

CELEBRATING THE LIFE AND WORKS OF CHEDDI JAGAN – THE FREEDOM FIGHTER

Eddi Rodney

It may well be that the transition to the AI post-digital algorithms the complete, essential Cheddi Jagan will materialise. Already technology coupled with X-ray <instruments> and infra-ray scanning has made considerable impact in unravelling Ancient Egyptian scrolls and monumental artworks. At least much more than the innovations of the 20th century technology would have reproduced.

I.

So dialectically there are grounds to be optimistic in terms of future generations being able to access recorded archives of this remarkable freedom fighter and political statesman.

The <Roundtable> documentary sponsored and facilitated by the Cheddi Jagan Research Centre could contribute towards a broader perspective of Dr. Jagan and the People’s Progressive party as the local political culture evolves towards 2035 – in just over a decade.

Introducing the panelists last week, Hydar Ally, former Permanent Secretary and currently Education Secretary of the PPP, reminded that the efforts to sustain and enhance the culturology of Cheddi Jagan remains more important than previously.[1]

He reiterated that it was important to highlight Jagan’s immense contributions to the Independence movement. [2]

Continuity and the Challenges of False News Messaging/Propaganda

One of the challenges the progressive movement has had to wrestle over the decades was the breaking, the fracture of the national liberation movement during the 1950s decade, specifically, the period when subsequent to the suspension of the 1953 Constitution, there emerged two PPPs – one under the legitimate leadership of Dr. Jagan and his loyalists and the other (PPP) controlled by Mr. Burnham and the so-called moderates.

Several problems developed, as for one example, many Afro-Guyanese became coerced and swayed by Burnham’s rhetoric. [3]

Eddi Rodney opined that the country and its working people suffered a great deal from this social class perfidy and betrayal, who were misled by Burnham, would eventually realise that the Jagan PPP represented the best interests of the working people. [4]

In this context Rodney noted that the contribution of the Jagans has to be understood viz a <continuity>. A process of one historical phase to the next.

II.

Indra Chandernal, a long-standing member of the PP who worked for decades alongside Cheddi and Janet Jagan (1970s- 1990s) and has served as an executive of the Women’s Progressive organization (WPO), posed the question as to what would have happened (to the social environment) if “there had been no PPP..” – utter chaos and madness! Under the reactionary groups of pro-imperialistic and opponents of Socialism. (ER).

Chanderpal sketched out the realities of the conditions, the living conditions of the masses of ordinary people when the PPP was established in 1950.

The role that women played in society was improved with the formation of the women's organization the Women's Political & Economic Organisation (WPEO), [5] and the Women's Progressive Organisation (WPO) in 1953. [6]

Women's rights as gender rights in the community, and the workplace had to be part of the organised struggle for Independence.

The younger population of Guyanese benefitted from the reforms introduced by successive PPP administrations. This process was initiated by Cheddi Jagan even during the years of extreme difficulties and violence that cost many lives and damage to property.

It was Cde. Cheddi's idea to develop the University of Guyana [7] during the years prior to 1966. He proposed the concept and started implementing sessional classes... the reactionaries laughed at him but he persevered.

Indra Chanderpal who has served as a Minister as well as Member of parliament, is the widow of another PPP stalwart the late Navin Chanderpal who died on October 28, 2014, after battling a life-threatening cancer episode. Currently she remains one of Guyana's most experienced gender Rights advocates.

The Formative Working-Class Experience of Cheddi Jagan

Similar to almost every intellectual or notable, Chedi Jagan is best understood by analysing the *stages* of

- (i) his early development, or primary/intermediate education.
- (ii) Involvement in the formation of the Political Affairs Committee (PAC) and thence to
- (iii) political party groups and national organisation, and ultimately, as the mature Independence movement popular symbol, or as some would equate (with being) the **Father of the Nation**. [8]

Eddi Rodney noted that Jagan in fact (WoT, 1966, p.20.) began working whilst a pre-teen "doing various jobs to support the family..."

During his years as a Queen's College student, he resided with three families in Georgetown.

III.

