

CBJ: Father Of The Nation

by Anthony Calder

Sociologist Ken Danns was his usual self in his recent viewpoint on Political Myths.

The University of Guyana lecturer began with general statements he held to be true or self-evident - that "political myth-making is part and parcel of the behaviors of many nation states seeking to strengthen national consciousness, promote patriotism, embellish their histories and celebrate their heroes," and that "a political myth is an ill-founded belief held uncritically by an interested

discredit persons and organizations paying glowing tribute to the memory of Dr. Cheddi Jagan served merely to expose his fanatical identity with those who believed deliberate untruths, venomous insinuations and malicious and scurrilous exaggerations are the way to securing a narrow partisan advantage.

The first truth about Dr. Jagan that Danns sought to deny was to state that "Burnham, whether or not one was a supporter of his rule, takes objective and historical precedence over Cheddi Jagan for any single claim to the 'fatherhood

organization, the People's Progressive Party, and consciously voted Cheddi Jagan in office in their country's August 11, 1961 general elections as the first Premier and first Head of Government of British Guiana, isn't Cheddi Jagan and not Forbes Burnham "the Father of the Nation"?

Secondly, Danns sought to rewrite history by contending that Burnham, not Cheddi Jagan, was a founder and leading light in the regional integration movement.

Is Danns denying that the regional integration movement began with the establishment of the West Indian Federation? Then I have news for him.

The very first paragraph of a June 1996 edition of **The History of CARICOM** tells us that "the establishment of the Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM) was the result of a 15-year effort to fulfil the hope of regional integration which was born with the establishment of the British West Indies Federation in 1958."

Adds the edition: "The West Indies Federation came to an end in 1962, but its end, in many ways, must be regarded as the real beginning of what is now the



Flashback: President Cheddi Jagan addressing a section of the International Conference on a New Global Human Order in Georgetown, in August 1996.

restrict his interest in achieving social justice for the working class to sugar workers? And once he assumed the presidency in 1992, did he not by 1996 "make a positive difference" by ensuring that the incomes of all workers rise above the rate of inflation and in fact increase by 130% to 150% above what they were in 1992?

By saying that "Jagan's leadership in reality revealed selfish and self-serving qualities," Danns also impugned the integrity both of Dr. Jagan and of the leadership of the PPP/CIVIC alliance in a most malicious and scurrilous manner.

Anyone who knows Guyana's politicians and political history ought to know that had it not been for Burnham's crafty collaboration with U.S./British intelligence to manipulate Guyana's political process, a practice Britain and the United States have publicly apologized to the Guyanese people for engaging in, Burnham would not have had the chance to banish Guyana into the wilderness of hemispheric development.

Far from being Guyana's greatest politician, Burnham should have been branded Guyana's most infamous politician who committed high treason with

search can bear this out.

Danns, not the majority of the Guyanese people, should "cut the crap" and get on with the serious task of rationally assessing the contributions that the late Cheddi Jagan made to Guyana being what it is today.

Of all the other "political myths" about Cheddi Jagan that professor Danns felt compelled to try to dispel, the one I'd like to critique, finally, is the sociologist's boast that Burnham, not Jagan, was "the greatest politician in Guyana's history."

The best way to end this essay is to reiterate Mr. Hydar Ally's point that those who in the name of academic



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Flashback: 'Nice to meet you Mr President,' this little one seems to be saying as Dr Jagan took a walk at the National Park on Easter Day of '96.

group of people."

He then moved to more specific conclusions: that Guyana's "people can ill afford to wallow in myths and falsehoods about its leaders and the society," and that "it is both dangerous and divisive for such political myths to be peddled at this time."

Scholarly, perhaps. But highly flawed, for real.

In his eagerness to vent his anti-PPP/CIVIC bias, professor Danns failed to inform us that "political myth" is an academic term he used to politicize the word "myth." The word "myth" itself has several meanings, one of which is "a traditional or legendary story, usually concerning some superhuman being or some alleged person or event, with or without a determinable basis of fact or a natural explanation."

Far from what Danns sought to imply, therefore, the word "myth" refers equally to what is real as to what is alleged to exist.

Secondly Danns' attempt to distort history and

of the nation."

Danns himself has conceded that "Cheddi Jagan was the first Guyanese to be Premier during the latter days of colonial rule." But he apparently didn't think we were intelligent enough to realize that a country or territory or state doesn't have to achieve political independence to be termed a "nation."

My 1991 Webster Dictionary defines "nation" as "a body of people united under a particular organization and usually occupying a defined territory." And the 1981 edition of the Random House Dictionary of the English Language defines it as "a body of people, associated with a particular territory, that is sufficiently conscious of its unity to seek or to possess a government peculiarly its own." A second Random House meaning of "nation" is, simply, "a territory or country itself."

So, since Guianese, associated with a particular territory, British Guiana, united under a particular

be regarded as the real beginning of what is now the Caribbean Community."

The Federation was a kind of federal government drawn from eight island nations and the mainland territories of British Honduras and British Guiana. Surely, Danns hasn't forgotten that Cheddi Jagan was this country's premier political leader during that period. In fact it was Dr. Jagan who led Guiana's delegation to what The History of CARICOM describes as the first Heads of Government Conference in Trinidad and Tobago in July of 1963 to discuss Port-of-Spain's proposal for the creation of a Caribbean Economic Community.

As a preamble to the Georgetown Accord emerging from the Eighth Conference of Heads of Government of Commonwealth Caribbean Countries (April 9-12, 1973) states, CARICOM as we know it today was meant "to consolidate and strengthen the bonds of unity which have historically existed among their peoples."

Thirdly Danns rejected the characteristic of Dr. Jagan as a champion of the poor and the working class.

Aren't sugar workers among the poor and working class? Besides, when Dr. Jagan ran for and won election to the Legislative Assembly in 1947, did he

in a similar manner. Of the other three political myths about Dr. Jagan that Danns used poisoned weapons of controversy to try to dispel, the only one worth any kind of critique is the sociologist's boast that Burnham, not Jagan, was "the greatest politician in Guyana's history."

mitted high treason with external forces to remove a constitutionally elected government from office and who, as head of government, imposed a self-centered, dictatorial rule on us that resulted in Guyana becoming the poorest, most backward country in the whole of the western hemisphere. Danns' own re-

who in the name of academia would seek to downplay the political and historical significance of Dr Cheddi Jagan should learn to make a distinction between social facts and essentially subjective assessments.

(This article honoring the memory of Dr Cheddi Jagan was first published in Mirror in 1997)

MOMENT IN HISTORY

March 8 marks the anniversary of the brutal killing of **Kowsilla**, a sugar worker, who died defending the rights of workers. This tragedy took place in 1964 when sugar workers were on strike and scabs of the PNC tried to break the strike.

She and other women sugar workers were defending a bridge, to prevent scabs from working, when a tractor rode over her, killing her and injuring several other women.

Since that time Kowsilla has been declared a heroine of women workers and women in general. Every year her death is commemorated at her graveside at Cornelia Ida, West Coast, Demerara.

This photograph was taken when the Women's Progressive Organization (WPO) marched from her home in Letchora to her graveside. Heading the demonstration, to the left, is former WPO General Secretary Arai Thantony.