

# THE THINKER

Volume 2

July - December 2018

## THE COLLAPSE *of* Sugar

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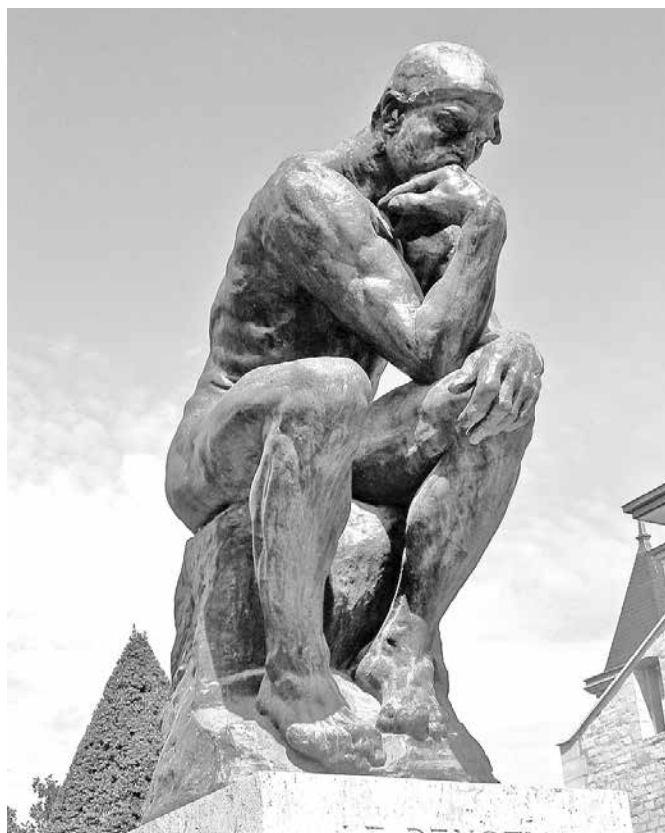
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*The Thinker (French: Le Penseur) is a bronze sculpture by Auguste Rodin.*

# EDITORIAL

This is the second edition of "The Thinker" which is intended to be a bi-annual publication.

The first edition was dedicated to the Birth Centenary of the late Dr. Cheddi Jagan, and from feedback received, the Journal made quite an impact on the reading public in Guyana and abroad.

This second edition will have two broad sections. The first section will deal primarily with the different aspects of the elections processes by persons who have been integrally involved, one way or the other, in the conduct of elections in Guyana.

The other section will focus on local and international issues which we believe will be of interest to the reading public.

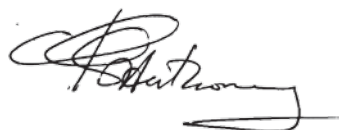
Significant changes have taken place in Guyana in the recent past, including the future of sugar following the closure of several sugar estates. Two of the articles have focused exclusively on the future of sugar in Guyana and the dire consequences that could result from the closure of sugar estates. Perspectives on the Future of the Guyanese Sugar Sector: Capital, Crop and Country by Dr. Ben Richardson from the Department of Politics and International Studies, University of Warwick, UK makes for compelling reading. This, coupled with "The Minimization of Sugar- A Macroeconomic Challenge" provided fresh and valuable perspectives on the future of sugar in Guyana.

This edition will also pay homage to Guyana's first female Executive President, Mrs. Janet Jagan, who, had she been alive, would have celebrated her 98th birthday on October 20, 2018. Mrs. Jagan, apart from her several duties at the Governmental and Party levels, also served as a member of the Guyana Elections Commission during the period of rigged elections, which were documented in a publication, "Rigged Elections in Guyana." Recent developments have once again raised the spectre of Democracy and the Rule of Law in Guyana following the successful passage of a No-Confidence Motion against the APNU + AFC Government on December 21, 2018. The Government have moved to the Courts challenging the legality of the motion. It remains to be seen what will emerge out of this Court challenge.

The Editorial Board wishes to express its gratitude to the several contributors to this Journal, and to the reading public.

We again look forward for your continuing support. On our part, we wish to recommit ourselves to the highest level of journalistic and ethical standards.

I take this opportunity to wish our readers and all Guyanese a prosperous and productive 2019



Dr. Frank Anthony  
Editor

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# PERSPECTIVES ON THE FUTURE OF THE GUYANESE SUGAR SECTOR: CAPITAL, CROP AND COUNTRY



In the last three decades, the international sugar trade has undergone an ideological transformation. Appeals for liberalisation, privatisation and marketisation have been ascendant, reshaping the rules governing where in the world sugar is produced, by whom, and at what cost. Against this intellectual tide, attempts to manage trade through state-led policies like import taxes and production quotas have become increasingly hard to maintain.

The epitome of this has been the reform of the

European Union (EU) sugar regime during the 2000s, which involved abrogation of the longstanding agreement to buy raw cane sugar from select African, Caribbean and Pacific countries at ‘remunerative prices’ and a shift instead toward free trade policy. This has provided greater market access to the EU but no guarantees on price, exposing to competition producers in the former European colonies that exported sugar to the EU at close to world market levels. Facing lower and more volatile sales revenue, economic restructuring has appeared increasingly unavoidable.

Given its historic dependence on exports to the EU and relatively higher cost of production, the Guyanese sugar sector has been on the front line of this change. Indeed, this restructuring remains an ongoing process, and there is arguably still no settlement on what the sector ought to look like and who should bear the burden of getting there.

Such questions are inescapably political, and it is partly for this reason that they have prompted such vociferous debate in the country. The other reason is because of their immediate importance not just for the thousands of jobs and livelihoods connected to sugar production, but also the wider role of GuySuCo as a foreign exchange earner and service providers; and even the view taken by voters at the next general election as they reflect on how restructuring has been managed by the government and challenged by the opposition. Clearly, there is a lot at stake.

During my research into the effects of EU trade reform in Guyana – which involved interviews with policy-makers and people working in sugar – there was a diversity of opinion expressed about why the sector was experiencing difficulties, and what should be done about it. Yet, within these accounts as well as those provided in documentary sources like newspaper commentary and institutional reports, three general perspectives kept reappearing: one based on capital

and the commercial pressures facing the sector; one based on the crop and the distinctive agricultural and industrial characteristics of cane sugar production; and one based on the country and the place of sugar in the longer history of the Guyanese polity. Each offered a different interpretation of unfolding events.

From the capital perspective there was an emphasis on ensuring the immediate economic viability of GuySuCo. There was a readiness to scrutinise the indebtedness of the company and its reliance on regular subventions by the state – or, to make it more personal, the Guyanese taxpayer – and conclude from this that far-reaching restructuring was necessary. Bringing down the total wage bill was deemed particularly important, as in comparison to more competitive sugar producers where cultivation and harvesting is highly mechanised, labour in Guyana account for a high proportion of the cost of production. This was also related to the unreliability of workers given the persistence of strikes and absenteeism that have undermined orderly business; a complaint echoing colonial tropes about the ill-disciplined slave. Also seen as problematic were the ancillary functions that GuySuCo has inherited, which in many other countries would be the preserve of the state. These have burdened it with additional responsibilities and prevented it from being run as a commercial organisation.

Imagining GuySuCo as an assembly of more and less profitable activities was thus central to this perspective, and provided the rationale for arguing that certain parts or functions ought to be sold off to leave a more streamlined successor. There was an openness to foreign investors in this vision, not least as a sign that the sector had a credible future, and to the potential of cane farmers – often referred to as ‘private’ cane farmers – who were seen as possessing an entrepreneurialism that existed because of their independence from the nationalised company. Piecemeal solutions to the low prices being fetched by sugar exports were sought in ‘value added’ marketing, echoing the success stories told of Demerara Distillers Limited in its adjustment to the liberalisation of the EU rum trade. But there was less enthusiasm for a broader transformation of the sugar sector. Rather, the long-term strategy with most appeal was to redeploy assets, chiefly land, to benefit from an oil-driven property boom.

From the crop perspective, things weren’t so straightforward. The sugar sector was very much

seen as a unity that had to be understood holistically: carving off parts of it would jeopardise the whole. Time horizons were also different. Decisions to save money by cutting back on activities such as tilling were considered myopic, as they would only make it harder to maintain yields further down the line. Similarly, investments in new technology and in training personnel would take time to pay dividends. The unique qualities of sugar production were also stressed. It had grown symbiotically with the landscape such that the water management services carried out by GuySuCo were now indispensable in preventing large areas of the country from being flooded. The supply-chain was also straightforward and for farmers provided an assurance of sale, albeit under increasing price pressure, that other crops could not. Finally, working in sugar was not just another occupation; it was in people’s blood. While diversification into other economic activities might sound easy, for those who *only* knew sugar, it would be anything but.

For these reasons there was a desire to envision a long-term transformation of the sector, one which would seek to harness the multi-functional potential of the sugarcane crop through technological upgrading. Industrial products like chemicals and fuels were mentioned, resonating with the conceptualisation taken in other countries of mills as ‘bio-refineries’ rather than simply sugar factories. Related to this, GuySuCo was not seen simply as a sugar company but as a captain of industry with a social responsibility to develop linkages with other parts of the economy such as horticultural and livestock enterprises. Strategic planning was thus called for, anathema to which was the perceived rashness of decisions taken by ministers to close down or shutter entire estates without feasibility studies, safety nets, or even fair warning.

From the country perspective, these economic concerns were supplanted by socio-political ones, wherein the sugar sector was seen primarily as a site of struggle. Questions about its current predicament could only be answered with reference to labour history, specifically the long road to trade union recognition and humane wages and working conditions for indentured Indians and their descendants. On this view strategies like privatisation were viewed with suspicion, indelibly coloured by the restrictions and exploitations experienced by estate workers employed by the privately-owned Booker Brothers company prior to its nationalisation

in 1976. Likewise, the difficulties encountered in the modernisation project at Skeldon during the mid-2000s could not be dissociated from the fact that it was Booker Tate that oversaw construction, ultimately suing GuySuCo for illegally terminating its management contracts and once again seeming to act against ‘the national interest’.

With this different temporality, the future of the sugar sector appeared to be more path-dependent. Radical restructuring was foreclosed by the weight of history, and emphasis was placed instead on winning old wars: redistributing pay from management to field workers, and ensuring representation of ‘the worker’ in collective bargaining and democratic politics. Subventions from the state arising from these were put in a wider context; where sugar was once a cash cow milked by government; support for it now was only fair. This perspective also foregrounded and racialised the role of political parties, with the PPP seen as historically- and electorally-bound to defend the sugar sector, while APNU/AFC was at best indifferent, and at worst hostile, to it. Failure to protect the sector, then, had repercussions far beyond imminent unemployment. It was interpreted variously as an ethno-political strategy to dislocate the PPP’s heartland, and a threat to established moral order by supposing that crime rates would rise in the sugar belt as people fell out of work.

It is helpful to identify these three perspectives, because they each offer compelling yet mutually inconsistent narratives of the fate of the sugar sector, straining the possibilities for deliberative democracy. Put simply, they encourage people to talk past one another. Such tensions were also evident in key reports, such as the 2015 report of the Commission of Inquiry for the Guyana Sugar Corporation, organised around sub-committee reports on issues like ‘marketing’ and ‘field’, and introduced with a section on historical reflections. Each addressed a different topic, but in

so doing also invoked alternative perspectives on the sector, giving the Commissioners the challenging task of trying to reconcile these in policy terms.

These perspectives also had their blind-spots and biases. The sector tended to be portrayed in all of them in very masculine terms, which downplayed the distinctive risks facing female employees as some of the lowest-paid in the workforce (with some also being single parents), as well as the extra responsibilities loaded onto female family members as waged labour for the male ‘breadwinner’ dried up. It was also notable – especially from the country perspective – how the sector was readily racialised as ‘Indian’, despite its historical association with African, Chinese and Portuguese labour, and despite the contemporary presence of GuySuCo employees and sugar belt residents from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. Such interpretation put a very different complexion on the politics of restructuring.

The disinvestment of finance, dismantling of infrastructure, and discarding of people that sugar restructuring entails are not unique to Guyana. Facing the same pressures from EU reform and similar ethnic rivalries in parliament, Trinidad’s PNM Government first downsized, and then closed down the entire state-owned sugar industry during the 2000s.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, but for reasons linked to loss of premium trade with the former Soviet Union, Cuba’s Government also began a process of shutting mills, ultimately cutting total sugar production by over half.<sup>2</sup> What has emerged from the experiences of the communities in these two countries is that uncertainty is hard to live with, and that short-term and long-term alternatives for people to support themselves need to be put in place. Keeping these concerns front and centre in the search for compromise between the three perspectives in Guyana is paramount.

1 See Ben Richardson and Pamel Richardson Ngwenya (2013) ‘Cut Loose in the Caribbean: Neoliberalism and the Demise of the Commonwealth Sugar Trade’, *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, 32: 3, pp. 263-278.

2 See Ana Vera Estrada (2017) ‘The Closure of the Sugar Mills, Narrated by the Workers’, *Oral History*, Autumn, pp. 60-70.



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# THE MINIMISATION OF SUGAR - a macroeconomic challenge



There has been a lot of focus, quite naturally, on the implications of the Government's policy to reduce the size and scope of the sugar industry regarding employment and social impacts on the workers, their families and their communities. Such attention is important, and is a critical element in evaluating the impact of the decisions to close sugar estates, especially when no credible alternative has been put in place. The ramifications of the haphazard approach to sugar will be felt for years and generations to come, and without a doubt leave an indelible scar.

In the United Kingdom, for instance, former coal mining communities have never recovered from the contraction of coal mining nearly three (3) decades ago. Closer to home, in Trinidad and Tobago, the closure of Caroni (1975) Limited in 2003 has had far-reaching effects. Jagroop (2012) found that *"was also a great dependence on other sources of income such as children. Also, the majority of the farmer's monthly individual income was decreased, and the majority of the farmer's dependence on public services increased."* There is no doubt that similar, if not worse, consequences could befall those who have been affected by the unwarranted and unnecessary

cutting down of the Guyanese sugar industry.

Those factors should not be lost in any discussion, as they are the most tangible and direct impacts of the minimisation of the industry. But apart from the direct hit, there will be an impact in the broader economy which has yet to be ascertained; but from all appearances, it will be significant. When considering the economic impact, we need to cast our eyes to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and its composition. The GDP, as is well known, is an economic measure, expressed in dollar terms, of all goods and services produced over a given period, usually annually. The GDP, using the expenditure method, is an amalgamation of expenditure relating to consumption, investment spending, government expenses, and net exports. It is accepted that all four (4) components will be negatively affected. In looking at the implications, the impacts on two (2) of the variables – net exports and consumption – would be examined.

## Net Exports

The most apparent impact will be found in the deterioration of the net exports component of GDP. The



2018 Budget indicated that net exports in 2017 were forecasted to reach minus US\$493.7M in 2017. In other words, imports exceeded exports by the quoted sum. With the reduction in sugar production arising from a smaller industry, and no other industries to make up for their decline in exports, all signs point to a worsening in the net export position.

But the declining position also has other implications as well. Lesser foreign exchange earnings, for instance, would place greater pressure on foreign exchange reserves to be used for the purchase of imports. Data from the Bank of Guyana has advised that foreign reserves notably have fallen by 35 per cent, from US\$751.2M at the end of 2013 to US\$552.8M in January 2018. Moreover, should oil prices rise as some analysts predict, demands for foreign currency will increase. The plundering of our foreign reserves cannot continue ad infinitum and without any improvement in our foreign exchange earnings, the depreciation of the Guyana Dollar appears on the horizon.

### **Consumption**

Looking at consumption, the Sugar CoI in 2014 pointed out that employment costs associated at now-closed Skeldon, Rose Hall, East Demerara and Wales Estates totalled G\$11.941B in 2014. To illustrate the significance of what the economy has lost we contrasted what obtains in the private sector. Using most recently available data concerning employment costs at Banks DIH Limited, Demerara Distillers Limited (DDL), Guyana Bank for Trade and Industry (GBTI), and Republic Bank (Guyana) Limited – four (4) publicly listed companies in Guyana which are among the country’s largest enterprises – we learnt they spent G\$9.6B aggregately. But more than that, the companies referred to are mostly urban-centric, where there is a fair concentration of businesses, and therefore employees have greater mobility. On the other hand, GuySuCo’s operations were skewed in the rural sectors, where business density is very low; and, in fact, outside of the sugar estates, there is no other productive enterprise.

Looking at consumption from another point of view, it is estimated that workers conservatively utilized about 85

per cent of their earnings on the purchase of goods and services. In other words, directly shopkeepers, market vendors, fisherfolk, transportation providers, etc. have lost \$10.15B. Indirectly, using the income multiplier formula, a further \$70B has been removed from the economy. This is a massive and substantial hit, and one from which many, especially in rural Guyana, may not be able to recover.

### **Conclusion**

The Government has advanced that it could no longer afford subsidies required by the sugar industry, arguing it was placing a strain on the economy. It cannot be forgotten that every sugar producing country receives State support. But that factor aside, there are genuine possibilities for the industry to be successfully turned around and be placed on a sustainable and viable footing. Moreover, the level of state subsidies pales in comparison to the economic benefits. Using the 2014 data contained in the Sugar CoI report, we have estimated that the sugar industry generated G\$118.3B in economic activity. That sum, using data for the year 2017 as outlined in the 2018 National Budget, was equivalent to 28.85 per cent of GDP. Without a doubt, the Government, through tax receipts, was recouping the subsidies it was providing.

We are yet to see the impacts of the other implications such as the increased budgetary allocations to take care of services provided by the sugar industry, such as drainage and irrigation, health services, and community centres. Then there are costs to address the social fallout and consequences, not to mention poverty alleviation methods. But a price that may never be ascertained, and probably is unquantifiable, will be the costs of cutting children’s education short and shattering their dreams; the breaking up of homes; the physiological impact of losing one’s livelihood; and setting back generations of Guyanese.

Without a doubt, the current APNU/AFC Government will do the country a service by going back to the drawing board concerning the sugar industry. Indeed, it should go in reverse gear.



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# EVOLVING, CHANGING, TRANSFORMING AND TRANSITIONING BAUXITE AND SUGAR COMPANIES, PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES.

*NOTHING IS EVER TOO BIG TO BE EVOLVED AND CHANGED, AND IN TIME TO BE TRANSFORMED BEYOND RECOGNITION INTO SOMETHING NEW, OR AT OTHER TIMES TO BE ABANDONED.*



## **Bauxite and Sugar: Many Similarities**

Let me recognize from the outset that I have no close-up experiences of sugar, but I have been in the trenches in bauxite. As a sugar outsider, I have nonetheless a sense of similarities as well as differences between our bauxite and sugar sectors.

Many may argue that the horse has already left the stable; that the actions of our Coalition Government since assuming Office both betray their preconceived judgment that sugar had already failed; and whatever the case, their actions put the final sure blows for the failure of sugar. Even as we strive our utmost to refashion some amount of profitable sugar production, like Britons are preparing for both "Brexit" with an Agreement and "Brexit" without an Agreement, we should be working also at continuing some sugar profitably and at replacing sugar; at winning good "transition and reintegration" support for all laid

off and involuntarily redeployed sugar workers, closed sugar estates and their communities. Further, all sugar workers who are fearful of what they see coming should be granted the option of "voluntary termination" with full termination benefits as we, PPP/C, instituted in bauxite through a number of years. Putting aside my sincere wishes, casting aside my fondest sentiments, and recalling what a debilitating effect higher wages for oil workers has had on other workers, as evident in Trinidad & Tobago and Nigeria, it would be an exceedingly great achievement to have some amount of profitable sugar and bauxite production in Guyana in ten to fifteen years' time.

We nationalized both bauxite and sugar soon after independence, in 1971 and 1975 respectively. They had different histories, different physical locations; but in their different ways, each had brought us Guyanese much pride, and we have been greatly dependent on them for working and earning and

imposing an organization and purpose to our communities. Demerara sugar and Demerara rum brought us much reknown. Demerara sugar became a world standard (we have been striving to recover Demerara as our geographical brand name); the British Navy may well have ruled the waves fuelled by the shot of Demerara rum made available to each member each day. It was often said that half of the aluminium for the airplanes of the Western Allies during World War II (1939 – 1945) as derived from our Guyana bauxite. Also, towards the end of that war, new applications of our extraordinary low-iron bauxite in making higher-temperature refractory bricks led to the speeding up of iron and steel making. By the 1970s, our calcined refractory bauxite was supplying 90% of that relatively small special market. We have been very proud of our bauxite, and sugar and rum; we suffer both tangible material and intangible emotional losses in their shrinking and possible ending.



the sentiments of, “Our bauxite is the best in the world”, “The World needs our Bauxite” and “Bauxite too big to fail”, our attitude should have been, “What is to be done now at the end of our glory days?”

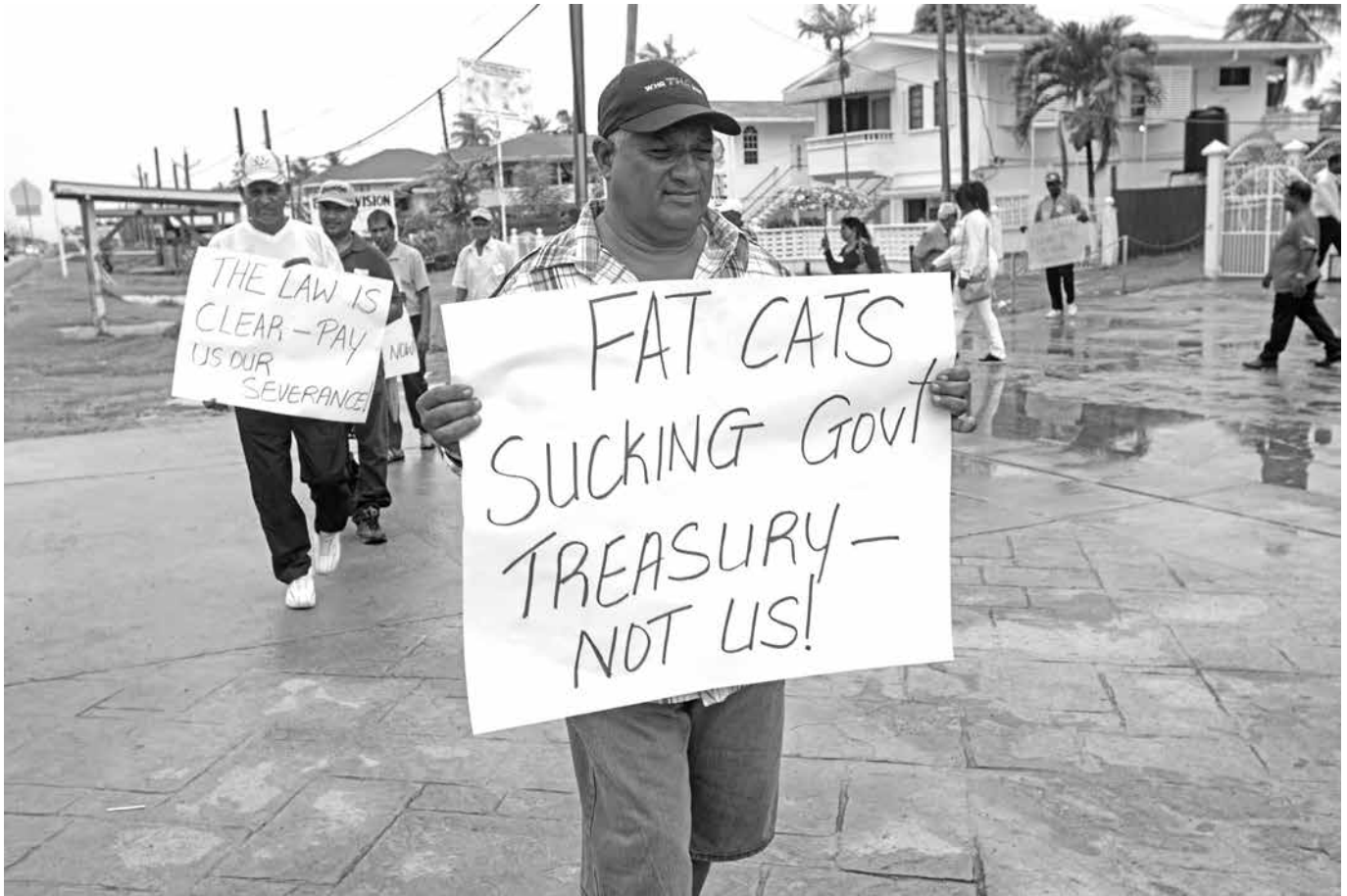
### **We are Constantly Changing the World and Ourselves**

I recall Vic Oditt, the GUYSUICO Chairman after 1992, saying to me that for a proper perspective, we should be thinking not just in terms of cane sugar, but in terms of the sweetener market of over 100 million tons, of which we might aim at best to provide half million tons. Our sugar production has been a big thing for us, but small in the total world market; it became so, too, with bauxite.

Nothing is forever; things are always changing as mankind forever explores, investigates, postulates, experiments, discovers, invents, innovates (adapted quotation from Mao); and the wave which brings good fortune our way one day keeps rolling on past us. Fashion keeps changing. There is the challenge to evolve and transform and stay with the moving tide for as long as we can do so profitably, as we keep watch for new waves which we may catch.

The critical importance of Guyana’s bauxite in the production of metal fostered an explosion of bauxite exploration (and substitution) after World War II leading to the discoveries and developments of new bauxite areas in Jamaica during the 1950s, Guinea, Australia (started up by the end of the 1960s, rapidly moving to become the largest supplier, and still there) Brazil, India, China, Indonesia and elsewhere. In the case of refractory (and other non-metallurgical bauxites), our limited experience and awareness of a lot of what mattered, the continuing technological changes, our production difficulties by the end of the 1970s, all led to a relative shrinking of our specialty markets as other technological solutions and substitutions grew. Demand and price were constrained by the end of the 1970s; we were probably not receiving a price that would cover all short, medium and long term costs, and could not sustain our earlier standards of living. Rather than

Malaysia, at its independence (31 Aug 1957), was still the country of rubber plantations and tin mines. Older comrades might have heard Dr. Jagan speaking about the great losses that England was to suffer in Malaysia becoming independent and Britain losing control of, and revenues from, Malaysian rubber and tin. I could not but take notice as a Malaysian High Commissioner, paying me a courtesy call in the 1990s, declared with great pleasure as he entered my office, “We are no longer in tin nor in rubber latex. We are into rubber wood, and make rubber wood furniture for export to North America”. Synthetic rubber had eaten much of the markets for natural rubber. Tin had abandoned Malaysia. I had heard over the BBC Radio in the 1980s, about the abrupt ending of tin trading on the stock exchange in London on the discovery and bringing into production of a huge rich resource of tin in Brazil.



The alumina plant in Linden, where I worked over my first ten years, finding my feet as a young chemical engineer earning my spurs, hitting record production in the years after nationalization, closed in 1983 and now stands derelict. I walk through the ruins. I can tell the story of every pump, of every tank, of every pipe-run: I stand forlorn, comforted in recalling some lines from a quatrain of the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam, “You know the ass and the lion now roam where Jamshyd once held court.” I feel a great personal loss and recall the trauma we endured from the late 1970s, wondering each day for how long the company would be able to pay its way and keep us employed with food on our table and something to do. I can empathize with sugar workers today.

Nothing is forever: in fifty to one hundred years from today, in the lifetime of some of our children now living, the oil sector off-shore Guyana, now beginning, may reach its autumn years, and perhaps be much like sugar and bauxite are today. It may seem an outlandish untimely thought, but as I write, I read that Petrotrin is to be closed, perhaps temporarily, we may hope for reorganization, 1700 workers are

to be laid off. Oil in T&T its autumn years seem to be entering, even as that sector in Guyana is just beginning. Our oil will not spoil, but it will, from time to time, have no lustre; nor will it last forever.

### **Anticipate and Avoid Failure with the Attitude of Evolving and Transforming**

There should be no surprise that my immediate concern is with the wording of the theme – “Sugar, Too big to Fail”, as it was with many of our similar conferences, arranged by then Chairman Kim Kisooson and Trade Unionist Lincoln Lewis in the mid-1990s, for reflections on our bauxite sector.

Firstly, such a theme inhibits the psychological attitude (of mind) required to really recognize, address and grapple with the problems. Failure and often we should not think of it as failure but as the end of a road travelled, along which we had found much good – failure, the end of an era, must be contemplated if we are to jolt ourselves to break traditional boundaries of thinking, acting and doing; if we are to find a new lease on life, extending in some manner and at some level the profitable production of bauxite/sugar in Guyana.

Secondly, I have sensed, inherent in this theme, a feeling that we could not be without bauxite and sugar; we live for bauxite, sugar. No doubt, this feeling arises from wanting to protect the living and the pride we gained from our offering of these products in a glorious past. But we don't live for bauxite and sugar; bauxite and sugar must serve us, must be for our benefit only as long as some summing of their value/contribution to us exceeds some summing of their costs incurred on us, and until we can find better things to work at; only so long as they bring us a better life. I recognize challenges in different views in agreeing on the "costs" items and the "benefits" items which should be recognized in the summing up.

The argument may be made that, for many years in our subsidies, we were paying customers to take our bauxite and our sugar. I recall in the early 1980s Mr. Dunstan Barrow, then CEO of our bauxite sector, saying that the CEO of Suralco had been warning at various conferences that if Suralco could not receive enough on each of its products, it would have to end its production; and it did end export sales of aluminium, metallurgical bauxite, non-metallurgical bauxite and calcined bauxite staying only in the production and sale of alumina; until a few years ago, when it closed completely. One thinks of a similar walking away from sugar in many of our sister Caricom countries. In both bauxite and sugar, those withdrawals have been seen as possible tantalizing openings for us; there is still the need to find ways to produce and sell profitably; indeed, it should be heightened.

We see situations in places near and far and in our lifetime where activities that were too big too big to fail, have one day gone away. Beyond any question their abrupt collapse brings untold disruption and trauma throughout. The challenge therein is to take hold and manage the change.

"Too big to fail" does not put us in the right frame of mind for evolving; for casting around, testing and trying to produce and sell a hundred other possible goods and services at which we might apply ourselves profitably. The theme "Too big to fail" seems to me to cultivate the feeling in other Guyanese that those who find themselves in this wrong place at this wrong time must have been themselves doing something wrong, and thus should accept what comes their way. Rather, our common membership as citizens of Guyana should engender generous assistance for and during transitioning.

## **Transitioning**

The programme of us, PPP/C, entering Office in 1992 included coming to terms with the refashioning of our economic activities in general, and with special attention to bauxite, where the International Manager we met in place was soon to recommend the closure of bauxite. For the record, we did not close bauxite. Two pieces of legislation, even though they may not have been so advocated explicitly, facilitate ease and flexibility in reconfiguring, ending and starting new businesses, by setting minimum standards for treating with workers. I refer to: the "Termination of Employment" Act which sets the schedule for the minimum prompt payments for workers whose employment would be ended; and the "Trade Union Recognition" Act which sets the procedures for workers, if they so wish, to institute or change to a Union of their choosing.