His experiences were not uncommon for aspiring collegians in the 1930s. "I had to do all the household chores...go to the market, tend to goats and sleep on the floor..." he noted in connection with the first such East Indian family. The other two were slightly improved although the aura of oppression was pervasive.

Whilst he studied at the Northwestern University Dental School, Cheddi Jagan was in fact a worker-student doing a variety of jobs and employed in diverse fields (WoT, 1966, Chp.3; pp.50-52).

The point has to be made that LFS Burnham had absolutely no such experiences. Burnham remained aligned with the Creole-African sub-elite amongst whom he was venerated.

Walter Rodney who originated from a working class "small man" family was not a worker-student as he gained a University of West Indies scholarship. Subsequently, he went on to gain other higher education

scholastic awards. Rodney's association with the working class emerged in Jamaica amongst the marginalized and unemployed.

(Campbell Horace and Lewis Rupert: relevant text, Rodney's association with Political Rastafari and his intellectualism).

「 However, he benefitted from the wisdom of veteran workers who were radicalized by socialist ideals. Jagan's development therefore, was unique in terms of direct linkages with workers districts in mainly Afro-American communities. 」

Cde. Dharamkumar Seeraj the other panelist, articulated on the attributes, the leadership prowess [9] of Cheddi Jagan, especially in terms of the development of the rice industry and Agriculture as a whole.

Seeraj recounted the several achievements of the PPP Administrations that were made during the years whilst in government as well as in the Opposition.

Drawing upon his decades of insider knowledge of rice cultivation, production and harvesting for markets both domestic and overseas, Seeraj elaborated on Cheddi Jagan's policies commencing from the early 1960s. [10]

However, Jagan recognised that the Colonial Development Corporation (or as the entity was officially described, the Commonwealth Development Corporation) was the single most favourable institution that could capitalize the mechanization/growth of the sector that was the only nationally-owned employing thousands of families.

「 Interesting at this juncture would be "*Agriculture in Guyana*" a study by French agronomist René Dumont...) Efforts to secure development assistance from the Americans had commenced since during 1958. The State Department negated Jagan's appeal some 12 months before the <Castroist> revolution overthrew the Batista pseudo-republic and liberated the Cuban people. 」

Seeraj observed that the 1961 PPP government pressed ahead in diversification mode. Amongst the measures implemented were:

- The establishment of the Black Bush Polder settlement for farming communities in East Berbice. The Scheme as it was described evolved during the stint as Agriculture Minister of Mr. B. H. Benn. The project was scoffed at by the PNC and Burnham himself persuaded his flock not to participate in any way with "Jagan's rice programme".
- Critical Drainage and Irrigation infrastructural works were implemented at Boarserie and Tapacuma as well as elsewhere along the coastal environment.
- Incentives and marketing were improved and the Rice Development Board upgraded with the creation of the Rice Development Company (Roopnarine Satram; 1989, on "The Case of the Rice Industry in Guyana during the period 1954-1970, **Transition**, Issue 17, 1989) p.67)
- Rice production was integrated into the Agriculture sector as a whole.

Eddi Rodney in endorsing Seeraj's analysis reminded that Dr. Jagan always urged that producers should organize. His main concern in resolving conflicts was to focus on the small often impoverished farmers.

His concept identified the large rice sector interests, the middle-scale operators and the small acreage farming people, who often were renting (or leasing) farm plots from either the government or another wealthy producer.

Not every rice industry stake-holder was a Kayman Sankar, a Beni Sankar, an Angad Rupee or Ivor Alleyne [11] and there were certain critical distinctions that had to be part of the equation.

Dr. Jagan also focused on supporting research projects specific to the rice sector including the opening of Rice Support facilities at Mon Repos and elsewhere all structured to improve the viability of the national economy.

