

**Remarks at the Launching of the book "My Fight for Guyana's
Freedom with Reflections on my Father" by Nadira Jagan-Brancier**

Friday October 9th, 1998 at 5 p.m at State House

Your Excellency President Janet Jagan, Mrs. Nadira Jagan-Brancier, creator of this marvellous book, distinguished invitees.

I feel very pleased and honoured to have been invited to make a few remarks on this special occasion.

I always enjoy attending the launching of books. It shows that a creative impulse in the country is alive and well. And it gives me a great lift to find that in the last few years I have attended scores of such launchings. We can never have too many books, especially books of our own making.

But undoubtedly this is a special book, a book born out of extraordinary love and devotion. So it is a particular pleasure to be present at this launching in State House where Dr. Jagan lived when he was President.

In a sense this book is another edition of Dr. Cheddi Jagan's *The West on Trial* - in fact it is described as "an abridged and illustrated version of *The West on Trial*". That book is one of the most celebrated of all Guyanese books - very much now an essential part of our written legacy - so this book gains from the historic value of that original.

But it is much more than that. There is an extraordinarily new and moving dimension to this book. This dimension is added through the love and dedication of Dr. Jagan's daughter, Nadira, and the result is a work which I believe gives a unique and intimate insight into Dr. Jagan's life which the public will never have had previously.

The illustrations are this book's special glory. There are over 350 pictures, most of them I imagine never seen before by Guyanese and these are a wonderful complement to the famous text. I think one would want to have this book for these illustrations and the commentaries on them alone.

The range of pictures both private and public is marvellous. I think I can imagine the mixture of emotions - the sadness as well as the well-remembered pleasures - which must have come when going through the family and other archives

in order to choose the pictures. The memories must have been intense and I believe tears of pride and sadness must have often come to the eye. We can feel privileged to have been presented with this veritable treasure house of memories of Dr. Jagan in the bosom of his family as well as in the public eye.

Browsing through this book brought back my own memories of Dr. Jagan. I was not close to Dr. Jagan but he always made a powerful impression on me as I imagine he will have done on everyone who met him.

- ▶ He always struck me as living an utterly dedicated and transparently plain and honest life. He realised deep down that greed played much too important a role in the affairs of men. As his wife, President Janet Jagan, puts it "He lived a simple life in an environment where luxury and materialism prevailed". He sensed very acutely that there were arrangements in the world which were fundamentally wrong in that they did not give ordinary men, women and children a fair deal. He fought desperately hard to try and change those flawed arrangements in the world and that is one aspect of the man that I will never forget.
- ▶ I also have a strong personal memory of Dr. Jagan being a person who bore no malice. On a number of occasions when I had written an article or given a viewpoint on radio or TV which basically did not agree with his own views or stated policies, when I happened to meet him shortly afterwards he showed absolutely no sign of being annoyed or bearing a grudge about the opinions I had expressed. Instead he always wanted to engage in constructive discussion, exchange views, seek clarity of thinking. That made a lasting impression on me. I think it was one of his great strengths and part of his integrity as a human being and a great national leader.
- ▶ My impression of Dr. Jagan was of a man who had a quite extraordinarily close connection with ordinary people in every walk of life. The truth of this impression certainly was proved after he died with that immense feeling of loss which the whole nation experienced and which led to that

outpouring of emotion at the ceremonies that marked his passing.

As I held this book in my hands, I remembered my own emotion. When the news of Dr. Jagan's death came at my home it was in the early hours of the morning and my wife and I sat down and talked for a long time together about our memories of him. Then I wrote a piece which was later published and I want to take a little time to read from that piece because it expressed a memory of Dr. Jagan which will always remain vivid for me:

It was on no great state occasion, at no momentous political event, during no gathering of the eminent and the famous. He was at Rose Hall estate to give out house lot deeds to about fifty sugar workers. It was pouring with rain but he did not think of cancelling and they did not think of not attending. When it came to his turn to speak an aide handed him a prepared speech but he gave a smile and did not take it. He then spoke from the heart to those few sugar workers and their families in the falling rain and I have never heard words so clear and powerful and suitable.

Not a long speech, no rolling periods, no ideology, but simple words spoken in a straight line to their heads and hearts. How their ancestors had suffered much in slavery and indenture. But now through years of struggle and sacrifice a different time had come, a better time, a prouder time. But they should know it was time when they must bear responsibility, they must take care of what they had won, they must show they were worthy of the efforts of those who had gone before. Now they must look after their house lots and improve them, they must leave things better for their children. He trusted them. He had always trusted them. They must remember what he said.

It was not really a speech. They had gathered around him and he was telling them the truth. I swear they will never forget what he said. And somehow on that

quite insignificant occasion I knew I had got glimpse of what this man has meant to the mass of people who have loved him so much.

Whirling around in my head somewhere is what remains after age has taken its toll of the vast amount of poetry I have read in my lifetime. But often lines surface and I cannot for the life of me recall from what poem they come or who authored them. When I heard Dr. Jagan had died some lines came as if summoned but I cannot remember their source. The summoned lines captured for me something of Dr. Jagan's fighting heart and the flame he lit for countless others. "He was one who in his life fought for life/Who wore at his heart the fire's center".

One thing that shines through this book which is now being launched is Dr. Jagan's deep love and devotion for his family - his parents and relations, his wife, his children and his grandchildren - and their deep love and devotion for him. The book is in many ways a lovingly chosen and very vivid family album. And we are fortunate to be given the benefit and privilege of sharing this special and moving family chronicle.

This is a book which I imagine Guyanese of every persuasion will want to own. Dr. Jagan is universally acknowledged and respected as one of the outstanding heroes of the nation. It is a book which not only reproduces in abridged form his most famous book but even more movingly it gives us a unique view of Dr. Jagan from the family archives.

We are all indebted to Nadira Jagan-Brancier for bringing forth for us this splendid, warm and loving book - a true work of filial love and family devotion. I am sure all her family must be proud of her.

Ian McDonald