Recalling how sensitively and thoughtfully we, PPP/C managed the transformation and transitioning of the bauxite companies, employees and communities, we can demand without any hesitating that our Coalition Government treat as competently and as equitably with the sugar companies, employees and communities. We can demand:

- i) the full and prompt payment of any monies which might be due to the SILWF or other workers' saving scheme;
- ii) the full and prompt payment of any outstanding retained monies to PAYE and NIS;
- iii) the full and prompt payment of all termination benefits; further, giving every employee the right to choose to end his current employment with full termination benefits (volunteered termination). He/she would be eligible to be hired again at the company's choice, starting afresh with no consideration of past employment.
- iv) That the Government seeks external support for programmes comparable to LEAP/LEAF for the sugar communities.
- v) Recognizing the ongoing subsidy of about G\$ 3 billion per year now for nearly free electricity, since the mid-1970s, to bauxite communities, and taking account of the much larger number of sugar workers, our Government should commit to providing from our national



budget about G\$5 billion per year over about five years starting with our 2019 budget, to fund living assistance, transformation and transitioning of sugar workers as at the end of 2015, and the transformation and development of sugar estate communities. This would be of no consideration in instituting any national programme for applying “oil” money.

There was much literature in the 80s and 90s on how best to manage such disrupting changes. Some authorities seemed to advocate, “the quicker and the bloodier, the better”. To remove any question, let me say that that has not been the PPP/C way, as evidenced in our 23 years of handling the transformation/transitioning of bauxite communities and people. I recall a visit of a team of MPs from the UK, during which, at a lunch, the team leader revealed that he was from the union in one of the coal towns that Margaret Thatcher had decimated. However, he had to admit that coal mining and production had reached the end of its road in England that his former coal town at the time of his visit was by then prospering better than ever before. No one thing had replaced coal, there was a multitude of things, but Margaret Thatcher did not need to be as bloody as she had been. We, who are still of some socialist mind, must

sense the challenge to effect, with much less blood, such transforming changes for which Mrs. Thatcher stood.

### **Enhancing the Core Doesn’t Come Easily**

No doubt, during your conference, you would be casting around once more for ways to make the continued production of sugar and related products, clearly profitable. As in bauxite, the mines and sugar fields, where perhaps two-thirds of costs are incurred, should be given greater weight in attracting more thinking about and trying of various labour, technology and capital mixes, seeking higher labour productivities and higher rates of remuneration for everyone, whilst staying clearly profitable. This is exactly what our sugar industry has been aiming to achieve, and the thrust to mechanize harvesting is worthy of our continued encouragement. We read in the media that our heavy, clayey soils are not favourable for mechanization. There have been advocates for soil improvement – the cricket ground at Providence is an example of successful but costly engineered soil. One experienced person from India was advocating coco-peat (charred coconut husks) and various persons have experience of significant soil improvement (both physical and chemical/

biological) with addition of rice husk ash. Then there are our sand-hills which we have had experience moving to the coast for building our homes. Do we dare think of soil improvement on a very large scale? In steps through many pilots, learning all the way, over a thirty-year period, say? Back-of-the-envelope calculations may quickly bring some perspective to such wild speculations.

Consultants' reports must always be tempered with the awareness that no one knows how the future will turn out. Projections are of the past – expecting the future to be much like the past, but the future nearly always brings a few surprises – favourable and unfavourable. Plans inevitably are based on rational, tangible, manageable things; but intangibles, like morale/spirit, can be great multipliers/dividers. In my youth, 1950s/60s, the somewhat tongue-in-cheek, irreverent books, “Parkinson’s Law” and “Up the Organization”, spoke to how companies in trouble might break out of old mindsets. Peter Drucker’s book, “Innovation and Entrepreneurship” of the 1980s, encouraged walking around plant and community, noticing what is happening, speaking with everyone, sensing what they are thinking, and in some synthesizing creative step in one’s mind new ideas might arise.

About 1983, the World Bank/IMF supported two simultaneous consultants' studies on the state of our bauxite companies, focusing on Linden. UEC (United States Steel Engineers & Consultants) essentially reported that the Management didn't know what they were doing. Presumably, with Management that knew and some money injection, all would be well. KATSI (Kaiser Aluminium Technical Services Inc.) essentially reported that, “You need a 30% reduction in costs. We see rational tangible things – money investments, improved management (technical, financial and administrative), etc, yielding at best a net 10% reduction of costs. The remaining 20%, if it were to come at all, would have to come from an improvement in spirit/morale. There was a long conveyor belt I knew which, when departments and workers were all clicking together, in just over twelve hours may be changed; but at other times, when everyone was standing on his rights and rules, forty-eight hours were not enough. KATSI would need to have been running the company for two years before they would venture an opinion. UEC was selected, but that relationship broke down in less than a year in bitterness and acrimony. Then everyone muttered under his breath that anyone could have seen that

the KATSI report was the more discerning, but not acceptable at the time. Whichever way, the historical path to bauxite as it is today was different again.

The Skeldon factory has not performed as expected: we should take note, but not be disheartened; the experience may be our contribution to the fount of world knowledge on which steady improvements are taken and from which we partake. It is not a waste. I judged that the Chief Engineer, with whom I spoke, had a good grasp of the problems and the solutions. Perhaps you ought not to be surprised there was a similar but smaller happening in bauxite in the latter 1970s. At that time, all alumina was calcined in rotary kilns, except for ALCOA in its guarded, patented, world's first fluidized kilns, reducing oil consumption and lowering maintenance costs. It was the wave of the future. To reduce our very high oil consumption, and taking a first step in the call for expansion of alumina production, we installed one of the first commercially available fluid-bed kilns. Problems elsewhere in the plant compromised the performance of that kiln and we did not enjoy the benefits of that installation – but today all alumina is calcined in fluid-bed and suspension kilns. Some people say, be careful about doing things early, but you don't want to be late, either.

Today the bauxite operation in Linden is living a new lease on life. It could be instructive to compare it in a general way from my now outside position with what it was in say 1980. The natural disadvantage of a high overburden-to-ore ratio might have worsened somewhat. Revenues may be about 60% of what it was then, from an about 35% of the bauxite mining rate then. Direct employment is down to about one-tenth, say 650 today, compared with 6,500 in 1980. All non-core company town responsibilities and activities of the former company have been transferred to the usual agencies (the generation of electricity excepted); technology (computers) has greatly reduced the number of employees in the mine planning and the general engineering departments (quite likely they would have been merged) and similarly for the financial, clerical and other areas. The biggest noticeable change and simplification would have been in the mines, when Omai's single fleet of much larger trucks and excavators took over both stripping and mining, ending the previous standard stripping layout of large dragline, bucket-wheel system and scraper fleet. A likely serendipitous discovery was that those large excavators could break-out the bauxite, hence the drilling and blasting

department, the explosives magazine and the police detachment stationed there were no longer required. Additionally, there appears to be no chasing after larger production numbers; it appears that sales are not sought at prices below what is profitable. We can imagine that if sugar were to find a new lease on life it would have to be similarly transformed.

### **Diversifying and Launching out New**

One could not avoid looking again at opportunities for the diversification of agricultural production in the sugar areas at various size levels. It is a continuing cost on our people and country that the promulgation of many good ideas during the period of the 1970s and 80s and by the way, they had to be implemented tainted them in that era of rigged elections. Diversification/substitution is being pursued in a number of places. One reads of well-known tea-growing areas in Asia introducing coffee growing to keep in step with their changing taste.

Inevitably many persons would have to think of new vocations/careers. Let me give an example of how much one may have to change. I was privileged to attend an American Ceramic Society Conference (which includes Refractories) in Japan in 1985, a time when the US steel sector was being outrun by Japan and Japan had begun conceding production of bulk undifferentiated steel, aluminium and other materials to South Korea, India, China and other developing countries. Learning that the site of a closed steel mill just outside Tokyo had been converted to an amusement park like the then new Disney World was amazing enough; but it was even more amazing to learn that most of the former steel workers were working there as the clowns, attendants at the booths, maintenance persons and so on. It was a time in Japan when a concern for everyone – win, win for everyone prevailed, no doubt easing the fright and fear of finding and turning to a new career.

### **GAWU's Commitment is to its Members**

Win-win for everyone is a good note for me to commend GAWU for hosting this Conference. I have challenged your theme, I have questioned whether your horse has not already bolted; but we are of the same mind - seeing our jobless sugar workers quickly through their today's realities of the difficulties, anxieties and misery consequent to being made jobless. I challenged your theme because it does not accord with what we see and what we can recall when we reflect on past times. Things change; we are constantly changing things in our work to make things better. What was good for our grandparents and parents is no longer, and no longer needs to be good enough for us or our children and grandchildren. Things change endlessly: we do our best to adjust, evolve and transform steadily and smoothly, but there comes a time when the pace can no longer be restrained and, as in an earthquake, there is rapid, abrupt, disruptive, destructive change. Looking back for the benefit of the future, we may wonder whether a faster pace of adjustment earlier could have reduced the disruption now. We are at now, and the pressing question is what to do now. When it was reported that our Linden bauxite operations were to be closed for a period, what then President, Mr. Jagdeo, did as a seeming reflex, (providing base pay once appropriate computer classes were attended) was instructive and indicative of what is to be done: assistance for now and opening doors to new futures. Provide some fish today and teach new places and ways to fish for tomorrow.

I challenged GAWU's theme, knowing that it is a natural response to hold on to what we know and have in hand, until better comes along; but we have to help make and find enough that is better. GAWU, in its commitment to workers, is challenged to both hold on to what it has won in the past and help in finding, creating and turning to better. GAWU must help its workers through this transition and into new employment. In this, GAWU will always have my encouragement.



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# DEMOCRACY ON TRIAL



Democracy, broadly defined as a system of governance based on the principle of majoritarian rule, is perhaps the most important ingredient for economic and social progress and for national development. It is the political oxygen that keeps the body politic in good health. And yet, according to a Freedom House Report, there are some 71 countries in the world today that saw a net decline in political rights and civil liberties over the past decade. Freedom House measures the level of freedom in a country by way of some basic indicators such as free and fair elections, rule of law, press freedom among other freedoms.

Democracy in Guyana has had a long and checkered history since the early days of colonial rule. It became much more pronounced with the split of the PPP in 1955 due in part to the entrenched, polarized and adversarial nature of our evolving politics. The struggle for democracy in Guyana remains a challenge despite some significant constitutional and democratic gains over the past decades. I will posit the view that democracy in Guyana has never been given a chance to flourish in Guyana both during the colonial and the post-colonial periods. I will further argue that democracy and democratic and constitutional reforms were in a significant way externally driven and did not evolve out of the needs and aspirations of the

society as a whole.

Democracy in Guyana did not come about in any serious or organized way until the late 1940s-early 1950s. It was not until the formation of the Political Affairs Committee in 1946 and the People's Progressive Party in 1950 that the political consciousness of the population was raised to significant levels. It was the strong and robust mobilization and advocacy efforts of the PPP during the early 1950s that resulted in the dispatching to the colony of a Commission led by Waddington, famously referred to as the Waddington Commission. The Commission, after taking evidence from key stakeholders, recommended to the British Government that the colony should have a new system of governance based on universal adult suffrage, a ministerial system and limited internal self rule. Prior to the 1950s the suffrage was limited only to the propertied class, which was deliberately done by the colonial government in order to maintain the then existing status quo.

The introduction of universal adult suffrage was a major constitutional development. For the first time, the people were allowed to exercise their right to vote in elections, which were won by the PPP. The PPP won 18 out of 24 seats. That victory was however short-lived and the

PPP was removed from office after a mere six months in office. That was the first direct assault on constitutional and democratic governance by an external force, mainly out of ideological considerations. Not only was the PPP removed from office, but efforts were made to destroy the militancy of the PPP, which was perceived to be too much to the left of the ideological spectrum. It took a mere two years after the removal of the PPP from office for the Party to experience a split. Jagan and Burnham, who represented the face of racial and political unity, headed their own parties after Burnham failed in his attempt to take over the leadership of the PPP. Interestingly, both parties carried the same name and theoretical journal, *Thunder*, and both went into the 1957 elections with the same name, PPP (Jagan) and PPP (Burnham). It was not after the 1957 elections which were decisively won by PPP Jagan, that Burnham changed the name of his Party to that of the People's National Congress (PNC).

The split of the PPP was encouraged, if not engineered, by the British Government, who saw a strong and united PPP as a threat to its imperial rule. That, along with the suspension of the Constitution in 1953 and the subsequent imposition of Proportional Representation in the elections of 1964 was aimed at emasculating the militants, some of whom were perceived to have communist leanings. The PPP, however, continued to win elections in 1957 and 1961. Despite an earlier promise by Britain to grant independence to whichever party won the 1961 elections, the British Government deliberately withheld independence under the PPP. Both the British and United States Governments were reluctant to see an independent Guyana under a left-wing PPP government. A way had to be found to stop the PPP from winning future elections, and that way was the imposition of PR, as opposed to the first-past-the-post system which it was felt gave the PPP an electoral advantage. In the 1961 elections, the PPP won 57% of the seats with roughly 46% of the popular votes. An obvious way to defeat the PPP was to change the electoral system from first-past-the-post to proportional representation, which was imposed by the British Government. As expected, the PPP failed to win a majority of the votes, thereby paving the way for the highly anticipated coalition government between the PNC and the United Force. The United Force was unceremoniously kicked out of the coalition after three years, but not before the PNC took full control of the elections machinery. Since then, all the elections, both national and regional, were massively rigged to perpetuate PNC authoritarian rule. Time would not permit any detailed narrative of the several methods used by the PNC to perpetuate its dictatorial rule. Suffice it to say that the democratic fabric of the society was severely

ruptured. Those who have an interest in the subject of rigged elections in Guyana should read a publication by Mrs. Janet Jagan, "Rigged Elections in Guyana", which was published in June 1978. In the 1968 'elections', the PNC increased its share of the vote to 50.4% compared to 40.52% in the 1964 elections. Interestingly, it won for itself 34, 429 or 95% of the total overseas vote, which was introduced in the 1968 elections for the first time. The PPP, on the other hand, saw its share of the vote reduced from 45.84% to 40.9%. The United Force, which obtained 12.41% of the votes in 1964, also saw its share of the vote decreased to 8 %. The PNC secured 43, 253 votes out of a total of 52, 896 new electors (1964-1968), some 82%.

I thought of spending some time on the 1968 elections because it represented the first large scale attempt to tamper with the democratic and electoral process in the country's post-independence electoral history. Under colonial rule, there were several attempts to distort the will of the electorate through constitutional fiddling and gerrymandering tactics, but nothing of the scale as in the case of the 1968 elections. This pattern of elections' rigging persisted on an even larger scale in the 1973, 1980 and 1985 elections. In the 1973 'elections', the PNC won for itself 70.1% of the votes, which was further increased to nearly 80% in the 1985 elections under Desmond Hoyte.

By the late 1980s United States' attitude towards Guyana had changed significantly. This was due to the collapse of the world socialist system. Communism was no longer seen as a threat to US national and geo-strategic interests. It is no secret that the US turned a blind eye to electoral fraud in Guyana, and at one time offered financial assistance to the PNC on ground that the PNC was ' the lesser of the two evils'.

It is against the above backdrop, along with robust lobbying efforts by the PPP in the US and other western capitals, that resulted a change of tide in favour of democracy in Guyana.

Democracy was eventually returned to Guyana in the October 5, 1992 elections, which were decisively won by the PPP under the leadership of the late Dr. Cheddi Jagan. Many political analysts felt that were it not for the intervention of former US President Jimmy Carter and his actual presence in the country on elections day, the elections could have been highjacked once again, as in the past.

It should be noted that prior to the 1992 elections, several electoral reforms were made to institutionalize

democracy and build trust in the electoral processes. Among these were a new Elections Commission, with the Chairman appointed by the President from a list of six names submitted by the Leader of the Opposition (The Carter-Price Formula); a new Voters list, overseas and local observer groups and perhaps more importantly, the counting of votes at the places of polling. This latter demand by the Political Opposition was fiercely resisted by the then President Desmond Hoyte, who described it as a 'logistical nightmare', but after some 'armtwisting' by President Carter, Hoyte eventually conceded.

The PPP/Civic went on to win elections which were certified free and fair by local and international observers. In the elections of 1997 under the Janet Jagan candidacy the PNC refused to accept the results and took to the streets. The matter was resolved through the Caricom brokered. Hermandston Agreement which saw the PPP's term in office truncated by two years.

Despite some constitutional and democratic gains since the 1992 elections, democracy in Guyana remains fragile. The PPP/C won a majority of the votes in all elections, except for the 2011 elections, when it won a plurality but failed to obtain a majority of seats in Parliament. A no-confidence motion by the Political Opposition was averted after the then President Donald Ramotar took the decision to prorogue Parliament, which triggered fresh elections, which were held on May 2015. The PPP lost that election to the now ruling APNU-AFC coalition by a narrow margin and the PPP has mounted a court challenge on the ground of voting irregularities.

## Conclusion

The way forward, in my view, is to come up with a new governance mechanism which is much more participatory and inclusive. The winner-takes-it-all formula, whatever its past merits, should give way to a new governance paradigm in which there is room for all political parties to become part of the decision-making processes commensurate with the level of support gained in free and fair elections at both the Legislative and at the Executive levels. One consequence of the current system

of winner-takes-all in the context of our ethnic and political diversity has been to make elections extremely high stakes, a do-or-die situation for large segments of the population, who feel politically marginalized and a sense of alienation when their party is out of political office.

The Constitutional Reform processes appeared to be in hibernation for the longest while, and there is a deafening silence on the part of the current administration on the issue of shared governance, which was a major manifesto promise.

Whatever the governance model, for it to be successful and effective, it must be situated within a democratic framework. Elections, both at the local and national levels, must not only be free and fair, but must be seen to be free and fair. Recent developments, regrettably, have not been encouraging. I refer to the unilateral appointment of the Chairman of the Guyana Elections Commission by President Granger, and more recently the apparent reluctance by the GECOM Chairman to meet with a UN team to discuss technical assistance to that body in the area of IT, which incidentally was requested by that body. The establishment of new Local Government Areas and the reconfiguration of constituency boundaries without adequate consultation with the relevant stakeholders raise some serious concerns regarding the transparency of the upcoming elections. As you are aware, this matter is currently before the courts.

Actions such as these only serve to undermine confidence and trust in GECOM to conduct elections in a fair and impartial manner. The leader of the Political Opposition Dr. Bharrat Jagdeo, has already gone on record in favour of UN supervised elections in Guyana, no doubt out of concern regarding the impartiality of GECOM to conduct free and fair elections.

Democracy in Guyana is once again on trial. Only time will tell whether or not the fears of the Political Opposition regarding a return to the days of rigged elections and undemocratic rule will once again rear its ugly head.



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# THE IMPORTANCE OF THE ELECTORAL ROLL (VOTER'S LIST) IN ELECTIONS



The Electoral Roll/Voters List is among one of the most critical components of any elections. This list reflects the persons who are eligible to vote in the upcoming elections. Guyana's Electoral Roll under the PNC consisted of overseas-based Guyanese, and in the rigged elections held under the PNC, the Voters Roll was the main instrument used to perpetuate massive rigging of the Elections. Padding of the Roll was an effective strategy used by Burnham and his PNC.

Recall a BBC documentary and many other reports which highlighted scenarios of the "dead", deceased persons, being recorded as having voted in Elections. Many fictitious addresses were unearthed, non-Guyanese and children's particulars were found on the Electoral Roll. Many voters, on arriving at the Polling Stations were told that there is a "tick" against their names, indicating that they have already voted.

An example of how this was done is reflected in the figures used for the Referendum in 1978. According to a population projection prepared by the United Nations Development Programme office in Guyana,

the total eligible voters (above 18 years of age) was estimated at 535,335, taking into consideration the officially registered overseas votes. However, the official figure for the referendum was given by the Government as 609,522. Interestingly, the official Government figure for the total population in 1975 was 780,000. The Opposition parties feared that this high electoral roll could only be arrived at by adding fictitious names to the list.

The People's Progressive Party, over the period it was in Government supported the Guyana Elections Commission in strengthening its checks and balances and use of technology to modernise its database. Initiatives such as Continuous Registration, Overseas Cross Matching of Fingerprints, the use of biometrics such as capturing fingerprints from all ten fingers of the registrants etc. However, from 2011 when the PPP was a minority Government, all its proposals to further strengthen the Electoral Roll were denied and frustrated by the Opposition, now Government.

Thus, there is a similar situation here in Guyana

today in regard to the size of the Electoral Roll. The last House-to-House Registration was done in 2008/2009. At the completion of that Registration Exercise, a “New” Register of Voters was established, and the previous database was deemed INACTIVE and was stored away. The present Electoral Roll of persons 18 years and older has approximately 642,000 eligible voters. The 2012 National Census Figures reflected Guyana’s total population as 747,000. These statistics are suggesting that a mere 105,000 Guyanese are under 18 years of age. According to the Ministry of Education figures released a week ago, 15,444, students are in Grade 6 of the Primary Education System and had written the National Grade 6 Examinations. It means, therefore, that the figures are unrealistic.

Coupled with the above, two weeks ago, June 2018, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in collaboration with the Ministry of Citizenship, presented figures to the Parliament of Guyana reflecting that over the past three years, more than 16,000 non-Guyanese who visited Guyana and have not departed the country. Most of them are from Haiti and Cuba. There are allegations that some of these persons were given “false” Guyanese Birth Certificates to facilitate their registration as Guyanese. Other allegations are that these persons are kept in places known to the APNU, and will be used to impersonate listed voters in the upcoming elections.

To prevent the rigging, of any elections, there is a need for a “perfect” Electoral Roll, which, in keeping with the Laws of Guyana should consist of Guyanese resident in Guyana who are 18 years old and above. The Laws further prevent persons incarcerated for periods beyond the due date of the next elections from being listed on the Electoral Roll for that Election. Persons of “unsound” mind are also prevented from having their particulars listed on the Electoral Roll for that elections. These safeguard mechanisms are intended to prevent illegal voting.

To prevent any manipulation, multiple voting and illegal voting, there is a need for enhanced biometrics. The Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM) must focus on using Biometrics to determine anyone accessing a ballot paper. The present system, which allows for the discretion of the Presiding Officer to issue a ballot to someone who allegedly lost his/her Identity document, was used recklessly by some Presiding Officers in the 2015 Elections, resulting in numerous instances of persons being issued with Ballot papers although Polling Agents representing the People’s Progressive Party (PPP) protested loudly and also claimed to have known the persons whose ballot were being claimed. Many of these instances are awaiting the hearing of the Party’s Elections petition, which is before the Judiciary. The APNU/ AFC Government has already indicated its lack of preference to have a “clean” electoral roll for the next elections, thus the need to look for alternatives.

To avoid such illegality and fraudulent activities, the GECOM must move rapidly to establish a system whereby the thumb/fingerprint of the prospective voter, when placed on a machine, if matched with the electronically stored print, would so indicate and a ballot would be issued. There is an abundance of such technology across the globe, and GECOM has the fingerprints of all registered Guyanese stored electronically in its database. Hence no difficulty is envisaged with this recommendation.

Further, every citizen has that shared responsibility with GECOM, to ensure that the Electoral Roll has the maximum degree of accuracy humanly possible. It will certainly be a huge indiscretion on the part of GECOM to prepare an electoral roll which is unacceptable to the Guyanese public. We must all stand together on the issue of the credibility and validity of the Electoral Roll and the use of additional biometrics to prevent fraudulent voting in our Elections.



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# GUYANA'S FIRST AND ONLY REFERENDUM



The first and only Referendum held in Guyana to date was the infamous 1978 Referendum. The intention of this Referendum was two-fold; namely, to allow the PNC and Burnham to remain in governmental power for a term extended by two years, and secondly to install an Executive President on the backs of the Guyanese people.

The general election was due to be held in Guyana in 1978. Parliament was expected to be prorogued on 25 July 1978, to be followed by the election not later than 25 October the same year. Five years previously, the PNC had executed wide-scale rigging which gave it a two-thirds majority in Parliament. However, while Guyanese awaited an announcement of a date for the new election, Prime Minister Forbes Burnham and his People's National Congress (PNC) surprised the nation by moving to postpone the election. They did

this by introducing, on 1 April 1978, a Constitution (Amendment) Bill No. 8 of 1978, in Parliament with the aim of changing Article 73 of the Constitution.

The proposed Bill sought to hold a referendum which would abolish any further referendum to change the entrenched provisions of the constitution; namely, State and its Territories; the Exercise of the President's Powers; the Composition, Sessions and Dissolution of Parliament; and the Electoral System. The Bill also proposed that any future constitutional change would be made by the two-thirds parliamentary majority which the PNC held at that time.

Without consulting the parliamentary opposition, the PNC rushed the Bill through Parliament, which approved it on 10 April 1978. A subsequent

procedural Bill stipulated that the referendum should be held on the 10 July 1978 by the existing voters' list. Additional legislation was also enacted to remove the right of the referendum results by citizens to appeal in the Supreme Court.

At the time the Bill was introduced, the entire country was experiencing an on going collapse of electricity and water services and a shortage of essential food items. Guyanese, in thousands, had left Guyana for neighbouring Venezuela, Suriname and farther afield. The people were more concerned about these problems, and paid little attention to parliamentary activities. Even though they could do little to stop the Bill from passing, by the time they realised its implications, it had already been passed by the rigged PNC majority.

Since the Bill intended to give the PNC full powers to change the constitution without any further involvement of the people – by having a referendum to end all future referendums – Dr Jagan led PPP initiated efforts to unite all the opposition political parties and some trade unions and religious organisations to oppose the measure. Very quickly these groups, except the United Force, united to form the Committee in Defence of Democracy (CDD), to coordinate national opposition to the Bill and its accompanying referendum question.

In addition to the PPP, this broad-based group included the Working Peoples' Alliance (WPA), Peoples' Democratic Movement (PDM), Liberator Party (LP), Progressive Youth Organisation (PYO), Guyana Agricultural Workers' Union (GAWU), Rice Producers' Association (RPA), Women's Progressive Organisation (WPO), Civil Liberties Action Council (CLAC), Guyana Peace Council (GPC) and the Organisation of Working People (OWP), Democratic Teachers' Movement (DTM), Guyana Hindu Dharmic Sabha (GHDS) and United Sad'r Islamic Anjuman (USIA).

Other Organisations and institutions joined the struggle, hence another anti-Bill group, the Concerned Citizens' Committee (CCC), was formed by some non-political professional groups. The members of this Committee were the Lawyers' Committee; Architects' Committee; Committee of Medical Practitioners, Committee of Concerned Educators; University of Guyana Staff Association; Clerical and Commercial Workers Union; and the National Association of Agricultural, Commercial



and Industrial Employees, with the Guyana Council of Churches as an observer.

Both the CDD and the CCC coordinated their activities and immediately proceeded to educate the population about the nature of the Constitution (Amendment) Bill, and at the same time urged its withdrawal. The Lawyers' Committee (of the CCC) prepared a paper summarising the objections to the proposed legislation. The paper explained that the Bill sought to deprive the Guyanese people of their right to approve or disapprove any new constitution in the future, noting that the requirement of the direct approval of the people to substantial alteration was most essential for a democratic constitution. It emphasised that the Bill was an attempt to get the electorate to place a blank cheque on the national future in the hands of a spent Parliament.

Shortly after, the Guyana Council of Churches declared that the Bill placed too much power in the hands of any parliament, and it was too great a temptation for the current or future parliaments to assume more power than was appropriate.

These fears as expressed by the Lawyers' Committee and the Guyana Council of Churches were echoed by all political and civic groups that opposed the Bill and the referendum proposal.

Faced with mounting resistance to the Bill from an extremely cross-section of the Guyanese society, the PNC Government was not prepared to accept opposition to the referendum. During the first week of July 1978, in a blatant act by the Government to punish dissent, it informed the Catholic Standard, the weekly newspaper of the Catholic Church and a sharp critic of the Bill, that its contract with the state-owned publishing company to print the paper was terminated with immediate effect. The state company, during that period, controlled the importation of newsprint, and refused to sell any to the Catholic Standard, whose publishers were thus forced to print the paper in a photo-stencilled format in smaller quantities. Other incidents aimed at clamping down on dissent occurred as the referendum date drew near. The state-owned Chronicle newspaper refused to accept paid advertisements by opposition political parties announcing their political meetings. As a result, the Chairman of the Liberator Party, Dr Makepeace Richmond, filed a writ in the Supreme Court against the newspaper, claiming that such refusal violated the constitutional guarantees of freedom of expression.

Then a peaceful picket exercise outside of the Parliament Buildings was violently attacked by thugs associated with the PNC, allegedly led by the “House of Israel”. The leader of the Liberator Party, Dr Ganraj Kumar, and national poet Martin Carter were severely beaten in the presence of police officers. That same afternoon, a meeting of the Committee in Defence of Democracy (CDD) at the St. George’s Cathedral was violently broken up by stick-wielding thugs transported in Government-owned vehicles. Several persons were injured and had to be hospitalized.

Another act of intimidation occurred when four University of Guyana students studying late in the evening on the campus were forced into a vehicle by thugs and taken to the sea-wall. There their abductors severely beat them with a metal-webbed belt before a crowd of about thirty PNC supporters. After this torture, the thugs forced them to paint pro-Government slogans on the sea-wall for over an hour.

As expected, despite media publicity of these incidents and the identification of some of the thugs, no one was arrested. On the whole, the referendum campaign was marked by the PNC supporting the proposal and all other political parties opposing it.

The Government blatantly prevented the anti-Bill viewpoints from being given publicity in the state-owned media, which in any case ridiculed and distorted them in various “analyses”. After the state media ignored their press releases, the Guyana Council of Churches and the Lawyers’ Committee attempted to have them published as paid advertisements, but these were bluntly refused by both the state-owned newspaper and radio. The Prime Minister, Hamilton Green, justified this action thus “paid advertisements were inconsistent with socialism as they gave the wealthier groups in society an advantage the poorer ones do not enjoy.”

The weekly “Catholic Broadcast”, a radio programme of the Catholic Church, was not aired on 21 May because it contained a discussion of the referendum. Green, in offering an excuse, said that “paid advertisements would not be allowed in connection with this matter, but that provision will be made in due course for full discussion by all sections of the radio and the press.” However, as expected, this never happened.

The Government also refused to consider the Opposition’s request to invite a team of observers from the Caribbean to witness the referendum.

In one of its numerous statements, the CDD drew attention to the fact that voters had no right of appeal to the courts after the referendum. The group also noted that many public employees, including members of the Police and the Guyana Defence Forces, were forced to sign blank proxy forms on which they were not allowed to name the person who should vote for them.

Opposition to the Bill was powerful, and there was no doubt that in the event of a fair vote, people would vote solidly against the PNC Government’s proposal in the referendum. In a unilateral act, the Government, in preparing ballots for the referendum, assigned the symbols of a house to the “Yes” vote and a mouse to the “No” vote. Opposition groups immediately condemned this as intimidating, prejudicial, and inimical to the fair and impartial conduct of the referendum. The CDD said choosing the symbols was unfair and discriminatory, adding that “the mouse is a symbol that the average human being finds offensive.”

With the symbols decided by the Government, the



PNC publicised its referendum campaign by urging people to “vote for the house”.

By and large, the anti-Bill groups could only manage to have their views widely expressed in the Mirror, the PPP newspaper, which printed five days a week. However, this paper was also stifled and forced to reduce its size and circulation because the Government refused to sell newsprint to its publishers. The PPP also held numerous public meetings throughout the country to inform the people about the expanding trend of the PNC dictatorship associated with the referendum Bill and the referendum itself. In some areas, the PPP public meetings were broken up violently by armed thugs associated with the ruling party.

