PAC travelled, held meetings and met the working people, assisting them in their problems and articulating

their hopes and desires for the future of the country.

As Cheddi Jagan recorded in his book "The West on Trial": "The

administration and the economy of the country."

He tackled early on the role of bauxite and its very low contribution to the

Today there are some hate-filled writers who attempt to lower the prestige and love Dr Jagan earned through some 60 years of work and dedication to the interests of the people and his country, forgetting the quality of the man, his intellectual grasp that led to a better understanding of the exploitation of the nation and to the man himself, a man of dignity, integrity, culture and most of all, his fighting spirit.

struggle in the next five years was to become intensified – a struggle in which I stood practically alone in the legislature against big business, though with growing support among the peoples; a struggle in which the task was to expose and attempt to break the hold the sugar planters and the Chamber of Commerce had on the legislature, the

economy, even though British Guiana and Dutch Guiana were the largest producers of high grade bauxite, supplying then two-thirds of the world's bauxite requirements. The Demerara Bauxite Co. (Demba) paid no royalty on bauxite mined from its own land and a small royalty of 10 cents per ton on ore mined from leased crown lands. Dr Jagan urged,

in the legislature, increased royalties on bauxite. He challenged the government: "It may well be asked whether government is satisfied that the wealth of the people of this country should be dug out of the earth and shipped out of the colony without one cent being paid in royalty, with the exception of a small percentage...which the company pays 10 cents per ton."

He dealt in full with the ramifications of price control of aluminum by the monopoly ALCOA, charging manipulated prices, low taxes, forcing BG to be a primary producer only, etc. Obviously, he put much time and effort into his research on bauxite and its international control.

Today there are some hate-filled writers who attempt to lower the prestige and love Dr Jagan earned through some 60 years of work and dedication to the interests of the people and his country, forgetting the quality of the man, his intellectual grasp that led to a better understanding of the



Janet Jagan

exploitation of the nation and to the man himself, a man of dignity, integrity, culture and most of all, his fighting spirit.

Not only did Dr Jagan tackle the issue of Demba getting away with ripping off BG as regards taxation, he also exposed other wrong-doings of the British colonialists and their flunkies. He exposed the machinations of the sugar planters, showing not only their control of sugar, but other controls. For example, he showed how the radio station was owned jointly by Booker Brothers, Mc Connell & Co. Ltd., William Fogarty Ltd., Wieting & Richter Ltd and the Argosy Co. Ltd., and was given a 15 years contract and a government

subsidy equivalent to 90% of the licence fees collected from owners of radio sets. Also, the three daily newspapers – the Guiana Graphic, the Daily Argosy and the Daily Chronicle, along with the radio station, had interlocking directorates. The sugar planters and the leaders of the Georgetown Chamber of Commerce owned the Graphic and Mr HG Seaford of Bookers was chairman of the Chronicle. In other words, the name this country once had was "Bookers Guiana," a British company which was almost in full control of the country's economy, its media and its politics – all under colonial rule.

These revelations were all steps in the direction of educating the people about what being a colony meant and why there was need to begin the struggle for independence. This began in earnest when the People's Progressive Party was formed in 1950, with its declared intention of seeking an end to colonialism.