

**Speech by Dr. Cheddi Jagan at the Queen's College Dinner Organized
by the Citizens Committee to Honour his Election as Premier, 16
September 1961**

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Dr. Jagan with his mother at the dinner

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen, Friends:

Justice Wills said a moment ago that I must indeed be a very happy man. I want certainly to admit that I am indeed a very happy man this evening.

On the 21st of August when the results were declared that was the first joy. Now when I see so many of you here this evening on this wonderful occasion this indeed has stopped the joy which I feel not only for myself but all those who have struggled to make this day possible for our country.

I feel a deep sense of pride this evening not only for myself but for all my comrades who fought diligently, indeed with a great deal of sacrifice over the last number of years. Some are here with us this evening, others unfortunately are not with us this evening. Some have suffered, some have lost their jobs, they have been victimised and so forth.

I am happy that I am able to speak for them all this evening to say how very pleased and how very proud we are that we at that function this evening are being honoured by the citizens of this country.

I feel proud also on behalf of my parents who made tremendous sacrifices and who had the foresight to make sacrifices so that this day has become possible that I have been elevated to become the first Citizen of British Guiana.

I feel proud also for the barefoot, the dispossessed, the exploited and the hungry who see in me the embodiment of their hopes, their wishes and their aspirations.

I am very deeply conscious of the heavy and great task which is facing me and my colleagues. I accept with all humility the great responsibility which has been placed on our shoulders. I am conscious and deeply so that we alone cannot do the great task which is ahead of us. I want the support of one and all in British Guiana.

Someone said some moment ago about talent. I have been to universities abroad, I have been to international conferences and I have seen Guianese at work and at play and, believe me, they are a match with any in any part of the world, and I have no doubt that if the same spirit which we see evinced here this evening prevails in the immediate future that the country is definitely on the high road of progress.

We are aware, unfortunately, of a few pebbles in the way. Some who seek to disrupt our national unity. I feel that at this important junction of our country's history, national unity is more important than anything else.

We must strive with every fibre in our body to achieve this national unity so that we can obtain our objectives of political and economic independence.

Some may say why talk about politics, why talk about political independence. I would like to utter the words of the famous leader Jomo Kenyatta who said that independence is not handed on a platter, it has to be fought for. It has to be wrested and with your help we hope that before a year is out we would have wrested our political independence also.

Colonialism is antagonistic to progress, to a balanced agricultural and industrial economy. Colonies have traditionally been used as a source of raw materials and foods and a market for their industrial goods from the metropolitan country or countries.

We have to break this vicious circle if we are to improve the lot of our people.

Then you have to help us to industrialise so that we could provide the jobs for the many hungry mouths in our country. This is why independence is not [just] something a chimera which we are always talking about and dreaming about.

This is something which is a vital necessity and I do hope that all would join in this struggle for national independence, political independence, and that it will be attained very shortly so that we can take our place with all the nations in the world.

Another thing which can be said in favour of political independence is the fact that it releases the energies of our people. There is no doubt about this. We have seen this in India, we have seen this in Ghana, we have seen this elsewhere where progress after independence has come forward in leaps and bounds, greatly exceeding what has been done in several years before independence.

Let us not divert and dissipate this wonderful energy by having internal struggles and strife. I know that my opponents, our opponents, have been very critical of us in the past. I noticed that many of them shifted their ground.

At one time it was communism, now it is racialism. Jagan and other leaders of the PPP were communists. Now suddenly we have now become racialists. Those who know anything about politics can at least say this that one cannot be a communist and a racialist at the same time.

My friends, this is a country in which many races have lived amicably for years, for generations, and there is no reason whatsoever that we should not continue to do so.

Indeed, it is imperative that we must do so if we are to improve the lot of the masses of the people. For believe me development does not merely depend on the Government or Ministers.

If we are to have development it must come basically from the people; without the co-operation of one and all there can be no development in any country.

I hope in the immediate period facing us that all of you those who are here and those who are not here will contribute whatever little they can and however much they can to the plans, to the formulation of policies, so that we can consider them and move to the policy which will be in the interest of all the Guianese people.

This brings me also to a point which I think needs to be mentioned here, and that is a sense of inferiority which some of us feel. A lack of pride in our own country and in our own goods. Housewives must begin to buy things

Guianese. We must stop thinking that only things which have a foreign label are the best things in the world.

Let us start a campaign of buying Guianese. Let me, however, say that I do not want to be misunderstood. I do not want it to be said that I am preaching narrow nationalism, because I feel that we must today not only be Guianese citizens, but we must be citizens of the world.

We who are socialists or who are simply good humans must recognise the fact that there are good human beings and humanitarians all over the world; and so far as I am concerned, and my Government is concerned, as long as an individual is willing to come and work with us, to live with us and to be one of us, we are prepared to welcome them and embrace them and regard them as our brothers in arms.

Let me say here also a word to those of us who are a little more fortunate. I want to advise that we should channel as much as possible of our savings into productive use. Our country has inherited many problems, but when we look around us we see some living in splendour, some living conspicuously, while others are wallowing in want.

Only today I went across the river with some photographers from foreign magazines, and I looked at some of the faces of the workers and there I saw symptoms of malnutrition and hunger.

Indeed at 1.30 this afternoon when I was leaving my office a lady was at my door at the Public Building asking with tears in her eyes, Please help me. My son has been thrown out of a job and he is at the point of committing suicide. This is indeed an alarming situation.

Let those of us who are little more fortunate remember that we have problems in our country and we have those who are not so well off, and let us remember to condition our ways of living, our way of thinking, so that we can think not only of ourselves, but we can think of all the people so that we can all progress at the same time.

I wish to take this opportunity to thank very sincerely the Citizens' Committee. I am sure that you will agree with me that they have done a wonderful job, but now that they have done this I do not want to be a taskmaster. But I feel that they could go on to doing something perhaps of greater importance and that is to rally the forces in our country so that we can demand on two fronts what is required in our country that is economic independence and financial aid from abroad.

The Citizens' Committee can play a great role mobilising as it has brought sections of our country to demand from Her Majesty's Government independence within the shortest possible time.

They could help us also in designing a national flag, in formulating a national anthem, and above all in deciding what the new name of our great country should be.

As regards aid we have had thrown up at the elections all kinds of figures. Mr. Macorquodale asked for a sense of proportions and for a sense of fragmentism. While I think the Citizens' Committee can certainly mobilise persons who have experience of all sectors of our country's life, and so come to some figure with the help of course of Ministers and technical experts, so that when I go abroad I can say that I have the sanction of the citizens of British Guiana.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I want to assure you, if any assurance is necessary, that you need have no fears so far as my Government is concerned. All your democratic rights or liberties or freedoms will be guaranteed and protected.

As regards the charge that we are racialists, let me say this, that if I were to be leader for one race then I will assure you that tomorrow I will retire from politics. I feel that we have a great task to perform. We have a glorious destiny. We must remember always that destiny a new nationhood One Nation, One People, One Destiny.

I thank you.

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