### **The Boycott**

Faced with the fact that the Government was organising the referendum without consulting with Opposition Parliamentary parties, the CDD and CCC requested a meeting with the Minister of Home Affairs, Vibert Mingo. After the Minister refused to meet with representatives of the two groups, they sent a joint letter to him, setting out minimum demands considered essential for a free and fair referendum. These demands were:

1. Final counting must be done in the polling places where the votes were cast.
2. Paramilitary forces must not be given access to ballot boxes before, during, or after voting.
3. Agents appointed by Opposition parties must:
  - (i) be permitted to examine the ballot boxes before voting;
  - (ii) be present throughout voting;
  - (iii) stay with the boxes from closure until completion of counting.
4. The boxes must be properly sealed in the presence of agents after a preliminary count.

5. Lists of proxy and postal voters must be available for inspection by recognized Opposition parties at least a week before polling day.

6. Counting must be continuous and be done in the presence of the agents mentioned above.

7. The announcement of results must be made as soon as they become available and must be continuous.

8. A report on the referendum must be published within a reasonable time, showing the numbers of postal, proxy and overseas votes separately.

Despite reminders, the Minister did not even reply to this letter from all the Opposition parties. With the Minister unwilling to guarantee these minimum demands, both the CDD and the CCC urged the Guyanese people to boycott the referendum; and more than 86 % of the Guyanese electorate boycotted, yet the results reflected another massively rigged activity. According to the CCC, the CDD and the PPP, the heavy boycott resulted in only about 14 per cent of the electorate turning out to vote. However, after a period of two days, during which the Government claimed the votes were counted – in the absence of Opposition observers – the official results declared that 71.45 percent of the electorate voted, of which 97.7 supported the referendum proposal. Burnham died before the 1985 Elections.



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# THE ENMORE MARTYRS

## - an enduring legacy



June 16, 2018 brings us to seventy (70) years since the brutal massacre of the Enmore Martyrs, and they have now become recognised as National Heroes. This is indeed a fitting tribute to the highest price they would have paid, that is, sacrificing their precious lives in their determined struggle to win respect from the powerful sugar bosses of the day, and at the same time, in their just efforts to obtain improved working conditions and social justice in general.

The sugar plantation historically has been viewed as a symbol of oppression, degradation and exploitation of workers by expatriate capital. From the very beginning, it was a European creation specifically designed to further the ends of colonial exploitation. As an economic institution, its prime historical need was for a reservoir of “*cheap, malleable and immobile labour*”.

Forged in the abovenamed circumstances, its genesis was antagonistic, based on the system of slavery and much later indentureship. In Guyana and the rest of the Caribbean, sugarcane cultivation and sugar manufacture were perceived by the colonisers as the “*supreme colonial economic effort*”. It was not surprising, therefore, that the plantation, in its

pursuance of maximum production and productivity, was pre-occupied with arbitrary, crude, and brutal and demanding tendencies.

During slavery, the enslaved labour force perceived sugar as the “*symbol of all their accumulated woes*”, and the plantation as the focus of colonial domination and oppression. As a result, they resisted when they could, and they accommodated when they had to. Oppression and exploitation persisted during the period of indentureship, and immigrants eventually debunked the myth of being a “*docile labour force*”. They resisted and openly defied the system, as in the case of sugar strikes and protests in 1869, 1872, 1876, 1879, 1888, 1894, 1896, 1899, 1903, 1905, 1913, 1914, 1924 and 1939. In every case, the response of the plantation oligarchy and the colonial police was stark, brutal and uncaring.

The Enmore Strike of 1948 originated in the general dissatisfaction of labourers with their miserable conditions of work and living. Wages were far from satisfactory. They were considered very low. At the same time, the cost of living index had moved from 95 to 247 between the period 1939 and 1948, mainly as a consequence of World War II. What it meant was that the workers’ circumstances were deteriorating



with each passing year. Further, in spite of repeated demands to improve the existing wage rate, the Sugar Producers Association (SPA) remained intractable.

At Enmore, the old system of “*cut and drop*” had given way to a more arduous task of “*cut and load*” the punts. This system made the work of cane cutters more demanding and, at the same time, caused punt loaders to be redundant. Indeed, “*cut and load*” proved to be an extremely difficult and hazardous operation, especially during the rainy season. Also, there was the faulty weighing of canes, which the workers felt was deliberate. This practice resulted in the loss of pay, workers’ dissatisfaction, and poor industrial relations.

Moreover, potable water was not available, transportation facilities were practically non-existent, dismissals without just cause were rife, and housing and sanitary conditions were most appalling. The barrack-type logies were in a “*state of advanced decay, dilapidation and general disrepair*”. A 1937 Commission report had recommended their replacement with four-block dwellings and structures of a more private nature, but the response of the employer class was both slow

and inconsistent.

Professional medical care on the plantation left much to be desired, and the illnesses associated with mosquitoes and water-borne diseases were prevalent. Of added significance was the workers’ disenchantment with the recognised union of the day, the Manpower Citizens Association (MPCA). This union was founded through the instrumentality of the Father of Trade Unionism in Guyana, Hubert Nathaniel Critchlow, who saw the need for a separate union in the sugar industry along with the initiative of Mr Ayube M. Edun and others.

The MPCA was accorded recognition by the powerful Sugar Producers Association following recommendations of the commission of Inquiry into the 1939 strike at Plantation Leonora, West Coast Demerara. It appeared that, following recognition the MPCA lost much of its militancy, as it made very little progress against the SPA. Workers, for their part, felt they were being betrayed by the union, which was not doing enough for them.

Against such a background, the Guyana Industrial Workers Union (GIWU), the forerunner of the Guyana Agricultural and General Workers Union (GAWU), was formed in April 1946. At its helm were dynamic leaders Dr. Joseph Prayal Lachmansingh, Amos A. Rangela, Jane Phillips-Gay and others, and it was this new union which gave workers a ray of hope.

The SPA stood firmly with its recognition pact with the MPCA, and this further increased the number of disaffected workers and made the union more unpopular and seen as a “company union”. Workers saw the 1948 strike at Enmore as a means of forcing the SPA into recognising GIWU as the bargaining agent, instead of the grossly ineffective MPCA. The strike itself began on April 22, 1948 at Plantation Enmore and quickly spread to the neighbouring East Coast sugar plantations, including Non-Pareil, Lusignan, Mon Repos, La Bonne Intention (LBI), Vryheid’s Lust and Ogle. As the weeks progressed, the strike gained momentum, and more and more workers joined in the struggle.

On that fateful day of June 16, 1948, the striking

workers gathered as usual outside the Enmore Estate compound. With tension running high, some of them attempted to enter the compound; and it was at that stage that the police took unwarranted action. Without warning, they opened fire into the crowd. Some labourers were even shot in their backs as they attempted to escape the onslaught. Five sugar workers lost their lives, and 14 others were seriously injured. Those who perished were as follows: Rambarran, who sustained two bullet wounds in his leg; Lall, called Pooran, shot in his leg and sustaining a gaping three-inch wound above his pelvis; Lallabagie Kissoon – shot in the back; Surujballi, called Dookie, also shot in the back; and Harry, shot in the spine.

It is rather amazing that such harsh actions by colonial police could have persisted in the late 1940s. After all, the first half of the 20th century in colonial Guyana had witnessed the emergence and rapid growth of trade unionism and labour organisation in general, the rise of political consciousness, a growing middle class, economic diversification, a declining influence of the plantocracy, and other positive developments.

Those killed were taken from Enmore through a large funeral procession along the East Coast of Demerara. The procession included thousands of sugar workers and prominent labour union and political leaders. The bodies of the victims were eventually laid to rest at the Le Repentir cemetery, and it was one of the largest funeral processions to have entered the capital city of Georgetown.

The deaths led to the setting up of a Commission of Inquiry to investigate the circumstances relating to this tragic and unfortunate incident; but like many Commissions of the past, this one was seemingly biased. Nonetheless, it felt that with more foresight on the part of the police and estate authorities, actual shooting could have been avoided. It was also the Commission's considered opinion that excessive shooting had taken place, and it was abundantly clear that some of the victims were shot when they were defenceless and on the run. This tragic episode could have been prevented had it not been for the contempt shown by the plantocracy towards its workers.

Did the Enmore Martyrs die in vain? I venture to say an emphatic no. Undoubtedly, their contribution to the overall advancement of the working-class struggle in Guyana is immeasurable. I daresay the incident surrounding the Enmore Martyrs had a lasting effect on the lives of numerous people, including leading personalities. Foremost is the Father of our Nation and late President, Dr Cheddi Jagan himself. On this issue, he revealed in 'THE WEST ON TRIAL' that, "*At the graveside, the emotional outburst of the widows and relatives of the deceased were intensely distressing and I could not restrain my tears. There was to be no turning back. There and then I made a silent pledge. I would dedicate my entire life to the cause of the struggle of the Guianese people against bondage and oppression*".

In the ensuing years, this remarkable man did exactly that – he devoted his entire life to the cause of all Guyanese, and the working class in particular. He quickly established himself as the champion of the working class in the Legislative Council, and he was very critical of the planter oligarchy and other exploitative elements in society.

His militancy and robust advocacy won him international recognition as a fearless anti-colonial fighter. His timely intervention on behalf of the working man, the unemployed and the dispossessed made him the leading political figure in the colony. As to his radical outlook in the immediate post-1948 tragedy, he confessed: "*I bought a new dimension to the politics of protest, continuity between the legislature and the street corner, the legislature was brought to the streets and the streets to the legislature*".

Senior counsel Mr Ashton Chase, OE, in his seminal work 'HISTORY OF TRADE UNIONISM IN GUYANA', acknowledges that "*In Dr Jagan, the workers found an outstanding champion of their rights ... on many occasions, single-handedly but most heroically and inspiringly, he fought for the workers' rights.*"

Addressing a symposium at the Cheddi Jagan Research Centre in March 2002 on the occasion of the passing of Dr. Jagan, Professor Clive Thomas

had this to say: *“From these personal reflections, I have no doubt whatsoever that Cheddi Jagan was an exceptional patriot, an exceptional trade unionist with a heart readily committed to the working-class people and the working-class interests”*. Obviously, the inspiration, the fiercer determination, had to do with his final pledge before the Enmore Martyrs in 1948.

The fallen Enmore heroes must have inspired and influenced their colleagues and other trade union and political leaders to intensify the struggle for social and economic justice, and betterment in general.

The Enmore Martyrs’ incident was indeed an embarrassment to the Local Legislature and the Colonial Office at the time. It forced the latter to promptly appoint a Commission of Inquiry (Venn Commission) to inquire and report on the organisation of the sugar industry in Guyana, with particular reference to means of production, wages and working conditions, and other relevant matters; and to make recommendations. This Commission spent two months in Guyana (December 1948 - February 1949) visiting estates and taking evidence. In the long run, it made some tangible recommendations which had a direct bearing on some of the very grievances of the Enmore workers of 1948.

Among these were: the prohibition of child labour under 14 years of age; the supply of potable water at convenient points on estates; the provision of planks of adequate width available at the site to facilitate the system of “cut and load”; the establishment of a single wage board or council for the entire sugar industry, with workers’ representatives being nominated by trade unions; the introduction of a contributory pension scheme; the establishment of at least four state hospitals in localities conveniently accessible to estates and villages; the clearing of

ranges or logic and the rehousing of occupants; government’s administration of schools on estates; the establishment of community centres and sports grounds with suitable facilities; and the appointment of welfare officers to each estate.

While these were merely recommendations, they could be viewed as a major breakthrough in the face of an uncaring plantocracy, thanks to the priceless sacrifice of the Enmore Martyrs.

In the final analysis, the Martyr’s left a legacy of militancy and activism for workers to follow. With the Guyana Industrial Workers’ Union giving way to GAWU, the struggle for betterment and a just society was intensified. GAWU, the union of the workers’ choice, had to wage a prolonged and relentless battle for recognition. This was very evident during the turbulent period of the early 1960s and onwards. A 13-week strike in the industry in 1975 culminated in a long-awaited poll between GAWU and MPCA. The result was a resounding recognition victory for GAWU with some 98 per cent of the ballots won. Certainly, the Enmore Martyrs have made their contribution towards the eventual accomplishment of recognition.

The heroes and Martyrs of Enmore will long be remembered for their sterling contribution to the advancement of the working-class struggle in Guyana, and for the prospects of a better tomorrow. Sugar workers in particular, and workers in general have since achieved many of the very things that they so relentlessly struggled for in 1948 outside the sugar industry in general. For example, improvements were made in workers’ wages and conditions of work; sanitary conditions; transportation; recreational facilities; and in education and training. The way for these achievements was paved by the struggle and the sacrifice of the Enmore Martyrs.



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THUNDER – April 9, 1955, and April 16, 1955

# THE PARTY AND THE FUTURE



**Recorded Speech of Comrade Cheddi Jagan to the Buxton Conference.**

**Comrades,**

I send you greetings. Today, in the most critical period of our country's history, a savage dictatorship ruling over our land denies me and others the pleasure of being with you. But even more distressing must be the feelings of our valiant comrades who know no home but a prison cell and a concentration camp.

Please stand and give three loud cheers for those comrades who cannot be with you today.... Hip, hip, hooray..... hip, hip, hooray, hip, hip hooray.

## **The Weapon of Terror**

These are difficult times. These are times which try men's souls, as Tom Paine used to say during the American War of Independence. Our imperialist masters, their agents and sympathisers are on the offensive with a big stick and with a vengeance. They will use every weapon in their armoury – every weapon which has been tried and tested in their long history of looting and plunder.

First is their naked brute force battleships, bayonets, an army of occupation, volunteer corps, police, reserve police, riot squad, tear gas, etc.- all meant to terrorise us into submission. Then that which hurts the most – the weapon of starvation. They will attack us through our families, our wives, our children. They will victimise, restrict and detain us. Their police and their courts will imprison us. They will punish some to terrorise others. And finally, they will try to buy out some of us.

That it is difficult not to weaken in the face of this terror, not to succumb to the cries of the little ones, there is no doubt. But this we must remember that this life and death struggle - a struggle, if lost, will

mean a living death for us and those to come; if won, will mean a full life, a life free from the daily anxieties, doubts and distresses.

And this we must not forget – that we are engaged in a long-term struggle. The opportunists only look at today, but we must look at today in terms of tomorrow. True, Churchill, Lyttleton, Lennox-Boyd, Savage and King Sugar have won the first round. Their mercenaries invaded our shores with fixed bayonets, ready to disembowel us. And they won the second round too, again with terror; only, this time with police terror-riot squad, tear gas, victimisation, restrictions, detentions and jailings. And now, it seems that with intrigue they have won a third round – the split in the ranks of our solid, united, national movement.

### **The Betrayal of the People**

Let me say a few words about this split. This, perhaps more than any other single factor, has brought more disillusionment among our Party's rank-and-file. But let us not be disheartened; this is neither the first nor the last betrayal of the working people.

It is necessary for us to understand the forces at play in our midst, in our party. When this is done, it will bring clarity to the situation, and will steel us for the greater struggle ahead.

What do the opportunists say in this period of marking time? This is their line of reasoning:-

**“We cannot go on like this; we must get back in the Legislative Council, even if it means the temporary sacrifices of some of our principles. When we get political power, then we will be able to fight for all our principles, to do economic good for the people.”**

This was the kind of ‘advice’ given to us not too long ago by an important visitor to our shores. These people are not realists. They are suffering not only from self-delusion, but the tendency to delude others. They had forgotten two important events since Black Friday in October 1953. First is the Lyttleton-Lennox Boyd doctrine – that Her Majesty's Government is not prepared to see the setting up of communist governments in any part of

the Commonwealth. We all know that for Lyttleton and Lennox-Boyd, the definition of communism, as for Dr Maltan of South Africa, is quite elastic. Any grave threat to imperialist interests can be deemed as communism.

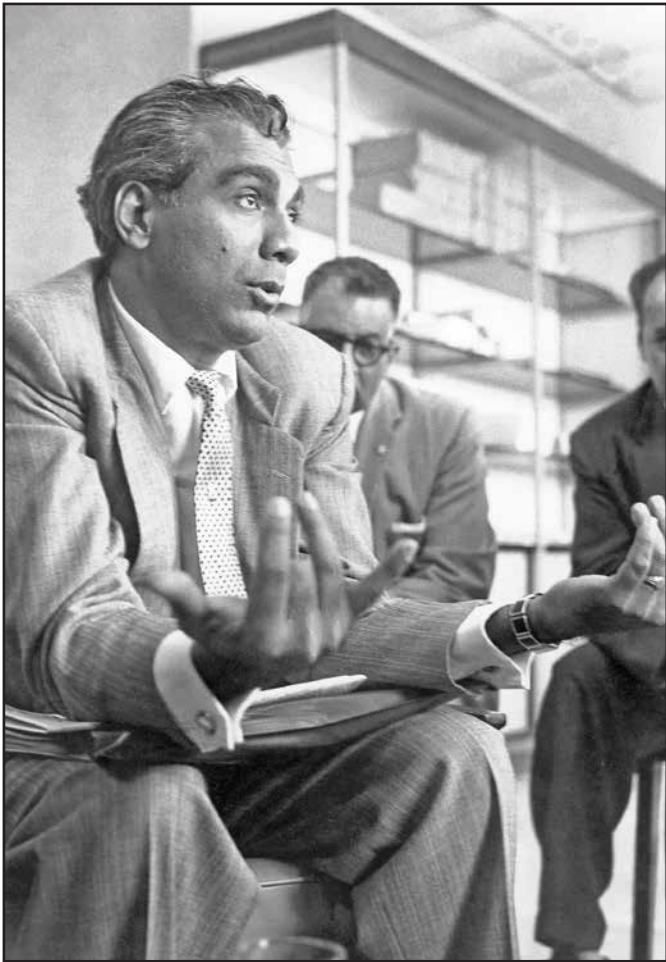
### **Lesson of Guatemala**

And secondly, there is the lesson of Guatemala. B.G. at least is a colony. It is ruled from Whitehall. A constitution was given, and it was taken away. But Guatemala is different. It was independent, sovereign territory. It had full political powers. But what happened? Precisely because the Arbenz Government tried to use its political powers in the interest of the people, it got into grave difficulties with the U.S. Monopoly, the United Fruit Company. This company, as we should all be aware, controlled the economic life of the Guatemalan people. The ultimate result was the intervention by the U.S. Government to protect the interests of its giant monopoly, and the overthrow of the democratic Arbenz regime – read our pamphlet on Guatemala, and another, “Development and Exploitation,” on U.S. imperialists.

Guiana and Guatemala, therefore, point out very clearly this one fact: that the imperialists and the imperialist Governments are not respecters of the rights of colonial peoples and the peoples of even sovereign territories; that sovereign territory, much more colonial territories, cannot stand alone against the onslaught of monopoly capitalists; that we must forsake a narrow, parochial nationalism for an internationalist working class outlook. Only by a clear understanding of this fact will we know what method to pursue to attain our objective.

The splitters, however, do not like to relate this factor or to have this fact related to them. Nor do they wish to hear about the lesson of Guatemala. It is too painful, for it exposes their opportunism.

This is how they put it: “The Caribbean Sea is an American lake. The United States is boss in North and South America. Britain is only a junior partner to the U.S., and must take orders from Uncle Sam, particularly in relation to the British Caribbean territories.” “The U.S. forced Britain to swoop down



on the PPP Government; therefore, we must play the U.S. against Britain,” says Jainarine Singh. Add Mr Burnham: “We must not go out of our way to attack America, even if she is wrong on international issues. We must only attack her on specific colonial matters. We must not praise the Soviet Union and the People’s democracies”.

### **Tactics or Delusion**

But why all this precaution? It is a question of tactics, says Burnham. But tactics for what; to what aim; to what purpose? So that we can get back our constitution? So that we can win national independence?

But what is to prevent the British Government from taking away any future constitution they may grant us and boot out an elected government while we are still a colony? What is to prevent American intervention a la Guatemala after we have gained national political independence? Nothing whatsoever. Except this single episode – those who have got the political

power must use it for the interest not of the people, but of the imperialists. Despite their demagogy, this is the role played by Gomes, Adams, Manley, Nkrumah and other so-called colonial leaders. This is the logical outcome of the so-called tactics of the opportunists Burnham, Lachmansingh and Jainarine Singh.

Recall the words of Dr Lachamnsingh when the Robertson Constitution Commission was first appointed. He said that we could build a more retrograde constitution than the Waddington Constitution. He recommended the PPP should contest the elections, win the seats and then resign. Those were fighting words borrowed from the experience of the Indian National Congress Party in its struggle for national liberation. But today, in the period of marking time, the good doctor is singing a different tune. Taking his political cue no longer from the Indian National Congress, but from the Robertson Commission that the leadership and policies must change before new elections will take place - he was talking about a reshuffle. We saw what they meant by a reshuffle in the so-called elections of the Interim General Council Comrades Ramkarran, Carter, Westmaas, Benn, Nasrudeen, Huntley, Robertson, Harrylall, Bowman, N. Jagan, the supporters of the past militant anti-imperialist policy, were thrown out and replaced by others.

Why? Clearly so that they can dominate and thereby change the policies. Comrades Sydney King, Janet Jagan and myself were retained. Why? To give popular support while they betray the people in the interest of the imperialists.

### **Political Wilderness**

But what happens, one may ask, if we don’t follow the so-called tactical line of the opportunists? Does it mean that we must remain in the political wilderness forever? It depends on our definition of wilderness.

**For is a legislature without any power anything less than a political wilderness?** It also depends on how many fronts we must fight from, and the relative importance of these fronts. The opportunists put greatest emphasis on the Legislative fronts obviously because this is remunerative to them both financially and socially. As I see it, we need to fight



on both fronts, inside and outside the Legislature. But I would rather remain outside the Legislature if it means getting there by selling ourselves; if it means the sacrifice of any of our fighting principles.

Let us see what is happening today. If the PPP Government were allowed to remain in office, it could have found great difficulty in raising loans. But now, when we are not in the office, the money is pouring in. Why? Is it because the British Imperialists love us? No, not at all; it is because they know that we are politically conscious and alive, that we are fighting from the outside. **How is it that we hear lavish praise for Mr Hutchinson's schemes from the lips of the very people who were responsible for his abrupt departure? The fact that people like Col. Haywood say that whatever the bill, the money must be found to carry out those drainage and irrigation schemes is an indication that we are not really in the political wilderness. We are a force to be reckoned with. We must realise our strength. We must not be disheartened.**

I know that having lost the first rounds, one feels like throwing in the towel. But let us not be shortsighted. This is a time which calls for vision – a distant, clear vision; for the battle can be won; and it will be won. Other rounds are being fought in far-off places, our working class outposts – in the straits of Formosa, the jungles of Malaya, the plains of Indo-China, the highlands of Africa. In the United Nations, our Anglo-American imperialist masters with their satellites, though dominant, are on the defensive. Resurgent Asia's playing a psycho role in the stopping of the new world's destiny. Asia-African Conference, with more than 30 countries assembled, will soon discuss the burning question of this age – colonialism. The problem of Bevanism in Britain is essentially the reflection of the crisis of colonialism – imperialism.

### **Forge New Weapon**

For our part, we must purify our ranks and strengthen our forces. In the early period of our Party's history, to broaden our movement, it was necessary to bring in many vacillating elements. When the going was smooth and easy, they rode on our bandwagon to victory. But today when the going gets a little tough, they prefer to take the easy road. They are no longer interested in the national struggle for liberation, both political and economic. This way means sacrifices, what they now want is to take over our party, our paper, our organisation. **They want a change in our anti-imperialist policies. Their main concern is seats in the Legislature and Ministries, fat salaries and perks, political patronage for their clique of hangers-on, and social evenings with the big shots.** This, of course, they will not admit. With demagogery and lying, they are slandering us to cover up their opportunism.

And the Government and police are helping them. They can move about freely and unmolested. Notice the recent activity of the once self-restricted renegade Dr J.P. Lachmansingh. We too must work. It is hard work which won for our party its phenomenal success. And it is hard work which pulls us through this crisis. Each one of you must not only be a good follower; you must be a leader, an activist, a hard worker. Paying 60 cents and holding a Party card is not enough. Now is the time to cast off disillusionment. **Now is the time to fight. Let us do so gathering inspiration and strength from the great victories which are daily being won by the [people] forces against reaction all over the world. Let not race divides us. Let not religion separate us. Onward to victory. Long live the P.P.P.!**

## VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

# Femicide, benevolent sexism and Guyana



In recent years, Guyana gained notoriety for ranking among the top five countries with the highest suicide rates in the world, securing third place after Sri Lanka and Lithuania in 2017. According to the Small Arms Survey, it is also one of the countries most affected by violent deaths in 2016, including by sexual assault (for every 20 per 100 000 population). Sadly, if enough statistics on gender inequalities, violence and discrimination were available, a similar picture might depict the horrible reality which challenges women and girls in this sparsely populated South American country. The UN ranks Guyana 127 on the Gender Inequality Index (GII), far behind its Caribbean neighbours Barbados (54), Bahamas (58) and Jamaica (94) respectively. Women remain

underrepresented in politics, and were it not for the legislative gender quota (33%), they might not have made it to the thirty per cent mark in Parliament. Though women comprise over 40 per cent of the labour force, expectant and nursing mothers are forced to put up with deplorable working conditions, due to a weak regulatory framework cobbled with the absence of political will to push for necessary reforms that would reduce gender disparities.

Despite national legislation which on paper makes provision for women's rights, violence against women and girls remains pervasive, while their access to social and economic rights is stymied by the invisible barriers of taboos and stereotypes anchored in the Guyanese psyche itself. How much

of the national budget goes to reducing gender disparities and promoting women's and children's rights is not certain. This aspect of development is not widely documented, and hardly any priority is given to assessing the impact of gender inequalities, abuse and discrimination against women on the overall human development of the country.

### ***Numbers that speak***

For a country with less than eight hundred inhabitants, the ratios of femicide and abuse are alarming. Where official statistics are lacking, media and police reports paint a grim canvas of the dangerous environment in which Guyanese women and girls struggle every day. Gender-based Violence (GBV) is widespread and is often the cause of fatal passionate crimes, incapacitating physical assault, sexual abuse and harassment, paedophilia and incest. Between 2011 and 2013, the Ministry of Public Security registered more than 9,200 cases of domestic violence, with 65% of them involving an actual assault. Police reports indicate an increase of 26% in the number of reported rapes, with 300 reported at the end of November 2016 compared to 238 for the same period in 2015. By the end of December 2017, the local media had reported 13 murders of Guyanese women (of which 9 were intimate partner crimes) and one murder of an 18-month-old girl. Of the 13 women, aged, 17 to 89, seven lived in predominantly rural areas that are highly dependent on the agriculture sector. Seven murders occurred in Berbice, and 6 occurred in Region 4 (mainly Georgetown). Two of these women were married, 2 had separated from their husbands, One was in a common-law relationship, 3 were in relationships, and 4 were over 70 years old, with the eldest being 89. One of the senior citizens was murdered by her son while the 3 others along with the 18-month-old who was thrown out of a window and buried alive, were the victims of fatal robberies.

By June 6, 2018, another nine homicides had been recorded. Most of the victims ranged between ages 20 and 40. One of the more gruesome cases involved a man slaughtering his wife and degutting his eleven-year-old daughter before taking his own life. These murders do not include rape allegations or Guyanese women murdered abroad. A glimpse at how sexual abuse is treated in Guyana reveals that out of over 230 reports of rape in 2015, only

36 accused were charged. By March 5 2018, only 10 cases of sexual abuse were brought before the Georgetown Courts for victims, of whom some were as young as 3. For the average citizen this is hardly a surprise but instead an indicator of the consequences of institutionalised gender-bias. The police and authorities are often accused of trivialising rape allegations and domestic violence; and in other instances, political connections and wealth supersede the law. At least 2 cases of femicide during 2018 (both in Berbice) resulted from years of ongoing intimate partner violence (IPV) which were known to family members, neighbours and the Police.

Likewise, there are elected and appointed political leaders who held, or continue to hold, high offices in Government though they were accused of sexual harassment, abuse, or gender-based discrimination. The case of a renowned Guyanese politician and TV station owner who allegedly raped a 9-year-old girl and escaped judgement is one of many examples. Abuse against girl children is rampant. By mid-2018, the Child Protection Agency had already announced a staggering 481 cases of child sexual abuse, of which 393 were girls. One could only imagine what the number would look like by the end of the year. The consequences are both physical and psychological trauma, and some girls end up being burdened by life-threatening pregnancies.

Victims of discrimination and abuse generally cower in silence under the pressure of taboos and shame in their communities. The chronic lack of medical professionals, especially in rural Guyana, limits access to professional help, forcing victims to bear the strain of emotional and psychological trauma alone, which can further degenerate into mental illnesses. There are approximately 10 or less trained psychiatrists in Guyana to deal with the overwhelming cases of mental illnesses, and there are only three certified psychologists at the overcrowded Georgetown Public Hospital. Meanwhile, a 2014 World Health Organisation (WHO) report established a direct correlation between GBV (including child abuse) and high suicidal behaviour. The organisation found that women who experience intimate partner violence are also twice as likely to succumb to depression and alcoholism. The WHO also reports that about 38 per cent of Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) is committed by an intimate partner. For Guyana, the



figures above suggest that intimate partners commit at least 60 per cent of homicides.

### ***Impact on development***

Statistics show that the number of femicides is slightly higher in rural communities (particularly in the Berbice region for 2018) than it is in the more urbanised Georgetown and surrounding areas. Data is not readily available to determine with exactitude the extent of gender-based discrimination and violence in the hinterland (inhabited by indigenous populations mainly). FAO Deputy Director-General Daniel Gustafson, in an interview available on the organisation's website, emphasised the link between poverty and food security and GBV. He explained that GBV "in rural areas where the FAO operates (...) is pervasive", having a consequential impact on food security. This scenario applies to the Guyanese context insofar as GBV is widespread, and the majority of the local population can be defined as rural and heavily dependent on traditional income earning sectors such as agriculture (rice, sugar, cash crops, fishing, etc.), and the extractive industries (gold, diamond, etc. in particular). The consequences on the economy, though not assessed by national

institutions, can be alarming if we consider that gender-based violence can cause loss of lives, physical and mental disabilities, while creating orphans and depriving the country's labour force of valuable human capital. The fact that a percentage of the murderers commit suicide after killing their partners augments the burden on the economy. Traumatized children who witness or are victims of gender-based violence generally go on to replicate negative behavioural patterns, and contribute as adults to the cycle of persistent gender inequalities and violence which characterises Guyana, especially since little opportunity for counselling and care exists.

The question of how we ended up here can be traced back to how leaders, national institutions and authorities, in over five decades of independence, have chosen to respond to gender inequalities. A closer look at policy-making in Guyana would reveal that the State's protection services and response mechanisms are anaemic, neglected, and overlooked in favour of more economic-driven priorities. As a result, conscious and unconscious gender bias continues to permeate every stratum of society, and

for a wide cross-section of the population, including women, violence continues to be condoned as adequate punishment for disobedience or perceived immoral conduct. Like many others, our society is structured on patriarchal norms and values which have shaped gender and social relations for decades. The concept of reducing the gender inequality gap by formulating a rights-based approach to development, therefore, seems distant from political agendas. And ironically, the blame cannot be cast on men alone.

