

# Many May Days Ago

by Janet Jagan

I can recall some memorable May Days, the first I participated in was either 1946 or 1947. We formed the Women's Political Economic Organization (WPEO) in 1946, the same year that the Political Affairs Committee (PAC) the forearm of the Peoples' Progressive Party which emerged from PAC to PPP in 1950.

Along with a few prominent women, Mrs Winifred Gaskin and Ms Frances Van Stafford, we organized the first womens' group to make demands for womens' rights. It was to last only a couple of years, but, made its mark in the women's struggles.

One of our first forays into public life was to call for better construction work on the Wortmanville Housing Scheme in Georgetown. These flats which were being built for lower income families were deemed by WPEU to be "unbuilt." It was during this time, too, that the cost of living was rising and was a burden on the lower income groups.

Due to my position in the WPEO and in the PAC I was able to bring about a linkage in the struggle. Mr H.JM Hubbard one of the 4 members of PAC was General Secretary of the TUC and we discussed with him ways and means of encouraging women into the struggles of the working people.

One of his suggestions was to bring the women into the May Day march and rally where their call for lowering the cost of living and other issues could be made.

Most of the WPEO women were middle class and had never marched through the streets of Georgetown or even thought of doing so. But they rallied and came out on that May Day, the first of many when women participated in larger numbers. It was a great success.

Another May Day I recollect, but I'm uncertain of the year, took place during Hubert Nathaniel Critchlow's life. The Trade Union Movement was practiced by the British when they sought to destroy the PPP after the 1953 elections and the TUC for supporting the PPP. It has never really recovered!

Cheddi and I were in the march which passed through Alberttown. As we marched, we saw Critchlow standing at the gate of his little house and yard. His face was so sad. He had not been invited to participate in that May Day march.

Cheddi went up to him and held out his hand and said "Comrade, join us" and he did! We marched together on that memorable May Day. After he died, the TUC began honouring the fall Father of Trade Unionism!

I remember another May Day, another sad event, when the People's National Congress (PNC) was in power and the TUC had its loyal partner. Cheddi, as Hon President of GAWU was asked to attend and speak. He did so, but as we all know, he was treated badly. He sat, isolated and alone in a section of the platform where he was placed by the TUC and booed when he spoke. It was done to humiliate him, but

Cheddi had a tough skin and behaved humanly and always seeking unity of the working class in his address.

Of course, the great pity is that May Day should be the manifestation of unity and solidarity of the working class. Those who believe this must always strive for that unity.

Copyright © Nadira Jagan-Brancier 2009

Cheddi Jagan Research Centre