References & Notes

1. A recently published book by Clem Seecharan has impacted on those sectors who either have nil knowledge of this country's history or are incapable of appreciating the colonial and post-colonial event involving the PPP as a mass movement.
Of considerable importance in this regard would be **Guyana History Notebook** compiled by the late Dr. Odeen Ishamel; Number 1-55 - ? and based on HMSO official releases, correspondences of Dr. Jagan, the Governors Savage, Luyt and Grey and other material.
Hydar Ally in his opening remarks referenced the need "to celebrate" Dr. Jagan's life and work.
2. See essays focusing on Jagan and Manley, ed. Caribbean Labor & Politics – Legacies (Afro-American life series, 2004, edited A. Young and P. Mars)
Also Weekend Mirror (WM), PPP; Vol 45 #29, 19-20 July 2008, article, Hydar Ally, "ideology & Development".
3. According to Guyanese Linguistic authority, Professor Hubert Devonish, Burnham utilised to the max the comparative advantage he had through the use of English rhetoric <Liberation> - Creole Language, Politics in the Caribbean, Ch.7, p.23.
4. In terms of political insight and affiliation with Afro-American solidarity groups, Brindley Benn's perspective on Jagan's <pragmatist> Marxism could be foremost in terms of the Dialectic. See his article, "legacies of Cheddi Jagan", in Caribbean Labor & Politics, op cit., pp 10-17.
5. WM., Vol #4, No. 48; 24-25. 11.2012, Editorial, "Women's Rights & the WPO". Also, article, "WPO celebrates its 16th Triennial Congress on the eve of its 60th Anniversary, p.15.
6. Thunder, PPP; Vol.48 No 2 ? Qt...2022, "WPO celebrates 60 years", pp15-18.
7. Guyana Chronicle, Nr. 101949, 15.3.2009, article, Professor Prem Misir, "Political resistance to the birth of UG", Misir notes that The Ordinance (UG) was approved by the Senate on 18.3.1963, and by the legislative Council on 5.4.1963.
Governor Grey signed the Bill into law on April 18, 1963, whilst the University's initial event was held on 1.10.1963 with classes commencing on 2.19.1963.
8. As interpreted historically since Dr. Jagan's death in 1997. For a review see WM. Vol 12, nr 63, 11-12 march, 2023, p10 for reprint of Address, 23 February 1970, on the occasion of the inauguration of Republic D Status. "Our People deserve a better future and that they must have".

Also p.10, (box) quote, Dr Cheddi Jagan, August 2, 1996, and p. 14, – “Dr Cheddi Jagan a force for good in Guyana” – positions from President Irfaan Ali at CJRC Reflection (?) March 6, 2023.

9. WM. Vol. 12, No. 62; 4-5 march 2023, p5, article, “Remembering the life of Cheddi Jagan” – a reprint of June 1, 1991, speech, “Equality the basis for Policy”.
Interestingly at this time the USSR had virtually been dissolved. Nevertheless, the PPP leader remained optimistic with regards to <revolutionary socialism> in Cuba, citing the solidarity positions of the US radical left-wing scholar, Paul Baran, as well as, academics Professor C. Wright Mills, Professor Douglas R. Dowd and author Joseph North, whose works consistently projected the Cuban (rather than the Haytian) Revolution as an Alternative to Imperialist domination.

10. WM. op cit. (4-5 March 2, 23) p.16, item, “Rice farmlands to be made available to MNA/ADA Scheme”.
In the dispensation that highlights Regional Food Security a good insight into the recorder Guyana Rice Production and Exports commencing from 2019-2022 can be obtained from the Agriculture Ministry’s web page < <https://agriculture.gov.gy/>> .

11. In terms of political economy and a neo-Dumont app to agrarian productivity and social class dimensions, see paper, Prof Wazir Mohamed, “Afro-Guyanese & Rice” – the first of a three-part summary made at the **International Rice Conference** organised by the Rice Development Board (GRDB) and the Ministry of Agriculture at the National Cultural Centre to mark the century of rice exportation from Guyana. The *In the Diaspora* column of Stabroek News, Monday ?, 1. 2009
Another overall review in the publication Guyana was edited in 2006 featuring an item by Elsa Croal, “Agriculture – the backbone of the country”, in a comprehensive book, ed. Arif Ali, the founder of **Hansib Publications**.
Croal notes that “the first recorded rive export from British Guiana were to Trinidad in 1889...” possibly sourcing from “Our Rice Industry”, by L. Ramgopal.

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