### ***Women supporting benevolent sexism***

A joint study published in August 2017 by the Australian Journal of Psychology suggested that some women may support hostile or benevolent sexism because they prefer to be validated by male peers, and proceed to use their status and power acquired through their validation by the opposite sex as a means to exert social dominance over other women.

Some women choose to deliberately perpetuate a culture of gender inequality, thereby constituting an even greater threat to women's empowerment. This includes emotional lynching and complacency in the face of discrimination, and transcends all layers of our social fabric, from the very bottom to the highest offices in Government. It is a women's rights paradox manifested when women condone, encourage, or justify abuse of other women - generally in cases of domestic and gender-based violence - on the distorted basis that something about the victim's attitude, conduct or appearance was immoral or unconventional, subsequently warranting her demise. Nation-wide internet access and the popularisation of social media outlets such as Facebook have transformed into courts before which victims are stripped of their dignity and judged against the dictates of society. Here, cyber-bullying and emotional abuse are mistaken for freedom of expression. This is one factor that contributes to the increasing normalisation of violence, constituting a travesty to technological progress and free speech, where some Guyanese women encourage virtual violence without grasping the detrimental impact this can have on our emotional health and development.

Higher up, policy-making can be described as lethargic at best when tackling the issue of gender

inequality. Irrespective of the level of education our appointed leaders might have, some of them are more prone to maintaining the status quo, while others have time and again sought to attenuate gender-based discrimination and turn a blind eye to sexual assault. Several Ministries in Guyana were and are currently spearheaded or co-managed by female Ministers who, despite being educated or having a history of public leadership roles, have done very little to bridge gender inequalities and, as the statistics indicate, make meaningful progress over the years.

Former Social Protection Minister Volda Lawrence came under fire in March 2016 when she dismissed a case of incest as being a "family matter". During the national Child Protection Week, the said Ministry under Lawrence's mandate issued a statement describing "incest and underage sexual activity in childhood" as the "deflowering" of children. Unsurprisingly, Lawrence angered several human rights bodies in the country, which sparked protests demanding her removal from the Social Protection Ministry.

Meanwhile, in the Guyanese highlands, Lethem's Deputy Mayor was leading a fight for justice when she accused a senior political appointee of sexual abuse. By 2018, Amna Ally was responsible for the Social Protection Ministry, and under her mandate all efforts were made to hush the matter, coerce the victim into silence, and later slut-shame her in court when she became implacable in her struggle. Although he was suspended from the senior Government position he occupied, the alleged perpetrator continued, more than a year later, to benefit from an attractive salary, benefits and regional accommodation perks. Today he is free, and has been transferred to Region 8 to occupy the same position of power. Unsurprisingly, a written complaint alleging his "immoral conduct" has already surfaced from a new victim in Region 8.

Similarly, Winnifred Ellis is still headmistress of the Bishops' High, despite condoning the alleged sexual abuse of schoolgirls whose security she is still tasked with guaranteeing today. When the story of a male teacher who allegedly abused several Bishops' High school girls broke, the headmistress was caught on tape reprimanding female students for being "slack" and "loose", before ordering them to "step out of the

line" and reveal themselves before the school if they were victims. This can be described as an attempt to humiliate, and by extent silence, any other victim in the school. The head teacher's response was a demonstration of her disrespect for confidentiality surrounding sensitive sexual abuse cases, in particular for minors. It reflected her reluctance at the time to protect victims and her apparent ineptitude to provide a safe learning environment for students. Although public calls by both students and interest groups were made to have her removed, the Education Ministry believed that an apology to students sufficed. Sadly, Ellis was not entirely unlike Minister Volda Lawrence, who attempted to desensitise the act of rape by decorating national discourse with politically correct and blurred expressions. These are some examples of female guardians of the Guyanese society.

#### ***What next for tomorrow?***

The notion of female inferiority has become so entrenched in the Guyanese psyche that many of us women have long since moved from resignation to accepting our conditions. The result is that mothers, victims of their own unconscious bias, maintain their children plugged into a system that glorifies the boy child. Daughters, on the other hand, continue to be trapped within the confines of unfounded gender limitations in an oppressive environment that stifles dreams and growth and shackles freedom, often by misconstrued perceptions of morality. This explains why, in one recent case of femicide, neighbours argued that the victim encouraged the recidivist behaviour of her husband by returning to him after every beating. The result of this mentality that has accepted the daily denigration of women is that when a victim stands up to her oppressor, her right to justice is often determined by the society based on their subjective judgement of her character and reputation.

How to go about tackling the scourge of GBV and gender inequalities depends mainly on the political will to look beyond economically-driven priorities. It is time to quantify the overarching devastating impact of systemic gender inequalities on sectorial progress to formulate policies that adopt a comprehensive approach to both social and economic empowerment. Measuring the huge contribution of the human capital of women to the economy, as well as their impact as economic agents, would serve as a formidable indicator of their value to our country's development, and support policies and regulatory frameworks that aspire to equal rights.

Achieving a gender-equal society would also require national institutions to take up their responsibilities in enforcing the existing legal framework that caters for women's rights and security, as well as adopting a National Gender Policy. It is equally important that women with leadership and influential roles, and who possess the capacity to act, take up their responsibilities to address the laxity of national institutions, shape healthier attitudes, deconstruct social taboos, and bring the national debate to the doors of policy-makers. Part of the solution to resolve gender-based discrimination, abuse, and inequalities, requires acknowledging that some of us women are also part of the problem, and must work to be the change we dream of.

Until then, newspaper pages will continue to run damp with the blood and tears of disenfranchised Guyanese women and girls.



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# KARL MARX AND THE FUTURE SOCIETY



## **Introduction**

May 5, 2018 marks the bicentenary of the birth of Karl Marx, one of the most powerful thinkers of all times. The fact that articles are being written and events are being held all over the world to commemorate this event is a demonstration of the relevance of Marx even today.

This is an important point to make, since his 'death' was proclaimed over and over again since his passing in 1883.

## **Marx's Theory**

There is no robust debate nowadays of Marx's analysis of capitalism. Time and time again, it has proven to be correct and has stood the test of time.

Marx pointed out that the main contradiction of capitalism was the social nature of production and the private appropriation of wealth. He also predicted that free competition would lead to monopoly. Another significant prediction was that, under capitalism, wealth would be concentrated in fewer and fewer hands.

Today, the social nature of production that Marx spoke about is not just confined within a country, but has become global. Globalisation has led to a global socialisation of production. Monopolies are

the dominant feature of capitalism today, with many monopoly corporations singularly commanding more wealth than a lot of nation states. Not only do we have national monopolies, but transnational corporations' monopolies. Global wealth is essentially social, but appropriation remains private.

As far as the concentration of wealth is concerned, it has reached the ridiculous. Figures from many international organisations point out that the resources held by fifty-eight (58) of the world's wealthiest persons are more than the wealth held by the bottom half of the world's population, or three and a half billion people. The concentration is becoming progressively worse. A decade ago, it was 300 persons owning as much as 3.5 billion people do.

So life has proven Marx's analysis to be true.

Moreover, Marx's approach in many other areas has undoubtedly proven to be correct.

His methodology in the study of history is now widely used by universities. Even though Marx is not always given credit for that, his approach to history is the most widely accepted.

His impact on sociology, philosophy, arts and culture has been very substantial.

Where some social scientists part with Marx is in his conclusion that society must develop beyond capitalism to a Communist society.

Marx was not the first to speak about the development of a new communist society. Before him we had Robert Owen from England and Saint Simon from France, among others who propagated this new society.

Where Marx differed from Owen and others was in how to get to that new society.

For Owen and company, persuasion was the main tool advocated. They used moral arguments to try to persuade the capitalist to join in the communist project.

Marx called them utopian. He was of the view

that the capitalists could not be persuaded in that direction. He concluded his profound study of history by stating that capitalism was a phase in human development. It logically must develop toward socialism/communism. What had to take place was a revolution to change the system.

Marx identified the forces that would lead the revolution as the proletariat, which he described as the working class of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. He wrote that the working class could only free itself from exploitation by freeing society as a whole. Eventually, he argued that such a revolution would lead to a classless society.

Bourgeoisie defenders of capitalism termed Marx himself as a utopian. They argued that man was inherently greedy and selfish, and therefore capitalism cannot be destroyed, only modified.

Marx rejected that argument. For him, the man is essentially good; it is capitalism and exploitation that has made him selfish. He spoke about the evolution of man under socialism/communism in which those features as greed, etc., would gradually be overcome.

Bourgeois propaganda has gained some credence because of the developments in the world in recent times. The union of Soviet Socialist Republics has collapsed; so, too, have the Eastern European socialist countries.

Some others who tried to build a new socialist society have run into many difficulties. Many of these countries' economies are in real problems, and essential shortages are pronounced.

To be sure, a lot of the problems spoken about above are as a result of enormous economic, political and even military pressures from western capitalist countries, mainly the US and EU states.

However, we cannot close our eyes to the fact that many mistakes were also made in the pursuit of social change. I would even say that many did not proceed in the way Marx had envisaged. The errors have been both theoretical and practical.

It is true that Marx did not write very much on what the new society would be like. However, he did deposit some thought, mainly in the debates he had with some socialists of his day.

Generally, he avoided speaking about how the new society would be. He felt that the future generations

would be more intelligent than his generation, and it would be their task to find the right strategy and tactics to build the new society.

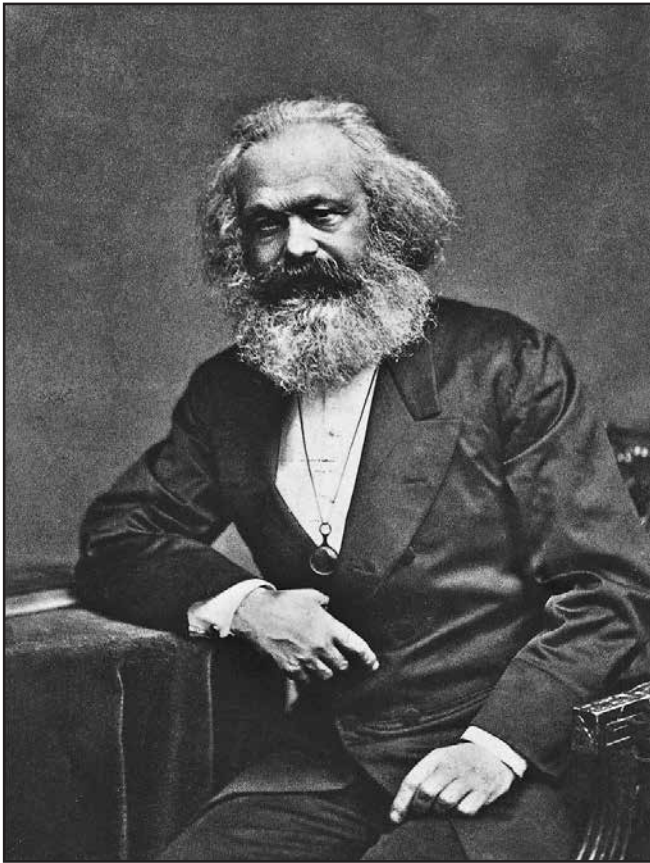
Even though his remarks were few about the construction of socialism/communism, what he wrote is invaluable and should be looked at again. This is important to avoid the pitfalls which are numerous along the way to effect profound social transformation, since, time and again, the socialist forces contributed to their defeat.

The first of Marx's thoughts which dealt with the building of a new society, was found in the Communist Manifesto co-authored with Frederick Engels. Here is what they wrote; "...the first step in the revolution by the working class is to raise the proletariat to the position of ruling class, to win the battle for democracy...". Significantly, he went on to add; "... the proletariat will use its political supremacy to wrest by degree all capital from the bourgeoisie... and to increase the total productive forces as rapidly as possible..."

This was not some reference in passing. It was a well-considered position by Marx and Engels. I say this because if we go back to Engels's work, 'Principles of Communism', one would find that idea in the Question and Answer from what Engels used in writing that work. Here is how Engels answered the questions. "...Question: Will it be possible to abolish private property at one blow?" The answer, "No, such a thing would be impossible. Hence the proletarian revolution... will only be able gradually to transform existing society, and will abolish private ownership only when the necessary quantity of means of production has been created..."

Following on that question was another, "What will be the course of the revolution?". Here is how Engels put the answer, "In the first place, it will inaugurate a democratic constitution, and thereby directly or indirectly the political rule of the proletariat...". Here he implied that real democracy is only possible when the working people are in power because they are the majority. He went on to identify some method by which the process of transformation will be affected; 1) Restriction of private ownership by means of progressive taxes, high inheritance taxes...., 2) Gradual expropriation of landed proprietors, factory owners, railway and shipping magnates, partly through competition on the part of the state industry and partly directly through the payment of compensation in currency notes" (cash).





Marx and Engels had a very realistic position on how a socialist revolution would proceed. They were extremely practical with the approach to the economy and this early stage of a successful revolution.

This approach was seen in another work in which Marx had criticised the German Party's programme. This was his 'Critique of the Gotha Programme'. This programme was authored by Lassalle, an Economist who had considerable influence in the party and among the workers. Lassalle was advocating, among other things, that workers should get "... all of what they produced. This is how Lassalle put it; "... The proceeds of labour belong, undiminished, with an equal right to all members of society..." Marx was brutal in his criticism of the Programme, showing its impractical side and its obvious errors.

Again, we see Marx considered the view of how things could develop at the beginning of reconstruction. Here is what he wrote: "What we have to deal with here is a communist society, not as it has developed on its foundation, but on the contrary, just as it emerges from capitalist society; which is thus in every respect, economically, morally and intellectually, still stamped with the birthmarks of the old society from whose womb it emerges".

He was very clear, too, that it will take time to transform society into becoming more inclusive and harmonious. He wrote: "Between capitalist and communist societies lies the period of revolutionary transformation of the one into the other".

What is clear is that Marx saw the need for workers to take power as soon as they possibly can. It is important that they break-up the old state apparatus and establish real people's power. Of importance to note is his emphasis on democracy.

Marx felt that a socialist society must be superior to a capitalist society in every respect, politically, genuine democracy, socially and economically

He clearly advocated a sober and careful approach in dealing with the economy. His emphasis again was that production must increase to satisfy people's needs. In that way he felt that the selfishness and greed that bourgeois theoreticians spoke of would be gradually overcome.

Engels, in his "Principles of Communism" put it in the following way: "...large scale unlimited expansion of production made possible by it (here he was talking about international trade) can bring into being a social order wherein so much of all necessities of life is produced that every member of society will be able to develop and to apply all his powers and abilities in the fullest freedom..." In other philosophical works, Marx spoke about the emergence of the 'new man'.

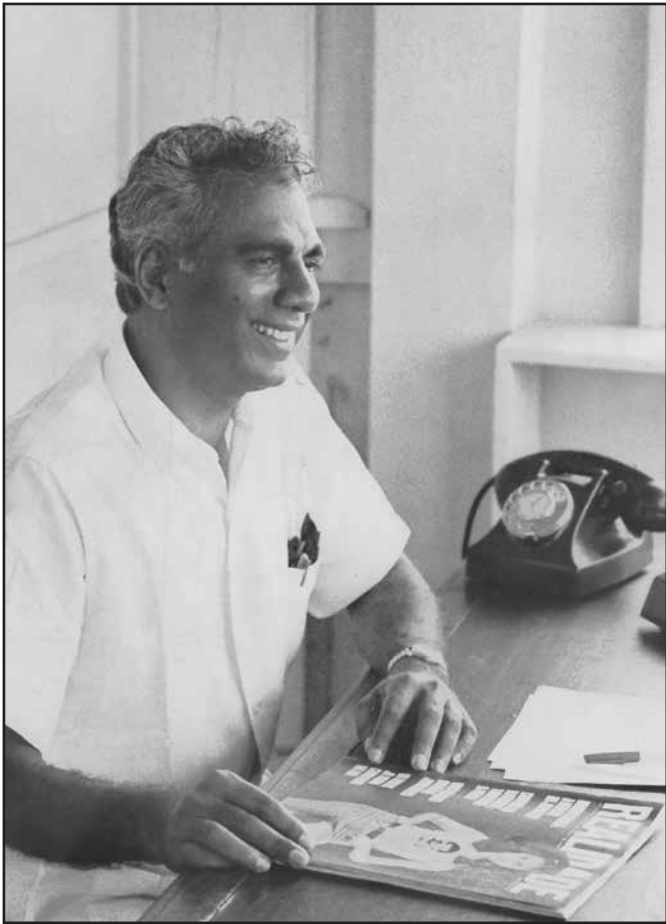
With abundance and without the exploitation of capitalist relations, greed and selfishness can be overcome.

### **Post Marx Revolution**

Marx, while not laying out a total blueprint of how the new society would be built, had recognised some important general conditions.

The revolutions which occurred after Marx and Engels' passing made a significant impact on humanity and history. Those that collapsed generated much despondency in the left movement. In many ways, the left has not fully recovered from the setbacks. It is, therefore, important that we examine some general, and a few specific, issues that affected the movement to freedom.

In the first place, revolutions create great enthusiasm. Most leaders of revolutions tend to get carried away and make great mistakes, in particular in the



way they handle economic issues. Often reckless haste is emphasised, which leads to adventurism in economics. People and their leaders tend to move too fast, in effecting massive nationalisation and confiscation when the capacity to manage does not exist and when all the traits of capitalism, such as corruption, greed, etc. are still formidable to contend with.

On the other hand, some revolutionaries who see the dangers of moving too fast and creating much dislocation go to the other extreme and move much too slowly. That allows the capitalist forces to take advantage and sabotage the process of change.

In between these two extremes lie other issues that may be described as mistakes.

The Great October Socialist Revolution, led by Lenin, made a tremendous impact internationally. Internally, too, it generated great energy and much enthusiasm. Feats of labour accomplished were unbelievable. Some of their heroes of Socialist Labour had awards in their names. One such award, the Stakanov Award, was for emulating the worker Stakanov, who proved to be exceptionally

productive.

Many revolutionaries felt that that enthusiasm would last forever. That, of course, has not been borne out in our experience.

That was a common mistake made by almost all revolutionaries.

The young Cuban Revolution had started a debate, led mainly by Che Guevara, which placed incentives as more important than material incentives. No doubt, he was infected by the massive enthusiasm of the revolutions.

It should be noted that, very early, Lenin had recognised very early that it was impossible to keep up the momentum by moral incentives alone. He spoke about the need for material incentives. It is important to improve people's quality of life constantly.

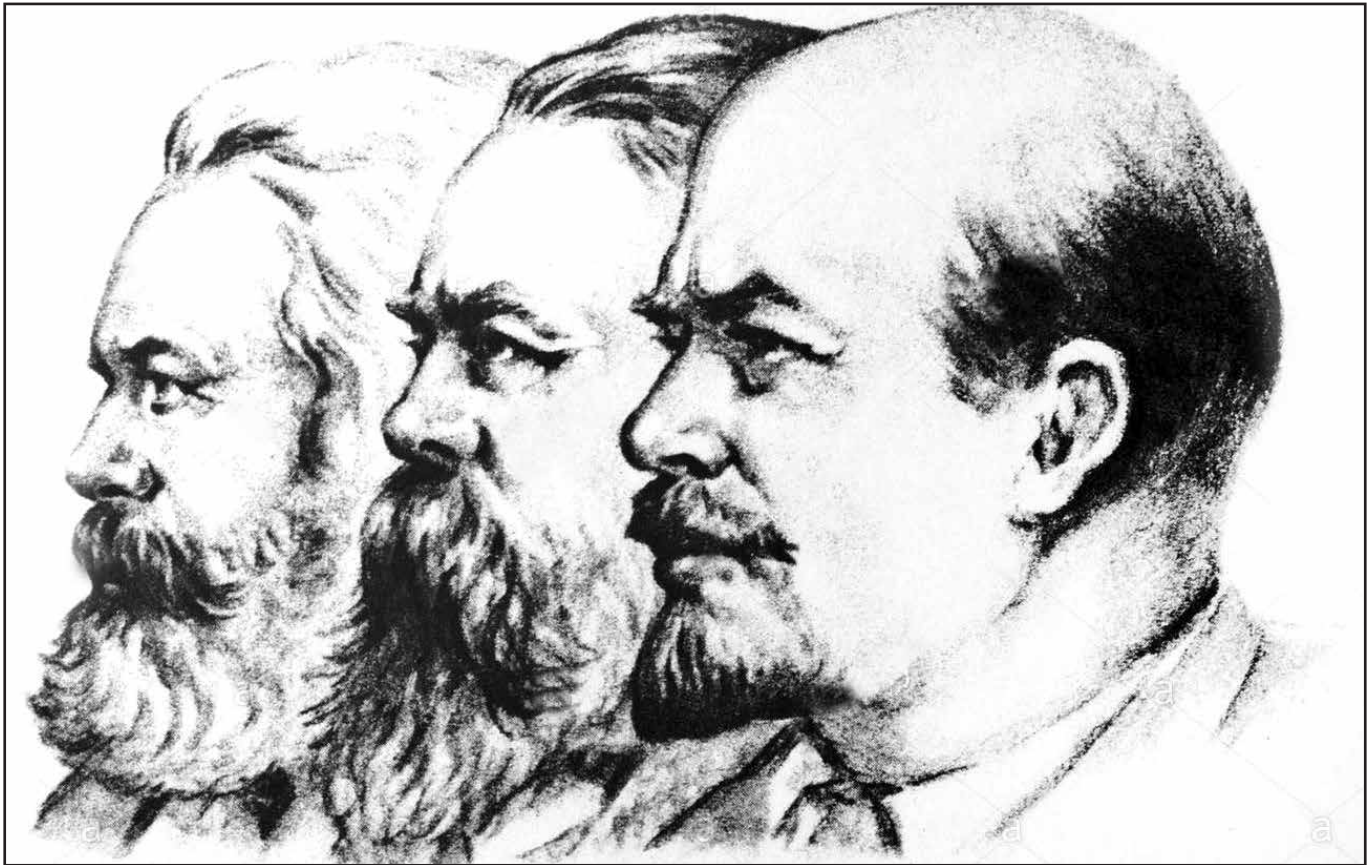
After the October Revolution, Lenin realised the mistakes that were being made. It is apposite to recall that he gave back some of the nationalised factories to their Russian owners. He also offered to do the same for foreign investors. However, the Civil War and the invasion of Soviet Russia stopped that from materialising.

Lenin, confronted by economic challenges, developed a New Economic Programme, which was essentially an economic plan based on a tri-sectional economy: state, cooperative and private sector. It was more reflecting Marx's ideas of handling the economy in the early period of transition.

Unfortunately, Lenin died quite early. The hostility from the West and internal sabotage saw Stalin chartering another course. He abandoned Lenin's plan. The Soviet model which most countries followed was based on the state being the dominant sector from the beginning. Agricultural collectivization was imposed on the farmers. Lenin's plan to set-up few state farms to act as examples to farmers in regard to the advantages of large-scale production was turned on its head.

It was no longer to be an example, and to allow gradual transformation was distorted. Instead, State Farms were seen as the ultimate and even coops were forced to transform to State Farms.

That approach, where repeated, did not fare any better. Fall in production and shortages resulted.



They moved too slowly in making fundamental changes.

The example of going too slowly can be seen in what happened in South Africa.

In the first place, the armed struggle did not come to an end with any side claiming victory. Instead, the Apartheid regime, no doubt with the advice and assistance of Western Powers, sought to negotiate an end to the armed struggle. They wanted to prevent changes by a successful armed struggle, that would have cost them too much.

The ANC-led alliance, aware that the armed struggle would take a long time and cost many lives, agreed to negotiate the end of apartheid.

However, in so doing, the forces of reaction retained a lot of power in the bureaucracy, including the police and army.

The South African revolutionaries, no doubt influenced by the terrible dislocations that Mozambique and Angola experienced, sought to avoid the same.

They discarded the Freedom Charter for the GEAR, and that left the economy firmly in the hands of the

whites. It is also important to note that some of the reforms, for instance land reform were not done. In effect, that left the black tillers of the soil landless.

Like many other revolutions that preceded it, the bureaucracy grew. A new social layer developed, mainly the bureaucratic elite, which seemed to have sided with some elements of the old order.

As was the case in many other countries, while much was achieved, clearly, fundamental social transformation has not occurred.

Lenin often said that politics was not just a science, but also an art. Therefore, it is important to be able to judge the right time to take action. Going too quickly or too slowly have their negative consequences, both of which exhaust the revolution and prevent countries from reaching their goals.

### **China's Experience**

In judging the right moments and the pace of the revolution in its task of transforming the society, we should look at the experience of the People's Republic of China.

Having also made serious mistakes at the beginning of the revolution, China, from the 1970s, began to

relook at their strategies and tactics in managing the economy. The year 1978 was significant in this regard.

Led by Deng Xiaoping, the party summed up their experience and made fundamental changes to correct the mistakes of the past. China went back to using all forms of ownership: State, cooperative and private. In 1978, its policies resembled Lenin's NEP.

At that time, the leadership of the Party and government saw the need to apply Marx's theory too, as Marx himself said a period when society was just emerging from the old exploitative relations.

China had recognised that moral incentives alone were not enough. People needed to see some material gains from their work and sacrifices. Socialism cannot become a reality when people must scrounge around for mere basics. Wealth creation is vital. After all, the distribution of wealth, and not poverty, is what socialism is all about.

The reforms in agriculture, wherein farmers got more direct benefits from their labour, saw production of food increasing dramatically.

It is opening up to the world and using a wide variety of ownership of the means of production that have resulted in great growth and massive wealth creation in China.

This country has become the second largest economy in the world. Over the years China has taken more people out of poverty than the rest of the world combined.

Its influence as a world power is proliferating. Many countries, rich and poor, are actively seeking China's assistance and greater economic relations.

China's success is due to its correct and creative application of Marx's theory in the building of socialism.

Many other countries are now looking at this model of constructing socialism and building the new man.

Marx's methodology in constructing the new society is being proven to be correct. Other countries are also looking at China's example to learn from it.

Some, like Vietnam, are experiencing real growth. These examples will have a more significant impact as humans continue to pursue peace, justice, social and economic progress.

Marx's theory will prove to be true in the constructing of the new socialist/communist society.

China balanced very well the issue of giving material and moral incentives. It applied Marx's concept at the beginning of the construction of socialism: "from each according to his/her need, to each according to his/her work." China's handling of the economy needs to be studied. Its lessons could be very instructive.

Today, China has been transformed. It is now the second largest economy in the world. It is rapidly catching up with the US. It has become the main driving force of the international economy. China's impact on the world is reverberating in every corner of the globe.

China's experience is the best example of the creative application of Marxism in the building of the new society; which, in the process, is developing the new socialist man.

Other countries are learning the lessons of China. Vietnam is now rapidly developing and is correcting its initial mistakes.

Marx's relevance in the past capitalist society is being proven in those countries.



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# Opportunities for Sustainable Economic Growth and Diversification within an Emerging Energy Sector in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Guyana



## Introduction

The literature on the Guyanese economy focuses on state mismanagement of scarce resources, traditional export of land-based commodities, and the incapacity to diversify into non-traditional crops other than sugar, rice, forestry, and mineral extractions. All published studies argued for a more diversified economy to achieve sectoral linkages, and more value-added to raw material as a hedge against world price fluctuations for land-based exports. A high proportion of production costs is the rising costs of oil imports. The central question addressed in this paper is whether the recent announcement of about 750,000 barrels of oil per day will relax the oil constraints in moving Guyana from land-based exports to manufactured products in its effort to achieve a steady state path of economic development in the year 2020 and beyond: and if so, how? Hence, the purpose of this paper is to evaluate and analyse the Guyanese economy from the perspectives of sectoral contributions to the real gross domestic

product (GDP); crime, violence and productivity; and opportunities for socio-economic realignment within an emerging energy sector to achieve sustainable economic growth and diversification. The country's performance, measured in terms of per capita real output, is based on publications of the World Bank, Bank of Guyana Annual Report, CIA World Facts Sheet, and structured and unstructured interviews of business owners of microenterprises.

**Crime and Violence:** Crime, broadly defined to include armed robberies, the killing of a person by another, and break and enter with intent to commit a crime, remains a problem. Studies have shown that crimes directly affect human welfare and consequently result in low productivity and the slowdown of the economy. Guyana's 2018 Crime and Safety Report indicated a 35% increase in the overall crime rate (Table 2). The crime incidence is so serious that the US Department of State, in January 2018, warned its citizens travelling to Guyana about common "armed robbery and murder, and that the local police lack the resources to respond effectively to serious criminal incidents (KN, June 2018). The consequences of frequent and prolonged crime were manifested in a downturn of real GDP from 3.4% in 2016 to 2.1% in 2017. The budgetary allocation of US\$ 29.1 million in 2016 and a further increase to US\$ 37.4 million in 2017 failed to curtail the prevalence of crime. The crime situation is "real and not manufactured", contrary to the evidence reported by the state-owned Chronicle in March 2018 (Guyana Times July 17, 2018). Instead of increasing resources to the Police and Criminal Justice System, the Granger government has increased military spending from 50.92 (USD million) in 2016 to 55.88 (USD million) in 2017 and there was a projected increase to 57.43 (USD million) in 2018, according to the 2018 CIA Facts Sheet. Military

expenditure (para-military, retirement pension, Air Corps, and Coast Guard), as a percentage of GDP, is above the average of low-income countries in the world. A classic case in point is Venezuela, with a population 32 million or 41 times the population of Guyana, spends relatively less (2.2%) of its GDP on the military compared to Guyana (less than one million people) or an equivalent of 1.6 percent in 2018 (<https://data.Worldbank.org>). Is the Granger government reversing the economy to a military state as in 1985, when the PNC spent 8.5% of its GDP on the military which was twice the amount of Venezuela? Shouldn't the scarce resources be allocated to diversify the economy and provide jobs to thousands of sugar workers, who have lost their jobs as a result of a Government phase-out plan of GUYSUCO and eventually the sugar industry, which employed more than twenty thousand workers—mainly Indo Guyanese in rural coastal areas where 4 of 10 people live in poverty?

In an attempt to fully grasp the ongoing dynamics of crime and its negative impact on productivity, I randomly interviewed micro business owners in the County of Berbice, Region 6, over a six-month period, January 2018 - July 2018. Each respondent claimed that sales and revenues have declined by “25% per month over the past two years.” One key factor for such downward sales was the lack of police protection after 5:00 pm. Businesses closed early to avoid theft and armed robberies. A common theme emerging from the various interviews is the insensitivity of the local police outpost and stations to the needs and concerns of the residents. The ethnic composition of the local police is skewed in favour of Afro-Guyanese who patrol predominantly Indo-Guyanese communities. There are two issues: (a) Is the goal of the local police “to serve and to protect” or to earn a salary? and, (b) Is crime a local or national issue? According to the respondents, crime is a local problem because it directly affects their business operations and well-being in their own homes; and, thus the judiciary and ethnic composition of the local police force should be aligned to the needs of the communities. A classic case in point is our neighbouring town of Nickerie, Suriname where the composition of the local police reflects the ethnicity of the residents of Nickerie. Here, in Guyana, the Judicial System is weak; lawmakers in parliament are

not elected by the local constituencies as is the case in the USA, where senators are elected in proportion to the various states. The Guyana Parliament and the rest of the country is a great political divide.

### **Sectoral Contributions, Realignments, and Sustainability**

This section focuses on the sectoral contributions of real GDP, which is a proxy for the size of a country's economy. It measures the market value of all final goods and services produced domestically in a given period, usually a year. In newly developing economies, wherein the market system is not fully developed, many activities that are beneficial (including do-it-yourself activities such as gardening) are not market exchanged, and thus are omitted from GDP. In the case of Guyana, many households are self-employed and consume what they produce, such as from subsistence farming. Nevertheless, GDP is an approximate measure of the standard of living for many countries of the world. In Guyana, a typical person lives on about \$US11.00 per day, or an equivalent of 2,100 Guyana dollars, an amount that is well below the poverty line in other words, 35% of the population is unable to live a decent life.

Economists measure the value of a nation's output either by summing all expenditures on final goods and services or aggregating all payments received by factors used to produce the output. The two approaches are identical for the economy as a whole, based on the national accounting framework principle that one's spending is the same as another's receipt. Following the Bureau of Statistics (2018), GDP is disaggregated into six sectors, as shown in Table 1 below for years 2015, 2016 and 2017. Each sector is measured at 2006 prices in Guyana dollars (million) with a corresponding sectoral contribution as a percentage of GDP shown in parentheses. For example, Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing contributes the total value of \$G74,863 of the overall GDP of \$G385,270 or an equivalent of 19.4%.

Table 1 shows Six Sectoral Contributions as a Percentage of Real GDP (the Year 2006 Prices) for Years 2015, 2016 and 2017.

<b>Sector</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>
	<b>Values ('000,000)</b>	<b>Values ('000,000)</b>	<b>Values ('000,000)</b>
<b>Agriculture, Forestry, &amp; Fishing</b>	74,868 (19.4% )	67,140 (16.9%)	67,409 (16.5%)
<b>Mining &amp; Quarrying</b>	41,890 (10.9%)	61,208 (15.4%)	55,798 (13.7%)
<b>Manufacturing</b>	28,668 (7.4%)	25,933 (6.5%)	26,972 (6.6%)
<b>Electricity &amp; Water</b>	6,394 (1.7%)	6,999 (1.8%)	7,314 (1.8%)
<b>Constructions</b>	37,750 (9.8%)	40,147 (10.1%)	44,704 (10%)
<b>Services</b>	209,059 (54.3%)	210,597(52.9%)	218,189 (53.6%)
<b>Less adjustment for FISM</b>	13,354(-3.5%)	13,825 (-3.5%)	13,664 (-3.4%)
<b>GDP ( G\$M( year 2006 prices)</b>	385,270 (100%)	398,199(100%)	406,722 (100%)

**Source:** Compiled from the Bureau of Statistics for various years

Table 1 above shows that Agriculture, Forestry, & Fishing as a consolidated sector, exhibited a declining per cent share of GDP from 19.4% in 2015 to 16.5% in 2017. This decline was not by coincidence, it was part of the Government's decision to diversify the economy by "downsizing of Guyana Sugar Corporation's (GUYSUCO's) operations" without reallocating the state-owned lands to private farmers for other crops. The "Services" sector in aggregate, arising from wholesale and retail services, public administration, and education to social services is growing and contributes to more than 50% of GDP. The data reveals that the different sectors are neither interrelated nor supportive of each other. Why does a small economy such as Guyana's have such an oversized and growing "Services" sector, while the manufacturing and agriculture sectors are in decline? Classical and neo-classical economists alike proffered that the stages of economic development originate from linkages in sequences from the Primary Sector, Manufacturing Sector and then the Tertiary Sectors, as evidentiary in newly industrialised and developed economies. The Guyana situation, however, is skewed. A common factor affecting the productivity of each sector is the rising costs of imported fuel, which reduce profitability and thus the level of production. ExxonMobil's announcement of oil discovery and production by early 2020 may offer renewed opportunities in the form of cost reduction strategies to diversify the traditional sectors of rice, sugar and

bauxite for the internal and external markets. But resources don't have value unless the state-owned enterprises privatise market-oriented activities of sugar, telecommunications, mining and quarrying with the expressed aim of creating value-added via forwarding and backward sectoral linkages in the effective management of the supply chain system. The next section examines the opportunities of the external sector to modernise Guyana in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **An Overview of Socio-Economic Landscape**

This section summaries and presents selected socio-economic indicators that underscore the persistent misalignments of the economy. Table 2 overleaf exhibits the scope of the sectoral misalignments, varying from declining economic growth, negative net export, and an outward migration to an increase in the number of reported serious crimes. The recurring balance of payment deficit shows that Guyana's imports exceed the value of exports. More exports have translated into an inflow of scarce foreign dollars, while imports are outflows of foreign reserves. As the economy continues to import more than what it exported (an increase of \$US53.3 million in the year 2016 to US\$ 69.5 million), the Guyana \$ in terms of the US\$ will be devalue as expected (G\$206.5 in year 2016 to G\$ 210 in 2017). The exchange rate for the year 2018 is projected at G\$211. The devaluation of the G\$ is derived from the vulnerability of the economy

to external shocks of rising costs of imported fuel from US\$43 per barrel to US\$50.3 in 2015, or an equivalent of 9% increase. Most of the trade deficit is financed by drawing down on Bank of Guyana

reserves and remittances from abroad, which is about 7% of GDP as of 2017. Gross reserves are depleted to such an extent that Guyana “stood at 3.2 months on imports at end-2017.”

**Table 2 Showing Selected Socio-Economic Indicators for Years 2015, 2016 and 2017**

Indicators	Year 2015	Year 2016	Year 2017	Year 2018 (Estimates)
<b>Growth of Real GDP</b>	3.2	3.4	2.1	4.8
<b>Per Capita GDP (US\$)</b>	4,168	4,531	4,578	4,649
<b>Net Export (Overall Balance)</b>	107.7	53.3	69.5	79.7
<b>Exchange Rate(G\$/US\$)</b>	206.5	206.5	210.3	211
<b>Fuel Costs US\$/barrel</b>	43	50.1	50.3	51
<b>Net Migration ('000)</b>	-4.5	-18.5	-18.5	-19.0
<b>Education as % National Budget</b>	16.0	17.5	17.2	17.0
<b>Reported Serious Crimes</b>	3,925	2,894	3,030	3,939

**Source:** Compiled from the Bank of Guyana; World Bank; and, Statistical Bulletin for various years

Now, the question is whether the start of oil production in the year 2020 will contribute to lowering the cost of imported fuel and consequently the production cost, to make Guyana competitive in the world market. The answer is a resounding no. The overall balance of payment remains negative irrespective of whether fuel costs were high (above US\$ 100 for years 2011 and 2013) or low (below US\$50 per barrel). An analysis of the data, therefore, shows that fluctuations of the sectoral contribution of GDP might not only be related to external fuel costs, but state mismanagement of the economy.

### **Coming of the Oil Messiah**

A country’s endowment of natural resources doesn’t guarantee a high standard of living for its citizens nor accelerated economic growth, unless the socio-economic policies are aligned to the needs and goals of the domestic and international markets. The projected 750,000 barrels of oil will not resolve the issue of misallocation of resources that undermines

Guyana’s economic performance. The IMF’s lists of recommended legislative and regulatory framework about the efficient utilisation of the oil revenue are necessary but not sufficient to rebound the economy to a sustainable path of medium to long-term economic growth. The government, in partnership with the private sectors and other key stakeholders of society, must be committed to diversifying the economy within a good governance framework for the benefit of all Guyanese. The oil revenue itself has no value unless it is effectively and efficiently utilized. Therefore, the coming of the “Oil Messiah” is a challenge for all Guyanese.



Dr. Devindranauth Rawana received his primary and secondary education from Port Mourant in 1972. In the following year he migrated to Canada, where he earned his Ph.D. (McMaster University); M.A and B.A (Honors) York University in economics. Upon his return to Guyana in 1993, he was a Senior Research Fellow at IDS, University of Guyana. Currently, he is a Professor of Economics and Statistics at Monroe College in New York, USA. He concentrated his primary research on economic development for immigrant and low-income communities in urban areas.



# HISTORY OF GENERAL ELECTIONS IN GUYANA

The first Elections in what would become Guyana were held in the 18th century at a time when the colonies of Berbice, Demerara and Essequibo were under Dutch control. A Court of Policy, established in 1732, initially consisted of the Governor, five appointed officials and five colonists chosen by the Governor from a list of nominees submitted by the College of Keizers, an electoral college consisting of Dutch planters. Sitting together, the Court of Policy and the College of Keizers formed the Combined Court.

The British took control of Guiana in 1803, and the colony was referred to as British Guiana. The College of Keizers was abolished, and its duties were given to the Financial Representatives, who were elected by the public in six constituencies, although with a severely limited franchise. The Court of Policy and Financial Representatives continued to form the Combined Court. The College of Keizers was re-established in the 1830s, with its members elected for life by planters. When a vacancy arose in the Court of Policy, the College would nominate two candidates, on whom the remaining members of the Court of Policy would hold a vote.

In 1891, Constitutional reforms led to the abolishment of the College of Keizers for a second time and the introduction of direct elections to the Court of Policy, with eight members being elected from seven constituencies in addition to the continued direct election of the six Financial Representatives, giving equal numbers of appointed and elected members in the Combined Court. Elections were held under this system in 1892, 1897, 1901, 1906, 1911, 1916, 1921 and 1926. However, the franchise remained severely limited, with only 11,103 people registered to vote from a population of 317,026 (3.5%) by the time of the 1926 elections; the figure had been just 1.1% for the 1921 elections.

More reforms were implemented in 1928 with the acceptance of a new constitution. This led to the abolition of the existing bodies and the establishment of the 30-seat Legislative Council. The new Council had 14 elected members, elected in single-member constituencies under a limited franchise, but they were

now outnumbered by 16 appointees, as the authorities were concerned with the rise of the Popular Party, which had won a majority of the elected seats in 1926. Elections were held under the new system in 1930 and 1935, but World War II caused the next elections to be delayed until 1947, with reforms passed in 1943 reducing the number of appointed members to nine, giving the elected members a majority on the Council. A reduction in the income requirements to voters increased the electorate from 9,514 in 1935 to 59,193.

As a result of the Waddington Commission, further constitutional reforms led to the creation of the House of Assembly to replace the Legislative Council. The new House had 28 members; 24 members elected in single-member constituencies, a speaker appointed by the Governor, and three ex officio members. Elections were held under the new system in 1953, and were convincingly won by the People's Progressive Party, which took 18 of the 24 seats. However, after assuming power, PPP leader Dr Cheddi Jagan embarked on a series of policies that involved radical social reform, mainly directed at the colonial oligarchy. The British colonial authorities sent in troops in response to the alleged threat of a Marxist revolution, and Governor Alfred Savage suspended the constitution in October (only 133 days after it had come into force) and set up a transitional government of conservative politicians, businessmen and civil servants.

Having removed the democratically elected PPP from office and replacing it with a "hand-picked" transitional government, there was growing discontent against the Colonial rulers. The transitional government lasted until elections in 1957 to a reconstituted Legislative Council with 14 elected members. The PPP won all but two seats, although it had split into two factions, one led by Dr Jagan and the other by Forbes Burnham.

Another round of constitutional reform in 1961 led to the creation of the Legislature, consisting of an elected 36-member Legislative Assembly (35 members elected in single-member constituencies, who in turn elected a Speaker) and an appointed 13-member Senate. These elections were again won by the PPP, who took 20 of the 35 directly-elected seats. The PPP

had nearly double the number of seats in comparison to the Burnham-led People's National Congress (PNC). This resulted in mass demonstrations led by the PNC, a general strike and severe inter-racial violence. After a few weeks, the British authorities intervened by sending in troops, and the Governor declared a state of emergency

Following these events, further constitutional reforms were enacted to create a unicameral 54-member House of Assembly elected by proportional representation (53 members elected in a single nationwide constituency and a Speaker elected by MPs). The first elections held under the new system took place in 1964, and although the PPP again emerged as the largest party, the PNC was able to form a coalition government with the United Force, which together held 29 seats. Despite having obtained plurality in the 1964 Elections, Dr Jagan's Party, the PPP, was not invited to form the government. Dr Jagan refused to resign as Prime Minister, and had to be removed by Governor Richard Luyt, with Burnham replacing him.

After independence in 1966, the House of Assembly was renamed the National Assembly. The electoral system remained unchanged, but the elections were rigged by the PNC, which had transferred responsibility for holding elections from the Electoral Commission to a government department. Unfair elections were held in 1968 and 1973.

A massively rigged Referendum was held by Burnham, popularly referred to as the "House vs the Mouse". This resulted in Elections which were constitutionally due in 1978 being postponed for two years. A new constitution promulgated in 1980 led to the creation of an executive president; the leader of the party that received the most votes in an election would automatically assume the post. Two further fraudulent elections were held in 1980 and 1985, with the PNC winning an increasing number of seats on each occasion. Burnham died and was succeeded by

Hugh Desmond Hoyte. The most massively rigged elections in Guyana was held in 1985 under Desmond Hoyte.

Due to demands from Western countries and international organisations, democratic reforms were introduced in the late 1990s, and after several postponements, elections were constitutionally due in 1990 but were only held in 1992, the second instance in which the PNC illegally extended its stay in office. The first free and fair elections were held in 1992. The result was a victory for the PPP, with Dr Cheddi Jagan returning to power after a 28-year hiatus. The PPP went on to win the next elections in 1997, Dr Cheddi Jagan died before the 1997 Elections, and Mrs Janet Jagan contested as Presidential Candidate. In 2001 the electoral system was modified; the single 53-member nationwide constituency was replaced by a 40-member nationwide constituency and ten multi-member constituencies based on the country's Administrative regions, which together elected a further 25 members. Elections later that year saw another PPP victory, which the party repeated in 2006.

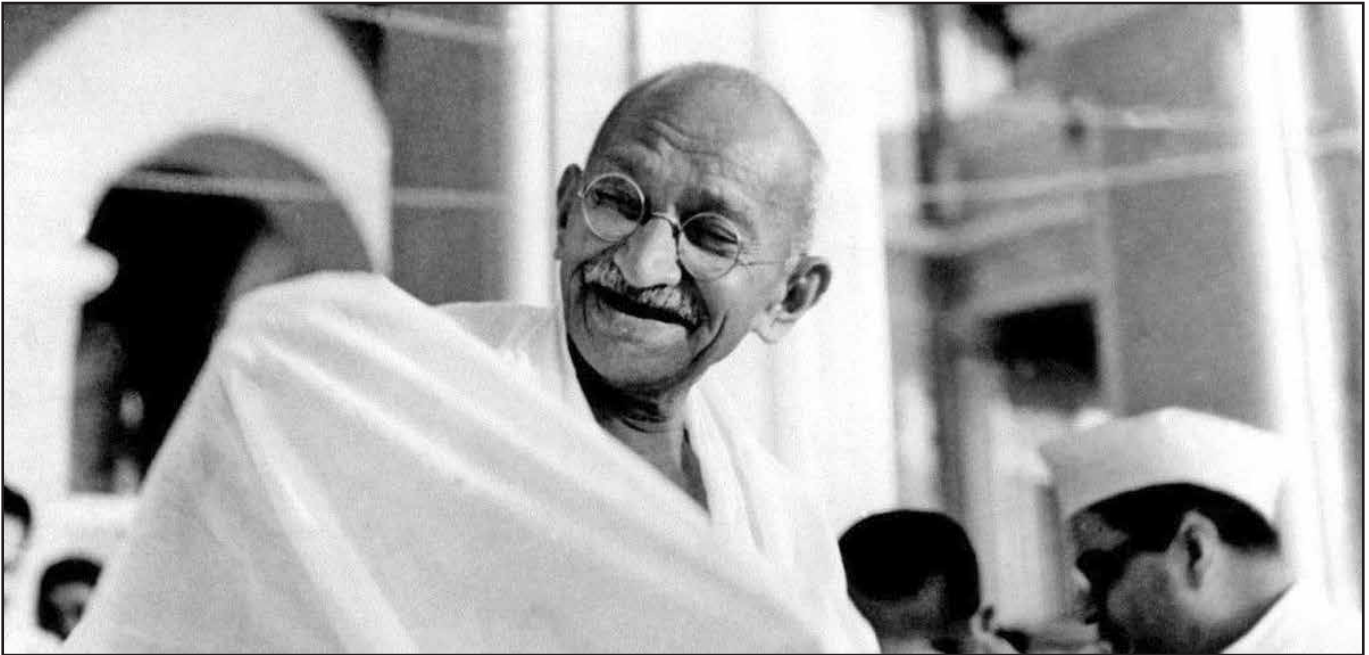
The 2011 elections saw the PPP won the largest number of seats (32), but fail to achieve a majority; however, although opposition parties held a majority of seats, the rule that the head of the largest party becomes President allowed new PPP leader Donald Ramotar to assume the position.

Before the 2015 elections, all parliamentary opposition parties (the Alliance for Change and the four-member APNU, which included the PNC) formed a single electoral list. The elections saw the joint list win 33 seats, while the PPP won 32 seats, allowing PNC leader David A. Granger to become President. There were several irregularities in the 2015 Elections, fraudulent Statements of Poll were discovered by the Guyana Elections Commission, and an Elections' Petition was filed by the PPP. The Petition is languishing in the judicial system.



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# Lecture to celebrate the 150th anniversary of Gandhi as well as the UN International Day of Non-Violence Gandhi, King and Cheddi



Richard, Attenborough, in his 'Selected Words of Gandhi' in the Introduction used a quote from Albert Einstein: **"Generations to come will scarcely believe that such a one as this ever in flesh and blood walked upon this earth."**

It was no accident, therefore, that on 15th June 2007, the UN General Assembly voted to establish 2<sup>nd</sup> October as the International Day of Non Violence in honour of the birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi.

Gandhi became famous as a result of the work he did in South Africa, where he worked to improve the rights of immigrant Indians. It was there that he developed his creed of passive resistance against injustice, Satyagraha; meaning, truth force, and was frequently jailed as a result of the protests that he led.

Upon his return to India in 1915, he got involved in the long struggle for independence against the British. He used passive resistance and non-

cooperation as a strategy to influence the outcome of India's independence.

His thoughts on passive resistance are best captured in Page 51 of Selected Words of Gandhi: He stated, and I quote, **"I am not a visionary. I claim to be a practical idealist. The religion of non-violence is not meant merely for the rishis and the saints. It is meant for the common people as well. Nonviolence is the law of our species as violence is the law of the brute. The spirit lies dormant in the brute, and he knows no law but that of physical might, the dignity of man requires obedience to a higher law – to the strength of the spirit.**

**"I have therefore ventured to place before India the ancient law of self-sacrifice. For satyagraha and its offshoots, non-cooperation and civil resistance, are nothing but new names for the law of suffering. The rishis who discovered the laws of non-violence in the midst of violence were greater geniuses than Newton. They were**

themselves greater warriors than Wellington. Although knowledgeable in the use of arms, they realized their uselessness and taught a wary world that salvation lay not through violence but nonviolence.'

**Non-violence in its dynamic conditions means conscious suffering. It does not mean meek submission to the will of the evil-doer, but it means the pitting of one's whole soul against the will of the tyrant. Working under this law of our being, it is possible for a single individual to defy the whole might of an unjust empire to save his honour, his religion, his soul, and lay the foundation for that empire's fall or its regeneration.**

I would like to illustrate two examples of how he was able to influence the outcomes in India as well as the USA through nonviolence.

### **The famous Salt March in 1930.**

On 12<sup>th</sup> March 1930, Gandhi decided that they will produce salt from the sea water, to avoid paying tax and thus undermine the British salt monopoly. This act of civil disobedience gained the support of tens of thousands of Indians and inspired millions to join the movement. It was the second great campaign of noncooperation in British India. The first was in 1917, when Gandhi went to Bihar to meet farmers who were engaged in Indigo farming.

### **The struggle in the USA for Civil and Voting Rights Act in 1965**

Quote from Coretta King: **"Martin always had a deep commitment to helping his fellow human beings. He told me that the turning point in his thinking about how to reconcile Christian pacifism with getting things done came while he was at the seminary, when he learned about the revered Indian leader Mahatma Gandhi."**

Dr King later wrote in 'Stride towards Freedom', **"Gandhi was probably the first person in history to lift the love ethic of Jesus above mere interaction between individuals to a powerful and effective social force on a large scale.... It was in this Gandhian emphasis on love and nonviolence that I discovered the method for social reform that I had been seeking for so many months."**

In another quote, he said, **"Gandhi was inevitable.**

**If humanity is to progress, Gandhi is inescapable. He lived, thought and acted inspired by the vision of humanity evolving toward a world of peace and harmony. We may ignore him at our risk."**

On December 1, 1955, Mrs Rosa Parks boarded a bus to return home after a day's work as a seamstress in a downtown department store. She sat down in the first row behind the second reserved for whites. Soon the bus driver ordered Mrs Parks to give up her seat to a boarding white man and stand farther back in the bus. She quietly and tiredly refused, the driver got off the bus to get a policeman, who arrested her. It was at this point that Dr King got involved in the situation, because this was the catalyst that was needed; and thus the incident urged a boycott of the buses. That single act of defiance by Rosa Parks influenced the wave of civil rights activities by Dr King and the Montgomery Improvement Associations.

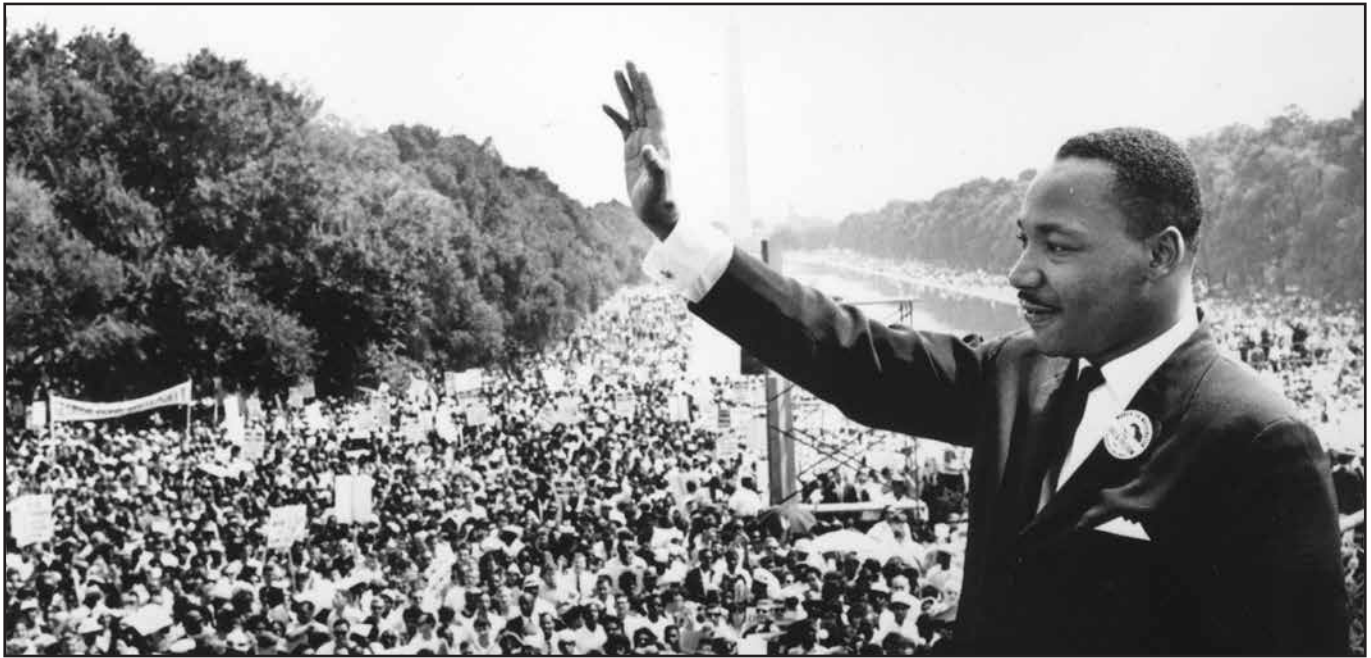
Dr King, within a 13 years' period from 1955 to 1968 provided dynamic leadership to the Civil Rights Movement. We all are well aware of the outcome of the 1 million march and the subsequent death of Martin Luther King, but that single act of defiance turned the tide of race relations in the USA. ." Both King and Gandhi died by assassins' bullets.

Dr King was not only a motivational speaker, but he wrote various insightful quotes which remind the living of how we should live our lives. One which fits in perfectly with the theme which we are discussing is:

**"When evil men plot, good men must plan. When evil men burn and bomb, good men must build and bind. When evil men shout ugly words of hatred, good men must commit themselves to the glories of love. Where evil men would seek to perpetuate an unjust status quo, good men must seek to bring into being a real order of justice."**

When the Atom bomb was dropped in Japan and wiped out Hiroshima in the Second World War, Gandhi wrote saying "Nonviolence is the only thing that the atom bomb cannot destroy." He further went on to say "Unless the world adopts nonviolence, it will spell certain suicide for mankind."

The Second World had a devastating impact on the lives of people in more than 30 countries, with more than 85 million fatalities and untold destruction,



including massacres, the genocide of the Holocaust, strategic bombing, premeditated death from starvation and disease, and the use of nuclear weapons in war.

Thus it was against this background that the peace movement took on a new meaning. Organisations such as the United Nations, the Women's International Democratic Federation, the World Peace Council and others took up the peace mantle since the horrors of the Second World War were still fresh in the minds of the people, and they were prepared to do everything possible to safeguard peace. Have they succeeded? The First World War started in 1914 and ended in 1918, while the second began in 1939 and ended in 1945 a difference of merely 21 years.

So far, while there have been various hotbeds of civil strife, invasions and aggressions of bigger countries against smaller - 74 years later, the world is still a relatively peaceful place.

Closer at home, Dr Jagan, who believed in the tenets of peace and non-violence, was also a great admirer of Gandhi and Dr King. In one of his books, "A New Global Human Order", Dr Jagan provided an insight of the machinations that have taken place in our world, and the need for a new world order.

I wish to quote from page 11 of A New Global Human Order: "This book is intended to fill a void in a world situation of great confusion and convulsions. After the Cold War, President George Bush announced a New World Order,

but within a short time, what emerged was a New World Disorder. And, as in the post-Depression period (the 1930s) and the pre-World War II period, all kinds of "saviours" are descending on the people with quack remedies – the fundamentalists, the Religious Right, the Far Right, the Ultra-nationalists, xenophobists and neo-fascists. Demagogues like Hitler and Mussolini glibly bandied National Socialism (Nazism) and practised intense nationalism linked to racism (the master race) in their quest for political power in the service of the vested interests.

"Today, in a period of intense crisis of modernised monopoly capitalism, the demagogues are once again rearing their ugly heads. They must not be allowed to succeed."

"Our times call for clear thinking: to diagnose the ills of our globe, to ascertain the cause of society's growing problems and to formulate what must be done – a set of guiding principles and a program of action."

"Certain concepts of democracy, human rights, regional integration, free trade, sustainable development, among others – are being discussed. These need to be examined fully – form as well as content."

"Democracy is a vital ingredient of development. It must be representative, consultative and participatory. The people, especially women,



**must be fully empowered. The goal of democracy must be, as the American Declaration of Independence stipulated: life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness”. End of quote.**

I remember 1973 in Guyana, when, after the Army took over the ballot boxes, there were calls by persons to fight back. It was a natural response to what was taking place. However, Dr Jagan, in analysing the situation, realised that there could be no “tit for a tat”, because that would spell more destruction and death. The memory of the civil disturbance in the early 60’s instigated by certain big powers to remove the PPP government, was still fresh in the minds of people. Therefore, a boycott of Parliament, various acts of civil disobedience, and non-cooperation were adopted to bring pressure to bear on the govt using those measures that were propagated by Gandhi and King.

The situation in countries such as Afghanistan, Iran, Syria, Yemen, to name a few, are a testimony to the evils of strife and wars, wherein families are

destroyed, women and children are raped, and the agony of life becomes unbearable.

It is against this background that every effort must be made to sit down around the table and find resolutions to situations which can lead to strife. This effort should also include domestic issues, which are spiralling out of control because of a number of factors, resulting in murders of loved ones and the disintegration of family life.

Proponents of peace believe there should always be checks and balances in the world, and that there is need for powerful nations to be checkmate as far as possible, to keep the balance of forces against war and aggression.

We have, within recent times, seen a few significant acts of individuals who have sought to influence change in a non-violent manner. The Arab Spring, which began in late 2010, was in response to oppressive regimes and a low standard of living, beginning with protests in Tunisia. This was attributed to the power of social media to influence regime change.

There is also the US National Anthem protest which started in 2016 with Colin Kaepernick of the San Francisco 49ers who was protesting police brutality and racial inequality in the USA.

I wish to conclude by quoting from page 71 of “The Words of Gandhi”, when he reminds us that **“in this age of wonders, no one will say that a thing or an idea is worthless because it is new. To say it is impossible because it is difficult is again not in consonance with the spirit of the age. Things undreamt of are daily seen; the impossible is ever becoming possible. We are constantly being astonished these days at the amazing discoveries in the field of violence. But I maintain that far more undreamt of and seemingly impossible discoveries will be made in the field of nonviolence.”**

The Gandhian doctrine will prevail.



*Indranie Chandarpal is the President of the Women’s Progressive Organisation (WPO) and Member of the Central Committee of the People’s Progressive Party. She is also Chairperson of the Women and Gender Equality Commission. She is a Member of Parliament and a former Minister of Human Services, Labour and Social Security. Also President of the Inter American Commission on Women. Currently Administrator of the Cheddi Jagan Research Centre.*

# A CRISIS OF CONFIDENCE



Since the PPP/C's tabling of its No Confidence Motion( NCM) in the National Assembly, the APNU+AFC coalition administration's propaganda machine has swung into a frenzy.

Utilizing unashamedly, the Guyana Chronicle, NCN and social media, the government has resorted to publishing full page ads and pull-out centre spreads praising its policies and its 'successes.'

Little do they realize that their efforts have proven counterproductive. The message is that they are in a state of desperation if not leaderless.

Taped recordings and Facebook postings by APNU+AFC local leaders and trolls calling for mass mobilization of APNU+AFC supporters in front of parliament buildings, only serve to demonstrate the extent of frenzies and recklessness impacting the administration in the face of a motion that is commonplace in any parliamentary democracy.

Photo ops and press conferences depicting a united front and 'reaffirmations of its patriotic commitment' have used up tons of ink newsprint in a desperate effort to dispel strong undercurrents that reveal a deeply fractured coalition administration.

Claiming that it has 'restored Guyana's credibility in the

world' and that all is bright and beautiful in Guyana, the coalition government in an amazing propaganda blitz ends up believing its own propaganda as if in a surreal world.

And as though to add insult to injury, the government continues regurgitating the unbelievable notion that it has brought about 'a marked reduction in serious crimes.'

Coincidentally, the NCM will be debated just one day after the cremation of Ronald Gajraj, Guyana's former minister of Home Affairs and Ambassador to India and Bangladesh.

Gajraj's stormy tenure as Minister of one of the country's most difficult sectors is bound to surface during the much anticipated debate on the NCM.

This is only natural because contrary to those who swallowed hook, line and sinker the PNC's propaganda, Gajraj rose courageously to a challenge thrown up by an unprecedented crime wave, unleashed by a band of notorious criminals bent on wreaking havoc in Guyanese society with the help of their political handlers.

The APNU+AFC parliamentarians will, no doubt, continue on the one hand, to besmirch Gajraj's good name by harping on President Granger's pet subject; the 'Troubles' while the PPP/C MP's on the other, will seek

to exonerate him. And quite justifiably so.

In the meanwhile, contrary to his much touted commitment, President Granger appears troubled about the efficacy of convening a Commission of Inquiry into his so-called period of the “Troubles.”

The police had reported that during the trial in the USA of Roger Khan for narcotic related offences, allegations surfaced that he was the leader of a gang that was responsible for several murders between 2002 and 2006.

At that time, political parties and organizations submitted to the Guyana Police Force several names of persons who were allegedly victims of extra judicial killings.

Robert Corbin submitted a list which

had 455 names covering the period 1993-2009.

Heston Bostwick, Chairman of the

Justice for Jermaine Committee submitted a list with 170 names covering the period 1993-2002:

Khemraj Ramjattan of the Alliance

for Change submitted a list which had 435 names covering the period 1993-2009.

Police investigations into these lists showed that they were not only inconsistent with respect to the periods and numbers, more importantly, no evidence nor additional information relating to the circumstances surrounding the deaths of these persons was ever provided to the police by either Corbin, Ramjattan or Bostwick.

The nation still awaits the fulfillment of the President’s commitment to establish a COI on this matter.

In fact, the COI’s into the ‘attempt on the President’s life’ and the Lindo Creek massacre were used as tools to clean the Augean stables in order to make way for those most favoured by the coalition government.

Incidentally, to this day no mention is made by the triumvirate about the killings by the criminal gang of the more than 100 police ranks.

The bias by those pushing the tainted envelope in favour of the criminal underworld is clear for all to see.

Thus far, the coalition government like barnacles, has latched on to the safety and security programmes and policies of the PPP/C administration.

They have not come up with a single initiative to match those implemented

or those that were about to be implemented by the previous government.

Security matters apart, the No Confidence Motion (NCM) must be viewed as a reflection of a crisis of confidence impacting the APNU+ AFC coalition administration.

This crisis of confidence is national in character. Its genesis is to be found in the actions of the government itself.

In effect, the coalition has long become its own worst enemy.

In just about three years, an opposition that promised so much to the electorate has failed miserably. The logical spinoff is the call for a vote of no confidence in the coalition government.

No more that one year is the national cry.

The Cummingsburg Accord is now in tatters. Desperate efforts are being made to mend broken fences in the coalition. The disastrous results for both parties following the recent local government elections is a harbinger of what can be expected in 2020.

And even if they manage to stitch together the deep wounds, the loss of confidence by the people in the administration will not be healed.

Experience has shown that collective responsibility been replaced by individual responsibility.

Small wonder why so much individualism permeates policy formulation at cabinet and at all levels of government.

Governance has now become dominance by a few, for a few.

During the agonizing three years whilst confidence in the government was being eroded, the poor and powerless were victimized and marginalized ...just cast aside.

At the economic level, it is meat for the boys and bones for the workers.

To add insult to injury the government closed down the Ministry of Labour.

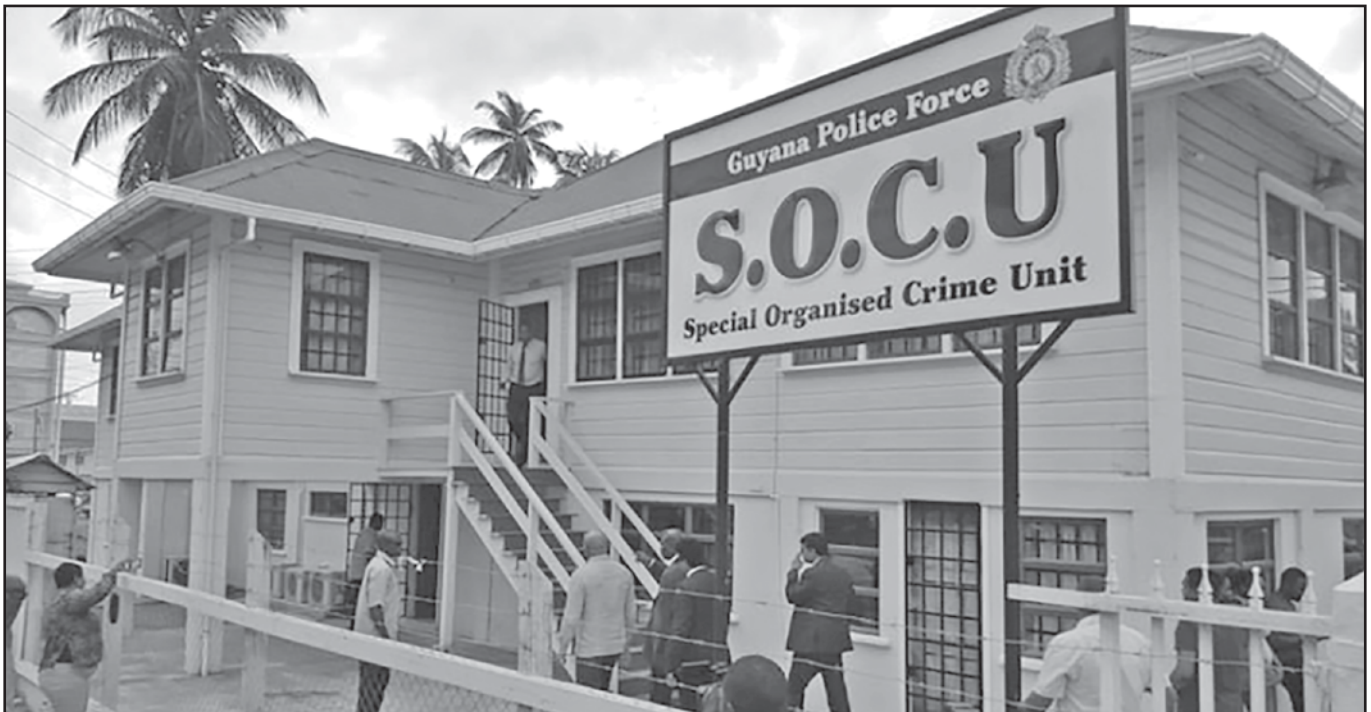
In the meanwhile, the working people’s standard of living has plummeted to disastrous levels.

And the business community, as if in a jet stream is simply drifting along hoping for a turn around with a change of government.

It is within this backdrop that the NCM has been tagged onto a Government because it has failed on every front.

Following the May 2015 elections our country regrettably is more divided than united notwithstanding all the talk about social cohesion. Instead of extending an olive branch to its political opponents the coalition government





has menacingly responded with a clenched fist.

The SARA and SOCU are being used as instruments to hound political opponents of the coalition administration and to haul them before the Court to face trumped up charges.

Today the Joint Services are worst off than they were under the PPP/C administration.

Political interference in the operational, command and administrative areas of the Joint Services has become a routine exercise.

And all the talk about a review of the Disciplined Services Commission Report has evaporated like so many other talk shows by the coalition administration.

More over, the Combe Report which was to be tabled in the National Assembly two months ago has not seen the light of day.

Moses Nagamootoo's declaration to the effect that he, "Wants to start on humbling the powers of the President, the excess powers of the Executive" and that he will be "fully occupied with Constitutional Reform" has since been completely reversed and fully embraced much to

the whims and fancies of the coalition administration.

President Granger had promised the nation that 'corruption and bribery will be wiped out' but a tour d'horizon of the government's track record in this particular area would reveal that rather than wiping out bribery and corruption this twin malady has been eating at the sinews of the entire administration without let or hindrance.

Given all the coalition administration's failures, broken promises, lies and acts of deception the NCM is timely and in order. Its passage has become a matter of national urgency.

The Guyanese people deserve better.

They are fully behind the NCM and look forward to its passage in the hallowed chambers of the National Assembly.

They must not be disappointed.

Let the consciences of those who sit on the government benches and who have privately expressed their disappointment with the APNU+AFC's three years of misrule be guided accordingly.



*Clement J. Rohee was former Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of Foreign Trade and then Minister of Home Affairs. Currently he is a Member of Parliament. Mr. Rohee is an Executive and Central Committee Member of the People's Progressive and was a former General Secretary. He is the President of the Guyana Peace Council.*

# AN INTERVIEW WITH JANET JAGAN

## FEBRUARY 2001, GUYANA



DD: I'm with Janet Jagan, who was until recently, President of Guyana, and before then, a Minister of Government in the colonial period. With her husband, Cheddi Jagan, the late President of Guyana, she who was one of the originators of our Independence Movement, .

Janet, can you tell me something about the early days of your encounter with the British, the fight that you had for Independence?

JJ: Well, you know our party was formed in the 1950s and in the period from 1950-1953, we began a campaign for the first stage of Independence; that is, self-government. We made some demands for the change of the constitution for universal adult suffrage etc. In those days, we did what was at that time, unusual for Guyana. We did quite well; the British sent out the Waddington Commission to prepare a Constitution, and it gave ministerial powers to the party that would win the government's universal

adult suffrage etc. In 1953, we had the elections, and our party won quite a substantial majority, and we went into office with my husband who became the equivalent of what was the Chief Minister. We were only there four and a half months. We had a rough period, the British regarded everything with great suspicion and I think hysteria, and suspended the Constitution. We were too radical, and the system of Church control, schools etc, various things upset and frightened them, apparently. Then there were other influences. Sugar was such an important influence in the country, so the leaders of the sugar industry, the Churches, they petitioned the British Government. They suspended the Constitution, and during that period there was what we called Marshall law: curfews. The British were here, marching around with their guns etc. so we began a protest: civil disobedience, and that is when a number of us went to gaol. During this period, we were calling for the restoration of our rights, and also continued the struggle by calling



*Dr Jagan being released*



*Janet Jagan being sent to prison*

for Independence for Guyana. The British felt confident that the PPP was weakened, and we had elections in 1957, and at that time our party won again. All during this time we were demonstrating for Independence, and had motions in Parliament. It was a full-fledged campaign.

DD: How long did the British jail you for?

JJ: I was put in jail for six months. There were three charges against me, but they went concurrently. Of course there are humorous sides to this thing. We had decided that we wouldn't pay fines. I could have stayed out of goal by paying my fine, but we decided against it. But my father-in-law couldn't bear the thought of this, and we had to restrain him from paying the fine.

DD: But six months is a long time in serious prison conditions.

JJ: Oh yes. I think mine was quite serious, because I wasn't allowed any contact; they had me in a cell alone in Georgetown prison. At that time, we had dresses made from flour bags and our only possessions were a comb and a toothbrush.

DD: What about the food?

JJ: The food was pretty awful, of course.

DD: Even though you were a Minister in your own country?

JJ: No, I wasn't at that time; I was a Deputy Speaker of the House of Assembly.

DD: Even though you were in this high government position you weren't treated with a degree of civility in prison?

JJ: Not really. I think they went out of their way not to show any preference, particularly because I was white. They transferred me later on to the New Amsterdam prison, and the matron was an excellent woman, She was the mother-in-law of one of our major writers, Peter Kempadoo. She kept her distance, but prison must have been pretty dull for her too, and the two of us used to talk a lot when there wasn't anything else to do. She put me down to making things like stuffed animals, she taught me how to embroider and so on, and I used to make things which they sold. So I made a little money for the prison.

DD: What about books? Were you able to read in prison?

JJ: I guess I must have been the first educated woman to go to prison. The women who went to prison were mostly women who got into fights or who were caught stealing, so there wasn't a book anywhere around. I did ask for books, and they couldn't refuse me them. They did bring a box of books. I read the Bible and I found it very interesting. When I was in New Amsterdam prison, one of the women there was interested in learning how to read and write, so they allowed me to teach her how to read and write.

DD: I remember talking to you a few years ago and you telling me that the diet in prison was so poor that once you nearly had a chance to eat a hen but declined to do so.

JJ: We stole a chicken which had wandered into the prison yard, and we grabbed it and we had to hit it and so on, but eventually we didn't get to eat it, because if we were caught we'd be punished. So we buried the dead chicken in the yard. I remember there was a little pepper plant in the yard, and we'd all grab the peppers as soon as they matured, because the food was pretty awful.

DD: During your Presidency of Guyana which lasted from 1997-1999, when you had to deal with the British, was there a sense of irony? Here they jailed you, deprived you of your dignity, and now you had become President. Were there any apologies forthcoming?

JJ: No, no, not really, all those things were forgotten. To me the irony was when eventually, Cheddi and I reluctantly moved into State House ... we wanted to stay in our own house, but were told we had to move for security reasons... State House used to be called Government House, where the British governors lived. I remember vividly picketing the Carmichael street side of the building and there were heavy protests. It was there that a member of Mr Burnham's party-strangely enough, our placards were very clear: "we want Independence and some of his members drove up and tried to break up the picket line and assault me. A lady came with a big stick to hit me, but fortunately, one of my colleagues saved the day for me. All of that was outside what is now State House, where Cheddi and I lived from 1992 to the time of his death, in the official residence of the President. That was the irony of it: the very place we had picketed and demanded Independence eventually became our home.

DD: You had a very unusual background as somebody who was born in America of Jewish heritage, coming to Guyana and being the forerunner in our Independence movement. Have you also found that ironic when you look back on your life?

JJ: Well, not really. I think my brother put it well, when the Constitution was suspended and there were a lot of international reports and attacks on us. Some reporter got hold of my brother, and he said, "I don't find it unusual, because we were inspired by the American Revolution, and she was just following through what she learned in her history lessons"... and that was a nice way of putting it.

DD: Was part of your radicalism related in any way to the Jewish context of your life? The great radicals of the Bolshevik Revolution, the ideologues of that, were Jewish intellectuals.

JJ: Perhaps there is something in that. Particularly in those days, Jews suffered quite a lot from prejudices. In America. My maiden name was Rosenberg. I remember, as a child, someone shouted at me that I killed Christ, I couldn't, of course, understand what it was all about. I learned later that there was a lot of prejudice in the USA. I remember later on, when I went into nursing, after I spent a few years in university the war broke out I felt I wanted to do my part in the war. I went into the School of Nursing in Chicago, and for some reason or other, my close colleagues didn't seem to understand that I was Jewish; it was never discussed. Then, once, they made a derogatory remark about Jews and I said but I was Jewish; they were flabbergasted, they couldn't understand it. Nothing happened as a result, we remained good friends. I think that perhaps that gave me a fighting spirit and gave me a kinship with oppressed people. The Jewish people in America today are still liberals and democrats and many socialists; but also many hard-nosed right-wingers who try to dominate the political agenda, largely over the issue of Palestine. As you know, our Government is supportive of the Palestinian cause, and we also believe in the State of Israel's right to exist, but not for illegal settlements and making Palestinians second-class citizens... In fact, Cheddi was one of the first, if not the first, Caribbean leader to visit Israel... This was before Independence. And in the 1990s, he was invited by the Israeli Government to visit, but then violence broke out, so he didn't go.



DD: Where did your grandparents come from?

JJ: On my father's side, they came from the USA, but on my mother's side they came from Hungary and Romania. My grandfather came from Romania and my grandmother from Hungary. They came on the boats in the late 1800s. On my father's side, they came around the period of the Civil War, because I have a copy of an application from one of my uncles to become a citizen of the USA, 1864.

DD: Were they drawn to America, like all immigrants, because of anti-semitism in Europe?

JJ: No, nothing like that.

DD: Have you been to Hungary and Romania?

JJ: Yes, but the only thing I can remember is in Romania, I went to a museum and I saw the costumes, and as a child we used to dress up in the ones my grandfather had brought with him; and I saw the same things in the museum.

DD: All the years that you have lived in Guyana, obviously away from your American childhood and away from home, have you ever felt isolated here?

JJ: No, not really. The only problem I remember was when I first came here it was hard to adjust to different food. Of course I was here during the war years. For example, the meat and chicken were so hard, I couldn't eat them, and then I didn't know enough about cooking to know how to soften the products, and so I used to be hungry. Plus it was curry for breakfast, curry for lunch and curry for dinner. I remember escaping once to Brown Betty restaurant I think it was called, to eat some fried chicken! It was with Phyllis Carter, I seem to remember. 'Chicken in the Ruff' or 'Chicken in the Rough'...delicious, I ate and remembered America.

DD: When you first came to Guyana what do you remember of the first moments when you arrived? The different landscape, a different way of living etc.?

JJ: Of course, the landing. The coming to Guyana was interesting. I came by Pan-American sea-plane which landed on the Demerara river, so the first thing I saw was Stabroek Market which is one of our most picturesque points. They don't use the river for that purpose anymore. Georgetown was a beautiful city, it was called the Garden City... It's not quite the Garden City now but it was beautiful then. There were more canals, the early history is that the Dutch were here. The Dutch built Guyana on the sea. The coast was low and they had to build sea-walls. In fact, we're stuck with this tremendous overhead of maintaining sea-walls. We had this sea-wall where Cheddi and I used to go and walk in the afternoons, and later on I took my children there. In those days there were a lot of canals as in Holland, many of them have been filled in now. There used to be a street-car down Main Street. All of these things used to exist and there were more beautiful buildings, you only see a few of the old Colonial buildings now. The forties were exciting years in this country, and different things were happening. My husband started many new things in this country; he and some others in 1946 formed one of the first political committees. I had also organised a women's group, the first one that made demands for women's rights: the right to vote, education, and economic development.

DD: So it wasn't a matter of being lonely: you were so busy being involved with social and political activities?

JJ: Yes, we were always busy, and of course my husband was a dentist and, for over ten years, I was his dental assistant. So we were always busy, we had to make a living. He was a bit of a hero for a stupid reason - because he was a doctor, and those were the days when being a doctor was a great thing, particularly because he came from a sugar estate. He didn't like that. After a while, Cheddi started getting involved in the sugar workers trade union. I got involved in one of the trade unions too. I never had any contact with the white people living here, not for any other reason than I just didn't come into contact with them. I think they used to look on me with horror perhaps because I was married to Cheddi - a bit of a left wing, and also because I married out of the white race. After we both came out of gaol and we compared notes, oddly, we both liked the quiet of gaol. Life had been so hectic outside that we both felt that it was very quiet in gaol. It gave us time to reflect. He came out of gaol the day I went in, so we didn't see each other for one year.

DD: Coming from a relatively sophisticated society into a more rudimentary space in terms of the absence of theatres, great libraries, art galleries etc., how did you manage to cope in those early days?

JJ: Well, there were things happening here, on a more modest scale, understandably. We had few resources, but I remember, very young, they had an AJ Seymour's film which was set to music and I remember going to a concert with Pilgrim - a fine pianist and he played the music in one of the halls, so things were going on. I remember going to churches to hear the music. There were plays and dramas.

DD: Remind us what British Guiana was like in those days politically?

JJ: The top man was a British Governor, he was very aloof from the people. When we were in the Parliament in 1953, the things that we objected to were the Colonial Secretary, the Colonial Treasurer, The Attorney General. They were all British-dominated offices. Where the British-dominated life was in the sugar estates, all aspects of life: cricket, everything.

DD: So the people working on the sugar estates were totally dependent on the British managers?

JJ: Yes, the British were evident in the managers and overseers. The Guianese were not treated very well. It was the old Colonial system - the British prize themselves for fair play and all that, but at the same time, people's lives were interfered with - certain things they couldn't do. I think I was a great embarrassment, now that I think about it. A white woman going to the sugar estate. Shortly after I arrived, Cheddi took me to his home at Port Mourant which is still one of the biggest sugar estates in Guyana, and it was an education to me. Of course I never met any of the British overseers or managers.

DD: What you're saying is that in some way your presence there would have subverted the hierarchy.

JJ: It wasn't very pleasant for them because it threw things out of gear.

DD: And the sugar workers?

JJ: I would say that the British dominated their lives in many ways and they had to get permission to do certain things, holding festivities and things like that. The worst part of British Colonialism was the paternalism. It injected paternalistic feelings and subservience, much of which is still there. And the poverty of sugar workers was so evident. The interesting thing about British Colonialism is that the British never dug deep roots, as the French and Spanish did in their colonies. If you go to the French colonies in Guadeloupe and Martinique, the French take part in all aspects of the life. They are part of the life, and here, when British Colonial rule ended, there were only about a dozen British people left. They never had roots here, they always considered home England or Britain, this was never their home. The British were different in that sense, more aloof and never really involved themselves in the same way as, say, the French. But at the end of the day, they were all colonialists, existing on the labour and resources of other people; breeding despair and poverty even whilst spreading the Bible and books by Shakespeare. They never thought that one day we would use the Bible and the Shakespeare to master the language, and fight back using Bible stories like Moses and Exodus. And the Hindus and Muslims had their own books that spoke about freedom from tyranny, Seta and Rama fighting Ravana and so on.

DD: When Independence came, was there a discernable change to the cultural landscape, the political landscape?

JJ: It didn't happen suddenly, except in the Civil Service and the Public Service. We had called long before Independence for the Guyanisation of the Public Service, that it should be run by Guyanese. It had some effect, and gradually the Public Service became Guyanised perhaps because the British were only at the top levels of our Public Service... So at least the Public Service changed and then the hierarchy of the police and the army became local people. I remember when I was Minister of Home Affairs in the 60s, the British had a British Commissioner of Police, and eventually he left and we had a local Commissioner of Police. Culturally, I don't know a lot of the cultural aspects: art, music, dance, all that. There are still the influences that exist today. Some of the artists went out of their way not to be influenced by the British, but there still remains a strong cultural linkage with Great Britain. The fact that government became entirely Guyanised with everyone in the government being local was a significant change.

DD: It must have been a startling thing for the Guyanese to see their government being people of colour, the Civil Service being people from their own communities; they must have felt a sense of power.

JJ: The other thing is that there weren't that many British people here, you know. The last British Governor didn't have a large staff. He had an Aide de Camp and a few others who were British. You have to remember, too, that we had several governments during the Colonial times: 1953, 1957, 1961, it was a PPP Government. The changes were taking place by demands from the people as well as the politicians.

DD: When you became President and you became President with the largest vote ever, even larger than your husband's - were there any race issues, anti-white feelings?

JJ: I don't think people look at me that way, but the People's National Congress used my race and my origins and also my sex as points to attack, but the ordinary person I meet on the street, they see me as I am. I was here before most of them, maybe decades before they were born. They know that I have always been on the side of the working people, fighting for their rights and all that. One of the reasons that the vote was so high was that it had to do with sympathy for my husband's death, which had been earlier that year. I can't claim

all that for myself, but I think a lot of it was sympathy vote, because he was so well-loved in this country. But PNC supporters did stone my car; and some made voodoo dolls and stuck pins in them, so I was told, I don't know for sure. There was no anti-semitism, because Guyanese are not a people with such racist views against Jews.

DD: When you look back on your Presidency, are there one or two things you felt you achieved that you are particularly proud of?

JJ: I had a rough time in my Presidency, in the sense that the Opposition never let go, they were after me all the time. In their eyes I was a vulnerable person. One of the things that I feel happy about is reform policy, because I have always had the view that Guyana has to look South, we are part of the continent of South America and we mustn't only look to the Caribbean islands which the British colonised. As they conquered most of the world they made Guyana an English-speaking country linked to the anglophone Caribbean, but geographically and economically, we are also part of the South American mainland. I focused on that and tried to bring Guyana closer to South America. I led state visits to Venezuela and Brazil and attended conferences in Chile, Bolivia, Panama and so on. Locally, I focused a lot on women's rights, education for women. When I was First Lady I was Chairperson on the Commission on the Rights of the Child and I focused on making it a reality: better education, health, for children and women. Those are some aspects of what I did in my period of office. Of course I also made mistakes...

DD: You told me once about marijuana...

JJ: As politicians, we fail to make correct decisions at times. Your Rasta friend told me to my face, but politely... Guyanese tell you straight out, but with manners... that I made a mistake over marijuana. If you remember I told him I regretted not doing more to decriminalise the use of marijuana. I took advice and argued to increase the amount you could possess before going to jail, but I should have increased it more. I felt terrible for the Rasta people who were jailed very often, breaking up families, so I argued to increase the amount you could possess without penalty, but not sufficiently. I don't condone the use of drugs, totally, but the use of ganja is part of the religion of Rasta people. In fact, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it was the British who used to supply it to sugar workers! The Indians smoked it a lot.



DD: I am myself fully supportive of any action that reduces violence related to the use of drugs, the millions of untaxed money made by suppliers and so on. Anyway, I was blown away when I read Roger Mais' novel, *HILLS*, with its ganja episode, which I think Professor Ramchand said was the most beautiful passage in fiction on the subject. To move on, but on the subject of beauty, you've been known very much in Guyana as a major supporter of the arts of this country. Giving one of the most beautiful buildings we have in Georgetown over to the National Art Gallery, and always in support of literature and cultural expression. Is this because you wanted to help finance a native sense of cultural identity?

JJ: Yes, I felt it was necessary, but also for practical reasons. Guyana had a large art collection that was scattered all over. I would find pieces in Ministries here and there, and they were never brought together. A lot of pieces were being stolen, and the former government was giving away a lot of art pieces, and I wanted to be sure that all these things were secure. All my life I have been interested in the arts and literature - it is just part of my life. My husband used to tell me that I spent a lot of time reading, but not reading what he was reading. He was reading the heavy stuff of politics, economics and I was reading Tolstoy and so on, he thought I was a tiny bit frivolous. Naipaul

said in one of his books that I was reading Colette, the French writer, I used to think he was poking fun at me. A few years ago, when I was in America, I slipped out of the conference I was attending, walked the streets, came across a theatre which was performing a Chekhov play. I attended, what a treat! Yes, it is true I can recite some Martin Carter by heart. We were always good friends, he loved anyone who loved books. I spent many hours in his house, with writers like Lamming coming along sometimes, and Trinidadian artists, everybody talking excitedly about a Caribbean cultural renaissance and cussing up politicians for not funding the arts properly.

DD: In the many years that I've know you, I've noticed that many people in Guyana have a warm attitude to you. I've accompanied you to meetings where African Guyanese people greeted you with hymns and blessings. And when I go with you to gatherings of Indian people, they garland you as a native woman and you sit on the floor with them. How do you feel about being a Guyanese. That Guyanese people have taken you to heart? Has that been something that has helped to sustain you in this country?

JJ: I would say so. It makes me feel that maybe I haven't wasted my life, that some people appreciate me. There is a mutual feeling of appreciation. Only





a minority, politically inspired, threw stones and made dolls. Sometimes when I look in the faces of some of my colleagues, people who suffered and given a lot of their lives to the fight for justice... Like this morning, I was having a meeting with eleven of our close comrades from Berbice and I looked at their faces - they have been in a struggle for years, they're the ones in the front line and they're really good people, and it's nice, well, a real honour, to be associated with them. There are a lot of good people in this country who have selflessly given their time and their lives to the struggle for betterment and there is a long way to go yet.

DD: Apart from Colonialism and all the grievances and exploitation of that - there was also the other problem that we had in this society, which was that it was very male dominated, wasn't it?

JJ: As a person, I have been in a most fortunate position. I don't really feel it, I can see it in other respects. But married to Cheddi has prevented me from being a victim, and he was never that type of person. He was the strongest advocate of women's rights, he really and truly believed in them, so I never felt it. One might say that I have been protected as other women haven't been protected. I do see it around me - sometimes I've been at meetings, I get so angry: when the men are talking,

everyone's listening and then when a woman colleague starts talking, they pay no attention to her, they start talking among themselves, and I still get so angry. Men think that what they have to say is most important, and when a woman speaks they become uninterested. It is a very bad quality, but it does exist in the Caribbean society and the whole region is affected. It will take time to go, but it is going gradually. If you look at it, women are coming into their own. Some women are in such high positions in this country. I was a President, the Chancellor of the Judiciary is a woman, and so on. Symbolic, maybe, but symbols are important. Therefore, men can't get away with it any more so it will have to stop one day. Discrimination should end now, not tomorrow.

DD: I think it is true to say that the first of Cheddi Jagan's government and undoubtedly yours, there was a very high proportion of women represented in parliament.

JJ: Our representation of women is higher than a number of developed states, like the USA. Women have probably done better in this region; Latin America, too, has produced a lot of high standing women. But all this has to be maintained, and become normal.



DD: So, in spite of the machismo, women are moving up.

JJ: Another thing I want to mention, Africa and Asia have this problem of girl children not being educated. Well, we fought very hard, and my husband was always very keen on women's rights. From the early days, we kept telling people, 'send your girls to school', and now the population in the schools is fifty-fifty - we've done well. Women can't move upwards without sound education, that is the basis of an upward climb to freedom and liberation.

DD: Finally, the biggest challenge of all, ethnic insecurity? What to do?

JJ: All ethnic hostilities were originally engineered by the British, the divide-and-rule policy in Guyana, Cyprus, Africa, India everywhere. As politicians, we have to keep grappling with this issue. Cheddi believed in a rainbow coalition of people of all ethnic groups...If he had lived and remained President, he would have made this Mandela philosophy a real political act, finding ways in which all ethnic groups from whatever political party can take part in the governance of the country, from the Executive to local institutions. Power sharing or political unity as in the early days of the PPP, before the split. You need to build trust first, though, and Desmond Hoyte had an intense dislike of me. But we have veteran and up-and-coming young politicians in both the PPP and the PNC, so I believe that there is a chance for unity, we have to agree on a programme of action, based on how to improve the lives of all Guyanese. No point having political unity unless we have agreed ideas, agreed actions. I believe that the Guyanese people are basically decent to each other. The badness comes as election time, so obviously there is a deep-rooted insecurity which we have to deal with. Trust and agreement on a set of political ideas, a set of actions, then we can move forward. No doubt it will take time, maybe I will not live to see it... We don't have to agree on everything, but we have to bear in mind at all times what is best for the well-being of people. Cheddi once said, 'What's the point of living if we can't do something to stop poverty?', something like that. In 1992 we were so heavily in debt that we were drowning. Cheddi fought hard for debt relief, so more money could be found for addressing poverty. That was what drove him.



DAVID DABYDEEN was educated at Cambridge and London Universities before taking up positions at Oxford and Yale Universities. In 1984 he was appointed Lecturer at the University of Warwick, and became a Professor of Literary Studies in 1997. He is presently a Professorial Fellow in the Office of the Vice Chancellor and President. Between 1997 and 2010, he represented Guyana as Ambassador to UNESCO in an honorary capacity; in 2010 to 2015, he was Guyana's Ambassador to China.

# Annual Cheddi Jagan Lecture

## Cheddi Jagan and the Bittersweet History of Sugar



### Introduction

I want to thank the Cheddi Jagan Research Center for allowing me the opportunity to deliver the annual Cheddi Jagan Lecture 2018, as we celebrate the centenary anniversary of Dr Cheddi Jagan's birth. I was inspired to speak on the bittersweet history of sugar, after reading Dr Jagan's publication, titled "Bitter Sugar." This oxymoron of bitter sugar still holds relevance today as it did in the past.

Sugar has had a long and fascinating history. Sugar cane was domesticated in New Guinea and Indonesia, and over time this was spread to various countries, including India. Vedic period hymns refer to sugarcane, and in 325BC Kautilya refers to five varieties of sugar, including khanda from which we derived the word candy. In Sanskrit, sugar was called KarKara (gains of sand), but in the more popular Prakrit language it was known as "Sakkara" and then into Arabic as "sukkar" and eventually into English as "sugar". This linguistic

journey tells a story of how sugar has travelled around various countries and continents.

### Sugar in Dutch Guiana

The Guiana's association with sugar started about 381 years ago. The Dutch West India Company in Entry No 23 of the proceedings of the Zeeland Chamber recorded on the May 14<sup>th</sup>, 1637, "that confrater van Pere was authorized to turn over to Mr Segers two kegs of sirup, or sap of sugar cane arrived from Essequibo from Jan van der Goes, in order that he may reduce it to sugar." This is a clear testament that sugar production was happening in the Essequibo. The evidence also suggests that production was ramped up about a decade later, 1645 to 1657, when Dutch Jews who were expelled from Brazil settled in the Pomeroon around the 1650s. They brought with them the experience and capital to produce sugar at a commercial level.

By 1657, there was a plan to bring slaves from Africa.

Dutch merchant David Nassy undertook, on the 26<sup>th</sup> January 1658, to transport African slaves to the Pomeroun. By 1658, there was widespread cultivation in the Pomeroun, which began selling sugar to the Netherlands on 6<sup>th</sup> January 1661. In addition to the Pomeroun, sugar cultivation was done in and around the Kyk-over-al area. By 1664, the first sugar mills were established by Jan Doensen at Brouwershoek (Brouwer's corner) situated near Sugar Creek (Zuiker Creek). By the 26<sup>th</sup> August 1669, the Dutch West India Company informed the Zeeland Chambers that a ship had brought along 50,000 or 60,000 pounds of sugar which were made in Essequibo by African slaves.

### **Slavery – the demand for labour.**

Slavery started under the Dutch and continued under the British. The exact date when slaves started arriving in the Guianas is unknown, but the records point to sometime around the 1650s. Estimates of how many Africans were sold into the transatlantic slavery ranged from 9.6 million on the lower end to 15 million on the upper end. It is estimated that approximately 2 million people perished at sea. How many made it to the Guianas is unknown, but what was certain was that those who made it had a wretched life.

After the abolition of the slave trade in 1807, planters tried to encourage the growth of the local population by creating slave breeding stations at Covenden and Huis't Dieren. However, these measures did not stabilise the population.

The atrocities committed on slaves were many, these have been documented in publications such as *Hearing Slaves Speak*. For example, in Berbice during 1827- 1828," *4,530 slaves were punished for bad work, 300 for refusing to work, 1346 for disobedience or insolence. Slaves were punished for criminality, ranging from attempted murder to trying to commit suicide and to theft. Also significant were offences connected to moral delinquency, such as the mistreating of children, fornication and adultery, drunkenness, lying or ill-treating wives — some of the most serious moral delinquencies related to practising obeah.* " In addition to eternal punishments, living conditions were atrocious; slaves were required to work an average of 12 to 14 hours per day and food was constantly in short supply.

These conditions were so bad that the average working life of a slave was estimated at merely ten years. Little wonder that the oppressed rebelled against the plantocracy, the most famous of these rebellions

include 1763 Berbice slave rebellion, 1823 Demerara slave rebellion and 1834 Essequibo Rebellion.

Eventually, slavery was abolished in 1834, but five years of Apprenticeship was imposed. During this period, slaves were brutally exploited, and this led to an increase in the already high mortality rates.

From our vantage point today, while we look across the centuries of history, it is difficult to imagine the toll that the wretchedness of naked exploitation had on the enslaved. The atrocities of slavery are the bitterness that stills lingers in our collective memory, and even if sweeten with reparations, it would help to heal the wound, but perhaps never erase the pain.

### **Indentureship – the demand for labour**

After the abolition of slavery, indentureship was used to find a new source of cheap labour. As historian Hugh Tinker pointed out, indentureship was a new form of slavery, through this scheme various peoples were brought to British Guiana. Portuguese indentureship started in 1835 to 1890. Indian indentureship began in 1838 and was suspended on 11th July 1838, and again restarted 29th January 1845, and it lasted until 1917. It is estimated that 500,000 or more Indian indentured immigrants came to the West Indies. These indentured immigrants, while they were contracted to work for five years, were thoroughly exploited during this period. The planters had a local saying that "they would have their immigrants either at work, in hospital, or goal."

This policy of jailing people for the slightest infarction led to the criminalisation of the indentured population. In 1901, out of an indentured population of 14,609, more than 23% (3,4230 were prosecuted, and 1,922 were convicted! For absence from work or refusal to work, the fine was \$10 or get a month's jail in British Guiana. For absence from the plantation for three days without leave, the penalty was a fine of \$24 or two months' imprisonment. For refusing to produce identifying documents, the fine was \$5 or fourteen days' imprisonment.

During the suspension of Indian indentureship, the planters recruited indentured black immigrants from Barbados and other West Indian islands, from the West Coast of Africa and the Southern United States. During this period, they also hired European indentured immigrants. Chinese immigration started in 1853. These indentured immigrants helped to mitigate the shortage of labour on the sugar plantations.



While working and living condition were abominable. The immigrants made complaints but they were not taken seriously. Around 1869, many of these complaints boiled over into open conflict between the immigrants and the plantocracy. The better-known examples of conflicts are Devonshire Castle, Essequibo in 1872, where five immigrants were killed. In 1903, at plantation Friends in Berbice, six persons were killed and seven injured. Another important event occurred at Rose Hall in 1913, where fifteen persons were killed. Many historians feel that this particular conflict helped to precipitate the end of Indian indentureship in British Guiana.

### Post-indentureship period

When indentureship ended, labour was still short. To mitigate this shortage immigrants were encouraged to settle rather than return to India. These settlements included Nootenzuil and Whim. The plantocracy also was seeking new alternatives, and an attempt was made to settle Assyrians and Jews. These settlement schemes quickly failed.

After resettlement failed, the plantocracy employed a different set of tactics. Dr Jagan, in his booklet *Bitter Sugar*, pointed out some: *“these measures have taken different forms – lack of agricultural diversification, land idleness, inadequate drainage and irrigation, price fixing of wages and farmers produce.”* These

measures effectively undermine peoples’ ability to earn a living outside of the plantation structure, that is they were measures to foster dependency on the plantation.

There was a minimal improvement to plantation life, it remained deplorable. There was poor housing, lack of sanitation and the absence of potable water. These unhygienic conditions led to a high prevalence of parasitic diseases, such as hookworms, tapeworms and malaria. The working conditions were no better, long hours for small subsistence pay.

Conditions for women were especially humiliating *“As the men and women proceed in their hundreds on the dams, the women, as soon as they reach their destination (cane fields) will have to get into the trenches. These trenches are sometimes breast deep and other times shallower, but in any case, they have to lift their clothing before they enter and they tell the men: “Brothers, hide your faces that we may cross.” Invariably it has been found that overseers, drivers and others have been in the habit of amusing themselves on the novelties of the unhappy scenes aback.”* This is just a benign example.

### Organising for representation

This period also saw the emergence of the Trade Union Movement, first with the emergence of the British Guiana Labour Union representing dock workers, and later the Manpower Citizens’ Association (MPCA), representing sugar workers. Workers no longer bounded by the indentureship contracts became more militant. As Basdeo Mangru noted, *“During the first nine months of 1938, there were 32 disputes in British Guiana involving approximately 12,500 resident field labourers out of 13,000. Of these disputes, 25 originated in inadequate pay, 3 in order wage questions, and 4 in the employment of certain headmen.”*

This new level of militancy eventually led to clashes between the sugar workers and the plantocracy. One such clash occurred on the 16<sup>th</sup> February 1939, when four people were killed (including a woman, Sumintra), and six others injured at Leonora. These workers were striking for better working conditions and fairer wages. The plantocracy would quickly quell the clashes, by demonising and often jailing the local leaders. By quickly isolating the incident, the plantocracy prevented it from spreading across the country.

## Cheddi Jagan enters the fray.

It is against this backdrop that Cheddi Jagan returned to British Guiana in 1943. The injustices that pervade the land pushed Dr Jagan, his wife Janet Jagan, H.J.H. Hubbard and Ashton Chase to form the Political Affairs Committee. One of the main activities of the PAC was the publication of the PAC Bulletin. As Clem Seecharran pointed out, “ *The PAC Bulletin was the forum through which Jagan articulated his vision of a new Guyana, challenging the plantocracy and other capitalists, as well as perceived collusion between the colonial administration and vested interests. He was a partisan of the working people, whatever their race, His remorselessly critical eye focused on high rent and exploitation by landlords; land hunger and insecurity of tenure; the plantocracy and their fear of land reclamation and alternatives industries; collusion between union and management in the sugar industry; the “exorbitant” profits of those he deemed the “sugar gods” or the “sugar barons”; the problems of Amerindians. Indeed, he was driven by the passion to eradicate the evils that he believed “bitter sugar” had perpetrated on the working people of British Guiana. Jagan brought to his politics the zeal of the crusader, incorruptibility in prosecuting the sugar workers’ cause, implacability in fighting the plantocracy and the colonial rulers. He had no parallel in the British West Indies; few, indeed, anywhere in the former colonial world.*”

On the 24<sup>th</sup> November 1947, Dr Jagan, at the age of 29, was elected to the Legislative Council. He had this to say about his election: “ The people have gained a political victory at the polls; now they seem prepared to struggle for their economic freedom.”

The MPCA had lost its militancy and became compromised by the planters. A new union emerged on the 5<sup>th</sup> of April 1948. The Guiana Industrial Workers Union offered the workers a more militant alternative. The union quickly demonstrated its militancy when it opposed the “cut and load system” instead of “cut and drop.”

Workers went on strike at Enmore on the 22<sup>nd</sup> April 1948, and during the protest on the 16<sup>th</sup> June outside of the estates, five workers were shot and killed with sixteen others receiving injury. Sydney King later wrote an article in the PAC that captured the sentiments of the times. “They asked for Bread; They Gave them Bullets.”

Dr Jagan’s memory of the day was recorded in the

West on Trial, “*The Enmore tragedy affected me greatly...at the graveside, the emotional outbursts of the widows and relatives were intensely distressing, and I could not restrain my tears. There was no turning back. There and then I made a silent pledge – I would dedicate my entire life to the struggle of the Guianese people against bondage and exploitation.*”

The PAC Bulletin published an article titled, “Bitter Sugar” in which they demanded a commission of inquiry into the sugar industry. The planters resisted this idea, W.S Jones, the director of Bookers in British Guiana, pointed out, “ *a lasting solution can only be obtained by discrediting the leaders of the “pirate union” in the eyes of the workers by demonstrating that their followers obtain none of their promises and that the unruly elements are liable to eviction.*” Despite this, however, the government agreed to the establishment of the Commission of Inquiry on the 27<sup>th</sup> of July 1948. The Venn Commission worked from 15<sup>th</sup> December 1948 to the 19<sup>th</sup> February 1949.

One of the many recommendations that Dr Jagan made to the Venn Commission was that there should be one union in the sugar industry. MPCA represented predominantly Indian field workers, while the British Guiana Workers League represented mainly African factory workers. Dr Jagan felt that the ethnic composition of the two unions would entrench racial division. He was so convinced of the need to break this racial divide that he accepted membership and chairmanship of the BG Workers League (Rose Hall Branch) much to the revulsion of the colonial authorities.

The Venn Commission report made several recommendations that led to the improvement of the lives of the sugar workers. One such example is the establishment of the Sugar Industry Labour Welfare Fund, which led to the building of the extranuclear housing scheme. In Enmore, a new housing area was created, and it was called Newtown. On many of the other estates, they were similar housing areas that were created.

The struggle for the betterment on the sugar plantations was intricately entwined with the struggle nationally. On the 1<sup>st</sup> January 1950, the Peoples Progressive Party was formed. The PPP’s aims, and the programme, was stated as, “ *After scores of years of British rule and misrule, of trials and errors, of constitutional experimentation, British Guiana is in great peril. Our people continue to exist on the border of starvation. The miserably low pre-war standard of living cannot*

be maintained. Devaluation and increased cost for imports are readily eating up all money wage increases.

*“Meanwhile, there has been no organised group speaking with the voice of the Guianese of all races and classes championing the cause of the oppressed and exploited and presented a constructive policy and programme as a hope to guide us out of our present abyss of poverty, despair and frustration.”* To this end, the aims are, *“recognising that the final abolition of exploitation and oppression of the economic crises and unemployment and war will be achieved only by socialist reorganization of society, pledges itself to the task of winning a free and independent Guiana, of building a just socialist society in which the industries of the country shall be socially and democratically owned and managed for the common good, a society in which security, plenty, peace and freedom shall be the heritage of all.”*

Using the PPP’s programme as his guide, Dr Jagan, speaking in the Legislative Council on the 23<sup>rd</sup> January 1952, had this to say, *“We have first to stop the flow of profits going abroad. In order to stop the flow of profits going abroad, we have to do certain things, and in order to do certain things, we must have political power...If we take the sugar industry, there is a definite need for reorganization of the industry, either on the basis of complete nationalisation or reorganisation in the sense that the estates are run on a cooperative system.”*

In 1953, British Guiana had its first general election under universal adult suffrage. The PPP campaigned on a very progressive platform of *“land reform, the democratisation of industrial relations, liberalisation of the colony’s international contacts, and nationalisation of bauxite, sugar, banks, insurance companies and other foreign enterprises.”* The PPP won the elections, but the government only lasted 133 days, as the British suspended the constitution and suppressed democracy to protect “King Sugar” and other vested interests. The political machinations and manipulations to remove the PPP became a priority. Moreover, after repeated attempts in 1957 and 1961, it finally occurred with an imperial imprimatur when the UF and the PNC were asked to form a coalition in 1964.

### **The PNC’s post independence activities**

The UF was smothered within the coalition, and what was left of the UF parted ways with the PNC before



the 1967 general elections. To maintain political power, the PNC resorted to fraudulent elections. After rigging the 1967 elections, the PNC started a program of nationalisation.

As Forbes Burnham remarked on Vesting Day at Mackenzie on the 15<sup>th</sup> July 1971, *“We have achieved political independence on the 26<sup>th</sup> May 1966. We got ourselves a new flag. We got ourselves a new outfit. We got ourselves a new wardrobe, but we did not get ourselves a new economy. Our economy continued to be dominated by outsiders, important sectors like bauxite and the financial institutions by non-Guyanese. We Guyanese had no part or lot in the making of vital decisions which would affect our economic progress or retrogression.”*

In 1974, The PNC government signalled its intention to act against Jessel Securities Ltd. By June of 1974, it established a committee headed by Allan Price to investigate conditions at the Diamond Factory. By the 22<sup>nd</sup> February 1975, Burnham used the Price Report to tell the Guyanese nation, *“Meanwhile, we have had a look at the holdings of the Demerara Company Limited. The expatriate company has been wasting our resources and operating inefficiently. Its sugar factory at Diamond has a spare capacity of over twenty thousand tons which has never been utilised, and its agricultural practices have been unsatisfactory. Its industrial relations are primitive, and the workers’ housing conditions are appalling.*

*In the circumstances, your PNC government has decided that the continued operation of that company here is contrary to, and inconsistent with, the national interest. Consequently this year, all*

***Demerara Company's holding in the Cooperative Republic of Guyana will be nationalised.***” Jessel was taken over on the 26<sup>th</sup> May 1975.

By the following year, Booker McConnell Limited's, assets in Guyana were nationalised, Burnham had this to say, ***“Now, for Bookers, which like a colossus did bestride our country, our economy and our people's lives for more than a century and a half. Its continued existence in Guyana was incompatible with our national goals and pride, as well as our economic thrust. When therefore that group saw fit to offer for consideration the acquisition of its sugar interests, your government decided to nationalise all of Booker's assets in Guyana. There cannot be two governments in one state. There cannot be two purveyors of the economy of Guyana.”***

In keeping with the PPP programme and aims, the party supported the nationalisation, of the sugar industry. At the time of nationalisation eleven factories were taken over, these were Leonora, Uitvlugt, Wales, Diamond, Enmore, LBI, Ogle, Albion, Blairmont, Rose Hall and Skeldon. Sugar, in 1976, accounted for 63 per cent of the agriculture output, and 20 per cent of the GDP. The newly formed GUYUSCO was producing 337,776 tonnes of sugar.

### **Post-nationalisation of the industry**

On the 6<sup>th</sup> of July, 1974, Parliament enacted the Sugar Levy Act No 22 of 1974. The Act imposed a levy on a graduated scale which was designed to retain for the benefit of the country. It is estimated by GAWU, ***“...for two (2) decades, between 1976 and 1996, paid US\$286.49 million or G\$58.730 billion in today's terms to the Government as levy”***. These funds from sugar were sent to the Consolidated Fund and utilised to prop up the national economy.

There has been a noticeable decline in sugar production. Under the PNC, production dropped by 98,878 tonnes for the period from 1976 to 1992. Under the PPP, there was an initial increase to 264,983 tonnes (1996 -2005) and then a drop to 208,783 tonnes by (2006 -2015), and in 2018 it plummeted to an all-time low of 98,000 tonnes.

Sugar impact on the economy has changed remarkably, from 20% of the GDP in 1976 to an average of 12.01% (1996 to 2005), to an average of 4.67% (2006 to 2015). The Coalition's actions have had an adverse impact on sugar's contribution to the economy.

The coalition had promised before the general elections of 2015 to pay the sugar workers a better salary. Unfortunately, this did not materialise. President Granger, in his address to the Parliament, explained the APNU/AFC position, ***“The sugar industry is being consolidated; it is not being closed. We will explore all options..to ensure a viable industry, mindful of its impact on the nation's rural economy and its residents.”*** However, this was said after the APNU/ AFC government closed Wales, Enmore and Rose Hall estates and terminated 7,000 workers, with an estimated indirect impact on an additional 40,000 persons.

President David Granger in a message on 10<sup>th</sup> January 2018 to the National Assembly stated, ***“The Government has acted resolutely and responsibly to protect the livelihood of workers, to preserve the viability of rural communities, and to prevent the further financial depletion of the country's treasury.”*** The President's words, ***“to protect the livelihood of workers”*** and his APNU/AFC government's action of terminating 7,000 sugar workers are inconsistent. The impact of the closure of the estates and the termination of sugar workers can be felt on the economy. Sugar contribution to the economy was 3.4% (2015), this dropped to 2.3% (2016), then 1.9% (2017) and there was a further drop of 1.3% (2018).

There are some in the APNU/AFC administration who hold a pessimistic view of the sugar industry. They believe that the unfavourable trading arrangements mean the industry is no longer viable. They claim that it is “drag on the economy” and the government must no longer invest in the industry. They have straight-jacketed their analysis to dollars and cents, ignoring the added benefits that this industry has provided to rural communities, such as health services, recreational services, technical training opportunities, apprenticeships, jobs and drainage and irrigation services.

I subscribe to a more pragmatic view: that the sugar industry is ailing, but with the right treatment, it can soon recover. One such measure is expanding into value-added products. The Sugar CoI report unambiguously recommended ***“[t]he industry can no longer rely solely on the production of Raw Sugar. Added -value products are required.”*** Those of us advocating this view are contending that the industry should restructure its business model to produce electricity through bagasse co-generation; the production of refined sugar; to produce direct



consumption sugars; to produce extra-nuclear alcohol for the rum industry, and molasses for health shops, among other things.

These ideas are not new. Dr Cheddi Jagan, as far back as the 1960s, had spoken about moving in this direction. An excellent and successful start in this direction was the establishment of the first co-generation plant at Skeldon. I recall the GAWU pointing out that in 2016 the plant was able to supply electricity to the tune of \$9.5B to the Guyana Power and Light (GPL) though the Skeldon factory was operating at one-third of its capacity. Moving from bulk to packaged sugar can increase profitability. The Enmore Packaging Plant investment is another excellent example. An ethanol demonstration plant was also installed at Albion as a precursor, possibly, to an investment in an integrated distillery/ethanol plant at that location. Studies had also determined that refined sugar is viable at Skeldon once Common External Tariff (CET) protection is secured. Despite these promising results, the government has not given a clear signal whether it would be pursuing these value-added options.

### **Sugar – a possible future**

As of now, what can be discerned from the government's varied and often conflicting pronouncements is that there would be a two-pronged approach. One prong is to retain State ownership of Albion, Blairmont and Uitvlugt, while the other prong is to privatise the remaining estates. Already, through the Special Project Unit (SPU), the State has borrowed \$30B apparently to upgrade these three estates. However, to date, the planned investments into these estates remain at best secretive, or at worst non-existent. No visible works have been done on these estates, and it therefore, begs the question of why the government borrowed this large sum of money which is sitting idly. I hope that this is not a ploy to borrow and squander these resources.

The decision of the current administration to privatise the sugar industry after more than 50 years of state ownership and control is risky and challenging.

This rushed decision to divest is no assurance that those estates will be preserved. While Government spokespersons have emphasised that technical competence will be given high marks, the interested parties are relatively unknown in the sugar business, and this creates serious questions about their sincerity to maintain sugar or sugarcane production. The bipolar policies of the government have left the workers traumatised and uncertain. Alternatively, to put it another way, a bitter government cannot produce a sweet industry.

In the words of Burnham, *“We have achieved political independence on the 26<sup>th</sup> May 1966. We got ourselves a new flag. We got ourselves a new outfit. We got ourselves a new wardrobe, but we did not get ourselves a new economy. Our economy continued to be dominated by outsiders, important sectors like bauxite and the financial institutions by non-Guyanese. We Guyanese had no part or lot in the making of vital decisions which would affect our economic progress or retrogression.”* To me, it is an irony that one of Burnham's self-professed disciples, David Granger is on the verge of undoing a crucial part of Burnham's legacy - that is undoing the nationalisation of sugar. It is also ironic, that as a student of history, the President must know of the investments that enslaved and indentured ancestors made in blood, sweat and tears, that is today so casually discounted.

Dr Jagan kept his pledge that he made at the graveside of the Enmore Martyrs. As we celebrate the centenary anniversary of his birth, he has left us many things to ponder — the bitterness of our history, but more importantly the sweetness of the future. The challenges make us stronger, as we work steadfastly to build a better Guyana for all of our people. What is your pledge?



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## *FACE OFF:*

### *Oscar Ramjeet with Former President Donald Ramotar*



*OR: When did you first meet Cheddi, and what were your impressions?*

DR: My first actual meeting with Cde. Cheddi Jagan was sometime in the mid 1960s, when I started working in Georgetown and became a member of the PPP and PYO.

Cde. Cheddi used to give us young people around the area lots of newspapers to cut for his files. He would mark out the articles and we would cut them and these would then be filed at the Freedom House office.

Before that, I met him when I was a pupil attending the St. Andrews Primary School, which was just opposite the Parliament Building, where Cde.

Cheddi, as Premier had his office. We sometimes played on the grounds, and once or twice he came up and chatted with us.

I knew of him, however, long before I met him. As a youngster, I used to read his 'Straight Talk' articles in the 'Mirror' newspaper. In hindsight, that made a big impact on me. Those articles raised my political consciousness at a very young age.

*OR: Were you aware that he was a Marxist and the implications of his ideological beliefs at home and overseas - in the context of the Cold War?*

DR: I did not know anything about Marxism. I know that from some quarters he was always being accused of being a Communist. I recall several of the handbills and newspaper articles that sought to demonise him and tried to depict communism as 'evil.'

This was a line of the political opposition and the mass media in British Guiana. It was, as you know, the period of the Cold War.

However, reading his articles and listening to him speak, either on the radio or at public meetings, he was always so knowledgeable, sincere and clear. It was impossible for me to ever believe he was 'evil' as the media had portrayed him. As we well know, the masses of Guyanese, in spite of this portrayal, held him in high esteem.

I suppose I was influenced by my father, Sam Ramotar, who was a strong and conscious supporter of the Party. He read a lot, and gave us things to read as well.

*OR: Do you think that Cheddi's support of the Cuban Revolution was the principal reason why the Americans fomented chaos in British Guiana?*

DR: First of all, allow me to say that when you pose the question like that, you seem to be justifying the American intervention in our domestic affairs and disregarding the will of our own people. I see no justification for what they did. Indeed, we are still

suffering because of such interferences.

Some academics, instead of standing up for justice, seek to blame the victims in these circumstances.

However, while it appears so, and may even be partly true, my view is that they would have intervened anyhow.

Recall that long before the Cuban Revolution they were meddling in our affairs. The 1953 suspension of our Constitution had their fingerprints as well. They supported the British in overthrowing the first democratically elected government in Guyana, then British Guiana.

You should also recall that this was part of the United States global position. Don't forget that in that period they also worked with the British in removing Mosadeq in Iran, and on their own they overthrew the Arbenz Government in Guatemala.

I wish to refer you to the documents that have been released by the US State Department and the British Foreign Office to substantiate my views.

If any government tried to show the slightest degree of independence, it was crushed. It was a total disregard for the will of the people.

One of the reasons the Cuban Revolution stands out is that it was one of the few that successfully resisted the US intervention.

Instead of trying to use that to criticise Cde. Cheddi, outrage should be directed at the United States and British policies and action.

*OR: Cheddi often said that the years between 1957 and 1964 were in many ways counter-productive: the party was in office but not in power. Was he right to say that the PPP should have focused more on winning support across ethnic lines, coming out clearly for Marxism-Leninism?*

DR: I can't remember Cde Cheddi ever saying that period, 1957 to 1964, was unproductive. In fact, it was just the opposite. That time was one of the most productive in our country's history.

The PPP government then built the Bank of Guyana; the University of Guyana (The only University ever set up by a government in any of the colonies), the Guyana School of Agriculture.

It was in that period, too, that the significant Black

Bush Polder and Tapacuma projects became a reality. The Mahaica/Mahaicony/Abrary (MMA) Scheme was just about to begin, when the PPP was once more ejected from office.

In agriculture, new crops were introduced; I remember clearly peanuts and cabbage. Coffee production shot up, and we were producing "Guyana Instant Coffee."

Our transportation system was revolutionised with the construction of three ferries; Malali, Torani and Macourin. Two of those were built in British Guyana. Another major achievement. Our productive sector grew rapidly; the average annual growth of bauxite was 7%, sugar 7%, manufacturing 8% and rice 10%. It was in this period too that the Aluminum Plant in Linden was commissioned on the insistence of Cheddi Jagan. That was closed by the PNC regime.

Every state-owned enterprise was making a profit, these were:

- (a) Guyana Airways Corporation
- (b) Guyana Electricity Corporation
- (c) Guyana Rice Marketing Board
- (d) Guyana Marketing Corporation
- (e) Guyana Rice Development Board
- (f) Guyana Telephone & Telegraph Company, and
- (g) Guyana Industrial Corporation

We also had huge leaps in Education, Health and Housing.

Many of the houses are still standing today.

Hundreds of new schools were built, and also technical institutions.

The hinterland education had its beginnings in these times.

British Guiana was leading the Caribbean in passes at the GCE examinations.

The same could be said of health services.

It could be said that it was under the PPP government that Malaria was eradicated, only to return two decades later under the PNC regime.



That period could be considered a golden age for the social sector.

These achievements loom even larger when we consider that it was a time of great disturbances instigated by the US and British in collaboration with sections of the PNC leadership and the United Force (UF).

It ought to be noted, too, that these were accomplishments made in the context of very restricted power.

This is what Jagan meant when he talked about being in office but not in power. So much more could have been achieved. So much was stopped by the British, like making a beer factory, a glass factory, an oil brand factory. The Amaila Electric Hydro Power facility at Tiger Hill Falls, just to name a few.

Also, it should be noted that the PPP always worked hard for the support of all Guyanese, regardless of their race or religion.

*OR: When the PPP embraced Marxism-Leninism in Moscow in 1969, what was the mechanism by which this crucial position evolved? Who/What was the Party's principal link in the USSR?*

DR: After rigging of the 1968 elections with the seeming support from the United States of America and the United Kingdom, Cde. Cheddi and the Party's leadership concluded that the PPP could not regain government with a loose party, which PPP was then. It was clear that we needed a more disciplined Party given the circumstances and the demands of the times. This was an important consideration for the decision in 1969 to so transform the Party.

The total disregard of the United States and the United Kingdom for the wishes and will of the people prompted the Party to strengthen and to seek other international alliances and support. The PPP developed ties with the socialist countries and saw natural allies in the anti-colonial, anti-imperialist movements in the world at that time. It is also important to note that the PNC is said to have been linked to US Security as late as 1973. This is according to the papers released by the US State Department.

By the time the PPP announced publicly its position in 1969, Socialism had grown to be a formidable world system, with impressive achievements recorded for the working peoples. These countries were headed by Communist and Workers Parties and

their ranks were swollen by quite a few countries which received their independence from the Colonial empires. Each Party was responsible for elaborating its own strategy and tactics.

The PPP did not have to give up any of its independence in this transformation process, as some have pedalled.

It was the PPP leadership, often after discussions with our membership, alone that took all the decisions in relation to our internal affairs.

The PPP, at the same time, developed cooperation with a wide cross section of political parties and movements the world over.

The links were not necessarily with persons, but the structures. In this regard, the PPP had good relations with the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

*OR: Did Burnham steal Cheddi's thunder in 1974-75 when he, too, embraced Marxism? What was the response of the Cubans and the Soviets?*

DR: Burnham could never have stolen Cheddi's 'thunder', as you put it. They were two very different personalities.

Cheddi was principled, honest in his dealing with people. His sincerity, among his admirable qualities, shone through all of his life.

Burnham, on the other hand, took positions he thought convenient. His 'swing to the left' in government had to do with the great advances that were being made by the left forces internationally.

Many 'left-wing' governments were making laudable gains.

Recall the shift in Latin America. Recall, too, the victory in Vietnam and South East Asia, the big advance in the national liberation movement in Africa, Angola, Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau, the uprising in South Africa (Soweto). In Europe, the collapse of the fascist government in Spain and Portugal. The influence of the Non-Aligned Movement, all these were clear signs that the balance of forces was shifting in favour of the left.

It was during this time that Burnham shifted towards the socialist forces. He adopted a new posture. Moreover, I believe that Burnham's pride also played a part. He wanted to distance himself from his past as a collaborator with the British and with the USA.

Jagan, on the other hand, always identified with the left. Of course, he was an able political strategist and tactician. He could manoeuvre and make permanent or transitory alliances. But he was always principled in his dealings. Whatever he did, it was always on the side of, and on behalf of, the working people of Guyana and the world.

In relation to the second part of your question, I believe that the Cubans and Soviets saw Burnham's shift and obviously sought to encourage such approaches. Recall that Burnham agreed for Cuban planes going to Angola to be refueled in Guyana. He had agreed not to search the planes. This placed him in greater contradiction with the US. Obviously, too, the PPP supported it.

*OR: Was 'critical support' forced on the PPP by Cuba and the USSR?*

DR: 'Critical Support' was a necessary response to what was taking place at home basically, and developments internationally too.

When Burnham joined the side he thought was winning, he came under pressure from the United States. Recall then that Venezuela began taking some hostile positions on the border issue, which was most likely stirred up by foreign circles.

Incidentally, this was one of the consequences of Burnham's opportunism. He had signed the Geneva Agreement with Venezuela in 1965, re-opening an issue that was closed. This was an engineered position he obviously agreed to so that it could be used against the PPP should the PPP be returned to office in 1968.

The adoption of 'Critical Support by the PPP' was to send a clear message internationally that we were ready to stand with the PNC government to defend our country. The PPP was not going to allow its difference with the PNC to jeopardise and endanger our country and its people.

Internally, it was to say to the people of the country and to the PNC that we were ready to support positions we agreed with, including defending our sovereignty; but will continue to fight for political democracy and the socioeconomic interests of our people.

Those were non-negotiable.

Cuba was not decisive in this. I suspect that they

would have agreed with that position.

*OR: Did the Cubans push Chandisingh to leave the PPP?*

DR: I have no grounds to believe this. However, it is possible that in discussions with Chandisingh the Cuban assessment of developments in Guyana could have influenced him. His position was one of total, uncritical support. Cheddi and the majority in the PPP did not agree, they thought that there were no guarantee that Burnham would not swing again and return to his earlier right wing positions under pressure. That would have been a disaster for the PPP, and would have affected its mass base.

I say that the Cuban influence was there, because his position changed when he returned from Cuba. However, I believe he was of the view that the Party needed to change its line from non-cooperation. He was not wrong, but went too far.

*OR: Was Burnham's effort to seek unity between the PNC and the PPP genuine, and why did it collapse?*

DR: Since the split in the PPP in 1955, it was always the Cheddi Jagan-led PPP that was making all efforts to re-unite the Party or at least to get an alliance with the PNC. The PNC always rejected. Even when Burnham swung to the left, he rejected.

Recall his attitude to the 1977 call by the PPP for a National Patriotic Front and Government. He said then that he was the Bolshevik and PPP was the Menshevik. Therefore, no unity was possible. He had the power and was not willing to share.

In the 1960s, he chose the United Kingdom and the United States to ally with instead of the PPP, because he saw power coming with their help. But as Cheddi predicted since 1955, such a move would prove disastrous. Cheddi was right.

It was therefore a great surprise when, in January of 1985, the PNC General Secretary, Dr. Ptolemy Reid, wrote inviting the PPP for talks. That generated very many heated discussions in the PPP.

At that time our economy was in the pits. Burnham had rejected the World Bank/International Monetary Fund conditionalities. The relations with the United States and other Western countries were cold.

The Soviet Union was already beginning to

experience economic difficulties. The kind of assistance needed could not have been provided. Already the Soviet Union was helping Cuba and Vietnam to rebuild apart from other big expenditures. It was a huge cost to them.

Thus, Burnham's options were limited. He was looking for a way out. Therefore, I believe he was ready to make some changes. Unfortunately, he died in August of the same year, and Hoyte jettisoned the talks.

*OR: How would you assess Janet's position as a Marxist in the shaping of the PPP?*

DR: Janet was indeed a Marxist who made a great contribution in the PPP's development as a Party. She is highly respected for that. I am prone to the view that she proved to be an able partner of Cde. Cheddi's political work and in the Party's development. I think that is what you are most interested in learning.

It was a racist attack on the early PPP by the British to say she was the main brain in the Party. They wanted to say that Indo- and Afro-Guyanese did not have the capacity to do what the PPP was doing. That Janet was laying down the law.

Unfortunately, after the split, Burnham continued that line in his attack on Cheddi.

Without in any way trying to diminish Janet's great contribution, I would say the truth is Cheddi was head and shoulders above the rest of the Party when it came to the elaboration of strategy and tactics. He was a great thinker and an active practitioner at the same time. He was equally strong in theory, and as we know was an outstanding political leader.

The Party also produced many powerful thinkers, Ashton Chase, C.R. Jacobs, Ranji Chandisingh, H.J.M. Hubbard, Janet Jagan, Brindley Benn, Ramkarran, Feroze Mohamed to name a few. Other powerful non-Marxist thinkers were Reepu Daman Persaud and Fenton Ramsahoye, and they all made great contributions to the elaboration of the Party's line at various stages.

*OR: What was Cheddi's greatest strength? What kept him going despite being 28 years in opposition?*

DR: Cheddi had many great strengths, and it is hard to pin down one. I will, therefore, list some very important ones.

- Firstly, he was a thinker. He had a vision and he worked towards it.
- He was also a great communicator. He had the ability to explain the most complex ideas and situations to allow the ordinary man to understand.
- He was extremely persuasive.
- He was very sincere. That came across to all who met him.

It was those personal traits and the conviction that he was right that gave him that boundless energy that saw him through the difficult periods of his life and endeared him to people.

*OR: What was Cheddi's main weakness?*

DR: His main weakness was also a strength. His total trusting of his close Comrades. He never believed that many who defected would have done so until it was too late.

From talking to his contemporaries, I was often told that they warned him about schemes going on behind his back to remove him as leader in the 1950s. Cde. Eric Gilbert told me when he warned Cheddi that Burnham was planning a coup against him, Cheddi did not believe, and told him Burnham was too intelligent to do something as damaging to our goals as that.

It was only in January of 1955, a mere three months before the split, that he got worried about it, and wrote a 'Straight Talk' article headlined 'The Way Backward', wherein he warned of the consequences of a split.

Unfortunately, his fears were realized.

*OR: Did Marxism fail because it could not bring the two main races together?*

DR: No. Marxism is still the most potent tool for analysing society and actions in both international and domestic affairs.

Those who say Marxism failed are people who are dogmatists and those who do not understand that Marxism is a science.

But look at how creatively the Chinese Communist Party has used Marxism to build China and to contribute to international development despite

recent setbacks internationally of Socialism. Look at how Vietnam is now rapidly rebuilding, after decades of devastating wars, using Marxism as their tool.

*OR: Why did virtually every political party claim to be Marxist by the late 70s in Guyana?*

DR: I think I touched on that above. It was the great successes of the socialist countries and the anti-colonial, national liberation movements the world over. At that time, one felt the whole world was going socialist rapidly.

*OR: How would you assess your work in the PPP at the time of Cheddi Jagan?*

DR: I believe it was a great honour to have the good fortune to work with Dr. Cheddi Jagan, to see him close up as he wrestled with many complicated issues practically and theoretically, with both domestic and foreign issues.

I always marveled at the way he came up with answers and was able to chart new directions at every turn in the political life of the country and the Party.

It was during that period my political convictions were cemented. I was an active participant in very memorable discussions and in the practical activities on the ground.

Those times are most valued in my life.

# GAWU's presentation to the Government of Guyana on the future of GuySuCo



## Introduction

Sugar cultivation was first introduced into Guyana in the 1630s, and the scale of its planting expanded rapidly from the second half of the seventeenth century onward. In succeeding eras, the sugar industry in Guyana played the most important role in the economy<sup>1</sup>.

The sugar industry in Guyana is indelibly linked to our country. It has become a way of life for Guyana, and the industry is firmly implanted in our country and people. It has made many substantial contributions, which are noticeable in very many communities of our country. To this day, it is still playing a monumental role in developing our nation.

We, in the GAWU, recognize that the industry is the reason for our country's highly-cherished cultural diversity, and it cannot be detached from our proud heritage. Our habitation of the low-lying coastal belt is made possible by the network of canals, dykes, sea defences and water conservancies which were

built primarily for the sugar industry. Economically, the industry's contribution is probably most tangibly felt through the huge resources it has garnered and made available for nation-building.

In contemporary terms, the sugar industry still contributes approximately 5 per cent of GDP, provides direct employment for approximately 16,000 persons (in 2013), supports more than 300 service providers, and is the country's third largest contributor of foreign exchange. It also plays critical socio-economic and environmental role in the predominantly low-income coastal communities where cultivation and processing are concentrated.<sup>2</sup> Also, in view of the lack of other enterprises in sugar areas, entire communities are dependent on and revolve around, the functioning of this industry. The income multiplier plays an important role in sustaining communities and livelihoods

With those significant functions in mind, we are of the firm view that decisions concerning the

1 NDS(1996)

2 CDB (2014)



industry cannot be taken in a perfunctory manner, but, rather, with care and diligence. There should be comprehensive approach, taking all related and relevant factors into consideration, and great thought should precede any and all major decisions made in regard to sugar. Incorrect policy prescriptions can very well cause more harm than the intended good. Among the factors which need to be borne in mind are:-

1. Macroeconomic effects in terms of a reduction of aggregate demand and its spinoff effects;
2. The reduction in formal employment and its implications for the Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA) and the National Insurance Scheme (NIS); the effects can be debilitating, especially for the latter;
3. Reduction in workers' purchasing power and its impact on businesses and employment; and
4. The fact that a decline of economic activity can lead to increased criminality, a rise of suicides, greater destitution in the catchment areas, and other social ills – which will certainly require huge sums and great effort to remedy.

### **The challenges**

We acknowledge that, in recent years, the sugar industry and GuySuCo have been confronting various challenges, which have placed it in the sad state it now finds itself and which, no doubt, have influenced the Government's proposals at this time. In this regard, the GAWU notes that this is not the first time that the industry has faced challenging periods; and, like in the past, we believe that today's challenges are not insurmountable.

From our point of view, the industry's main constraint concerns its agricultural performance. In recent times, we have seen a decline in sugar production, a reduction of productivity, and consequently higher unit costs. We find it strange that GuySuCo has been cultivating canes for such a long period but has been unable to come to grips with its agricultural

problems. The science of cane cultivation is well known and established in our context, and hence our perplexity.

Consistently poor productivity since 2010 cannot be simply attributed solely to adverse weather, as average growing conditions have prevailed since 2009. It is apparent that the operating principles established for the preceding years may have been quickly forgotten.<sup>3</sup> To this end, we urge that those principles which are known to yield successful results be pursued. We also urge the adoption of the guidelines as spelt out by the Agricultural Improvement Programme (AIP), which sought to have cane yields similar to those which were obtained in the 2002-2004 period. Research also needs to be furthered with a view to improving existing practices towards increasing cane yields and sucrose content, and reducing costs.

High labour costs have also been a perennial complaint emanating from GuySuCo. But we cannot fail to recognize that the industry is still largely labour intensive due to historical layout, and therefore labour costs as a proportion of overall costs being significant are not unusual. GAWU notes that the employment cost has fallen from 64 per cent<sup>4</sup> of overall costs to about 56 per cent in 2015 (6 per cent accounting for management). We also recognize that higher land productivity lends to improved production and thus increased revenues, while average costs decline in the process. We draw attention to such factors as they serve to illustrate how valuable an improvement in agriculture is to GuySuCo.

The state of the industry gives rise to the obvious question of the capability of its managerial cadre. We hold that the managerial team has been solely lacking, and has shown an inability to grapple with the problems which have been plaguing the industry. It is not unusual to hear, among the workforce, questions as to whether the management is indeed acting in the best interests of the industry. A key ingredient to the industry's success is strong, capable, committed and motivated management. GuySuCo,

3 Sugar Col (2015)

4 GuySuCo (2002)



we believe, already has many of the elements critical to its success, but the glue (the management) to hold it together is in our view obviously lacking. At the same time, we hasten to acknowledge that, over the years, we knew and have worked with several capable managers at the various levels.

Variations in the price of sugar have also had an impact on the industry. We recognize that this situation would become more pronounced after removal of the beet sugar cap in the European Union (EU) later this year. On this score, we believe, that our proposals to diversify the industry's product base would serve to mitigate this challenge. The GAWU is also aware of efforts to have, among other things, the terms "Demerara Sugar" and "Demerara Molasses" registered as geographical indicators (GI) relative to Guyana. This direction offers the industry a good means to market its products with the well-known and generally accepted Demerara name, while benefitting from the protection it affords.

The GAWU believes that challenges will ever

be present in sugar, but our timely and correct response can help to mitigate and avert any serious consequences. We believe resolve has been lacking in our times but we nevertheless hold that the industry through our combined efforts, the ingenuity of its people, and the dedication of its workers can rise above the challenges and demonstrate its resilience, as it has done time and again.

#### **GuySuCo's plans, the Government's proposals – our views and thoughts**

Having received and considered the Government's proposals, we wish to share our views on the major decisions proposed:-

#### **Sale of Skeldon Estate**

The sale of the newest and most modern estate in the industry is promoted on the grounds that there is need for significant capital investment to ensure its optimal operation. While we are aware that there are some shortcomings at Skeldon the Corporation, over the years, has been steadily seeking to correct the defects, and we have been seeing improvements

in its performance. It was therefore not surprising that ready interest has been expressed by private investors, who have obviously surmised that with some tweaking it can be made profitable in a short period. The willingness and conclusions of the investors, in our view, undermines the credibility of the assertions made by the Corporation regarding the estate. We believe Skeldon holds great potential and can make a big impact in safeguarding the industry as a whole. We reiterate our proposals in this respect and urge all the relevant authorities to positively consider them.

### **Closure of Rose Hall and East Demerara Estates**

We remain strongly opposed to the closure of any estate, especially in the absence of any considered study to address the ramifications of such a decision. We are reminded that “[t]he effect of closing any estate without planning and adequate notice to cane farmers has serious consequences, not only for the employees and private farmers, but for the communities as well”.<sup>5</sup> Such justifications are further heightened, as the alternative ventures recommended for the already closed Wales Estate remain at a standstill and thousands are affected. Moreover, while closure is so far actively recommended, no study has been conducted at the concerned estates to determine the consequences of closure and the possible ventures, if any, to come on stream. Wales provides a yardstick of what to expect. We are still awaiting a holistic position on production, markets and sales, costs, distribution and other important factors related to Wales currently.

### **Non-sugar diversification**

Our Union posits that it must not be forgotten that some of the ideas advocated have been pursued by GuySuCo in the past. Between 1978 and 1993, the GuySuCo Other Crops Division was, among other things, engaged in the production of rice, cassava, legumes, fish, milk, butter, cheese, and the rearing of beef and dairy cattle. Those ventures came to an end after it was determined that they were not viable.

The re-activation of the GuySuCo Other Crops Division this time around is fundamentally different

from the last foray. Now workers will be charged with producing on former sugar lands; whereas, in the past, the ventures were fully controlled, operated and managed by GuySuCo. This shifts the inherent risks of these ventures from GuySuCo to the many poor worker-farmers. This, we think, is a massive challenge and a culture shock for many workers, who will be pushed to become farmers facing the promise of a future filled with real uncertainties and poor prospects for success. Moreover, so far, according to the report, no study or examination has been concluded to determine necessary arrangements regarding farmer participation in the ventures proposed. In fact, as far as we see, there hasn't been any consideration of the plot sizes, the crop mix, land suitability and the cost of production, the revenue potentiality vis-à-vis current and future sugar income, and other important considerations for such ventures, which will involve thousands of Guyanese. In addition, the report lacks details on conditions Government will create for workers to be attracted to farming.

On the specific ventures being suggested, our Union wishes to offer these brief comments:-

#### Rice

The 2017 Budget pointed out that rice production was expected to decline by 12.8 per cent last year and growth will be flat in 2017<sup>6</sup>. It is therefore puzzling that GuySuCo is increasing the supply of seed paddy when rice production is contracting. Separately, we have been advised that the venture has not moved very far at Wales, and no paddy has been planted at this time.

#### Livestock

We also have concern with this proposal. From data contained in the 2017 Budget, the livestock sector's contribution to GDP was expected to contract by 5.3 per cent in 2016<sup>7</sup>. The current performance of the industry obviously does not repose much confidence in its success. The assumptions with respect to the venture are also of concern. Here we call attention to an absence of thorough market research, except referencing macro data; the absence of clear details

5 Sugar Col (2015)

6 Ministry of Finance (2016)

7 Ministry of Finance (2016)



regarding the funding, storage and distribution channels; the willingness of intended workers to engage in such a venture; and the need for strong veterinary support, among other important considerations that are imperative to a successful operation.

#### Beef Cattle, Pigs, Sheep and Ducks

The report draws attention to the quantum of importation of these meats annually. It seems, from our point of view, that the imports are a result of the taste, preferences and demands of upper middle class and upper class Guyanese as well as foreigners. This, we believe, is an important factor that must be considered. Very little also has been said about the state of the respective industries being recommended. We did not find any data or information as to the level of production, the number of participants, their location, the willingness and ability to expand or improve quality, etc

These ventures, the report advises, also require a number of important prerequisites to be in place to ensure success. And we are unaware of the implementation of the various measures which are necessary. In terms of the financial assumptions, we must also express our concern in terms of pricing. In

our view, they seem high, taking account of current market prices.

#### Fruit Crops

Like previously touted ventures, very little is also said about the existing market and the current state of the activity in Guyana. It is assumed that most fruits would be processed into juices. Again, little is said about market demand, prices, quality standards, packaging, etc.

#### **Other important considerations**

We believe, too, that some other important matters need to be considered by our decision makers:-

#### Tastes and preferences

Our current economic system emphasizes the notion of consumer sovereignty, which in our view is not significantly addressed, and which, we believe, is a key ingredient to ensuring the success of the ventures being proposed.

#### Existing farmers

We reiterate that insufficient information has been provided about the state of the respective activities proposed. This is important, as expanding production cannot fail to take account of existing production.

The finding by the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) in 2016 that about thirty (30) per cent of food produced in Guyana is not consumed is also important. A more prudent approach to the ventures identified is to work with existing farmers and engage unemployed Guyanese. Our country has sufficient land to allow sugar and the proposed ventures to co-exist. Such an approach allows our country to reach full employment, and is a good basis around which small industrial enterprises could develop.

#### Competition from imports

Our Union notes that Guyana is a small, open economy and the country is party to various agreements which promote free trade. On that score, we cannot ignore the interests of large international firms, which could engage in “dumping” in an effort to counter our local products. This possibility needs serious attention, given the harsh economic realities linked to such corporations.

#### **Summing up on non-sugar diversification**

Our Union, having reviewed the documentation provided, is not convinced that the possibilities recommended are the best approach to take in the context of GuySuCo. Such apprehension is justified taking into account what we see as many important and essential considerations being absent from the analysis, as well as our previous experiences in the past. It is our belief that at this time more detailed studies and examinations are required to clearly establish that proposed non-sugar ventures are viable business alternatives to sugar, and will not contribute to unemployment. To close sugar estates and to venture into activities where there is still a great degree of uncertainty is, in our opinion, not a wise policy decision.

#### **GAWU’s views on safeguarding and promoting a sustainable sugar industry**

The Government has thus far been presented with three options regarding the industry – retaining the status-quo, complete privatization, and estate closure and transition into non-sugar ventures. Having considered the options, we strongly believe

that they are not in the interest of the industry, the people linked to its operation and the nation as a whole. Thus, to this end, we wish to offer a fourth option, which we believe will safeguard the industry and protect the well-being of the thousands who are dependent on its operation.

Our Union recognizes that the industry has very good potential to succeed in Guyana, and has many positive characteristics – such as an abundance of arable land, adequate labour, low cost cane transportation, inexpensive irrigation, sufficient fresh water, adequate factory capacity, know-how and technical expertise. These strong pillars, we believe, give our sugar industry a solid foundation and a head start relative to its Caribbean counterparts. Sustainability of the industry, we believe, rests with a paradigm shift from it being an inefficient producer of raw bulk sugar to an efficient producer of direct consumption sugars and other products. In addressing the challenges that confront the industry, we recognize that a multi-pronged approach is necessary to reduce costs and enhance revenues.

Our suggestions have taken account of previous work done by GuySuCo. Those ideas, we are aware, were comprehensively studied and examined by external agencies, and found to hold great value in securing the industry. We believe their value remains undiminished; however, we recognize that some updating to the studies may be required to reflect current day circumstances.

#### **Reducing cost**

We are aware that the industry is confronted by high operating costs and reduction is imperative to ensure competitiveness. Immediately, we urge that a comprehensive review of the various activities, from tillage to sugar and molasses’ delivery, should be conducted with a view to identify inefficiencies and wastage, and to come up with innovative ways to do things better along the entire production chain. The Corporation is fully aware of its cane production cost being the largest contributor to total production cost.

Energy, according to GuySuCo, accounts for 8



per cent of overall costs<sup>8</sup> (\$2.8B at 2015 levels). We are aware that an energy audit found that with investments of \$192M in the factories of Uitvlugt, Wales, Enmore, Blairmont, Rose Hall and Albion, savings of \$659M could be realized per annum<sup>9</sup>. We understand that Wales factory implemented a fraction of those measures, which yielded savings by reducing its diesel usage in 2014/2015. Another idea worth pursuing is having services departments offer their services to the open Guyanese market for a fee. The income generated can be used to offset their operating costs, thus reducing dependence on the industry.

The Sugar CoI report also affirmed the view that GuySuCo was not adhering to known and best agricultural practices. The industry should immediately return to those practices which have served it well, and thus contribute to promoting improved production and productivity and reducing average costs. Research is also a critical element in the cost-reduction drive, as is the adoption of best practices.

Mechanization of operations has been recognized as a significant plank in the industry's drive to reduce costs. On this matter, our Union has generally been

supportive of the process, in keeping with labour attrition. Sugar workers, on the other hand, have also welcomed this development, as it enhances their productivity and consequently their earnings. In 2014, the Corporation, in a presentation to the Economic Services Committee, pointed out that it would require \$14B to mechanise its operations, and that its cost savings would amount to over \$6B per annum (17 per cent of 2015 overall costs). Pursuing this path, we believe, is one way to allow the industry to become more efficient and cost-effective.

### **Increasing revenues through sugar diversification**

For the Guyana sugar industry to prosper, even under efficient management in the future, it is readily apparent that other income earning streams have to be added<sup>10</sup>. Our Union strongly subscribes to the position that the industry needs to transform itself from being a “sugar” industry to being a “sugar cane” industry. This strategy has been employed in many countries and has yielded much success, and the experiences of those countries can serve as a useful guide to us. Moreover, this has long been the strategy of GuySuCo, and various ventures have to this end been studied and examined.

Through our suggestions, the entire sugar cane plant will be utilized to widen the range of the industry's products thus adding a number of profitable revenue streams. Apart from transitioning the industry from a “sugar” industry to a “sugar cane” industry, a sustained modernization programme, taking into account the adoption of realistic ventures, and using sugar products, must be formulated.

- **Cogeneration**

In our view, the main contributor to added-value to sustain the sugar industry in the long term will be co-generation<sup>11</sup>. The lone co-generation plant at Skeldon, in spite of its short comings, has great value. The CoI recommended that the Skeldon Co-Generation Units be returned to GuySuCo, and a reasonable Power Purchase Agreement

8 GuySuCo presentation to Economic Services Committee – January, 2016

9 TERI (2013)

10 Sugar CoI (2015)

11 Sugar CoI (2015)

(PPA) be negotiated with GPL, a view to which we also subscribe. Skeldon Energy Incorporated (SEI), in a recent interaction with our Union, advised that in 2016 it had some US\$45M (G\$9.45B) in energy sales to the Guyana Power and Light Inc (GPL) and Skeldon Estate from its diesel and steam units.

At this time, we are aware that co-generation feasibility studies are ongoing at Albion and Uitvlugt estates. Previously, feasibility studies advised that co-generation was found to be profitable at Blairmont and Enmore estates. A co-generation plant at Albion is expected to cost about G\$7B<sup>12</sup> and with rates similar to those enjoyed by SEI, the investment is very lucrative at the estates where the operation is feasible. We understand that Albion often dumps excess bagasse in open spaces, and resorts to burning as a means of disposal.

- **Refined White Sugar**

There exists a ready market in CARICOM for a total of 200,000 metric tonnes of refined sugar<sup>13</sup>. With improved production levels reaching 331,000 tonnes in 2025<sup>14</sup>, GuySuCo would be able to satisfy this market, for which the Corporation would receive in excess of US30 c/lb<sup>15</sup>. Our research informed us that a 180,000-tonne sugar refinery at Skeldon was found to have an Internal Rate of Return of 28.8 per cent<sup>16</sup> when a price of US23 c/lb<sup>17</sup> was expected.

Higher prices in contemporary times only serve to add to the project's feasibility. The recent indication, through press reports, that an Indian investor is willing to take over Skeldon operations with a view, among other

things, to establishing a refinery serves to remind us of the significant sums that can be earned in this venture.

- **Direct Consumption Brown Sugar**

We are aware, at this time, that GuySuCo is capable of packaging 50,000 tonnes<sup>18</sup> of sugar per annum from its Blairmont and Enmore packaging plants. The price received for this type of sugar is approximately US33 c/lb<sup>19</sup>, and represents the Corporation's highest return. GAWU strongly supports the maximization of GuySuCo's existing capacity, along with further expansion in this regard given the profitability of product lines. The opportunities for emergence of new product brands are numerous. Critical to this venture is the need for a robust product development and a marketing programme with clear vision and focus. North American and European markets ought to be pursued with energy. Efforts on the Geographical Indicator will boost marketing of branded products.

- **Bulk Alcohol**

The production of bulk alcohol is also another viable business venture, and another distillery in our country could be established next to a sugar factory. We are aware that a feasibility study was conducted for a distillery at Albion, and the results should be further analyzed to determine viability.

- **Fuel Alcohol**

The majority of GuySuCo's molasses was shipped to the 'Other Island' and Barbados, with DDL placing a significant third<sup>20</sup>. Fuel alcohol production from molasses is also another opportunity to enhance revenues and reduce imports. An ECLAC study in 2006

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12 Diversification Options for GuySuCo (2016)

13 Sugar CoI (2015)

14 GuySuCo (2016)

15 Sugar CoI (2015)

16 GuySuCo (2007)

17 Extrapolated from GuySuCo data

18 Sugar CoI (2015)

19 Sugar CoI (2015)

20 Sugar CoI (2015)

pointed out that 50,000 tonnes of molasses per annum was sufficient to meet a 90/10 fuel/ethanol mix. It is an area that requires further examination and consideration, and shouldn't be outside the realm of possible ideas to 'save' the industry.

- **Direct Consumption Dark Brown Sugar**  
The Corporation should examine the sale and production of a darker form of brown sugar. In North America, similar sugar is being marketed as a form of health food. Marketing is once again a critical factor to success.
- **Direct Consumption Molasses**  
The short-lived sale of bottled molasses as a health food was encouraging. GuySuCo must more seriously examine the possibility of selling (and exporting) molasses in small (400 – 500ml) bottles, with necessary promotion<sup>21</sup>. The difficulties encountered with this venture could be attributed to GuySuCo outsourcing pasteurization and bottling of this product. This challenge and additional production cost can easily be addressed through installation of the Corporation's own operation, based on market studies for volumes.
- **Other Commodities**  
Sugar cane has been successfully used to produce animal feed, pharmaceuticals, paper, etc. Such ventures have been undertaken in Cuba, and an examination should be pursued; and if feasible, could be implemented in the medium term. Carbon dioxide, a by-product of fermentation, can be trapped, washed and compressed into dry-ice, which is used for freezing. Vinasse, a by-product from distillation, is rich in fertilizer elements, and can be returned to the cane fields as fertilizer.

## Financing

The availability of finance to fund capital works is an important element in improving the industry's

performance. GuySuCo has advised that G\$45B<sup>22</sup> was required for capital expenditure in the period leading up to 2020. We believe this figure is heavily exaggerated, and requires close and careful examination. The Sugar CoI advised us that critical factory capital expenditure for 2016 – 2020 was G\$8.1B whereas critical agricultural capital expenditure between 2016 and 2018 was G\$5.6B (including \$1.4B provided by a Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) loan), a grand total of G\$13.7B, or 30 per cent of the Corporation's figure. Here we must express our strong consternation and disbelief that the Corporation has chosen to reject the CDB-funded Sugar Industry Mechanisation Project Loan. We find the Corporation's given rationale to be spurious, especially since the factors referred to by GuySuCo would have been considered, both by the CDB in their assessment as well as by the Sugar CoI. Given the obvious benefit of mechanization to the industry's future, our alarm is not unfounded.

The Corporation also, with regularity, calls attention to its indebtedness. We have examined the data shared with us on December 31, 2016 as at the end of October, 2016, and wish to make the following points:-

- At the end of October, 2016, short-term debt totalled G\$17.16B, and this represent the Corporation's immediately payable debt;
- At the end of December, 2016, ceteris-paribus, the Corporation's indebtedness of approximately G\$4B to the NCB (Jamaica) would have been settled, further reducing its indebtedness
- Of the short-term debt, G\$7.6B (44 per cent) were owed to a Government agency – Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA)
- The loans relating to the Skeldon project were being serviced by the Government, and are included in the figures contained in the Government's Debt Report
- The realisability of the Pension Liability (G\$32.8B), which is about 41 per cent of total debt, is very questionable in view of the high turnover and the mortality of pensioners

<sup>21</sup> Sugar CoI (2015)

<sup>22</sup> GuySuCo (2016)



The Corporation, according to documents shared, is envisaging selling lands in the sum of G\$35.9B between 2017 and 2020. Such sums, together with some support from the Government, would allow the Corporation to settle its short-term indebtedness, finance its critical capital expenditure, and increase working capital. The income realized on this front can also partially assist in the financing of the modernization programme along the lines we have suggested. The programme, we wish to suggest, could also be realized with injection of private capital through joint venture projects as well as concessional loans.

### **Government support**

We envisage that in the short term the industry would be dependent on Government support, as it seeks to correct its shortcomings and embark on its modernization programme. We wish to point out that Government support in GuySuCo's context is not unique. In fact, our research advises us that all sugar industries throughout the world, in one way or another, benefit from some form of State support. Such assistance takes account of the broader social and economic implications, and not the narrow financial parameters GuySuCo has shared. We surmise that to assess the industry solely on finance can lead us down a perilous path, as it fails to take into account the very important notion of opportunity cost, among other things.

In our case, we believe the CDB in 2014 aptly put the situation in perspective when it said:- *"... it is economically viable for GOGY to continue subsidising and protecting the cultivation and harvesting of sugar cane and processing of sugar for export and local consumption."* The CDB further said:- *"Projects and programmes that enhance sugar cane cultivation and sugar manufacturing have the potential to earn foreign exchange, but may not be always financially profitable. Consequently, given the importance of foreign exchange to the economy, such operations may, at times, need government's protection and/or support in meeting operating and capital costs"*.

We also recall that the industry in the past provided

massive support to the nation in the form of sugar levy, which amounts to about G\$70B in 2015 dollars. That aside, the industry provided other support, some of which continues on to now, such as drainage and irrigation and health services. Moreover, private owners, as we see from the Memorandum of Understanding with D. Rampersaud of Trinidad and Tobago, will require significant fiscal incentives in the form of tax breaks, duty exemptions, etc, and this cannot be forgotten in the overall contribution.

### **Privatisation**

The notion of privatization, which was featured prominently in the Sugar CoI Report and was recommended by GuySuCo, in the case of Skeldon, we do not believe is in the interest of us all. We do not share the expressed view that privatization is the panacea to woes we are currently facing. Moreover, with private owners being driven by profits over people, there is no guarantee or assurance that cane cultivation and sugar processing will continue to take place. Neither is there any guarantee that the thousands of workers will have their gains respected; or, for that matter, there will be improvement in their working conditions and lives.

The experience of Jamaica must be taken into account. Recently, privatized sugar estates owned by a Chinese company became idle after the investors withdrew, forcing the Government to intervene to operate one of the factories there. This experience is instructive, we believe. We are aware that privatization is promoted on the ground that the industry would need a large injection of capital, which maybe the Government can ill-afford. Our Union is not taken in by this reasoning, as it does not take a number of critical factors into account. For example, significant foreign exchange earnings will be repatriated by the overseas based owners, which can result in an aggravation of the economic challenges we face. We recall that then Prime Minister Forbes Burnham, in advancing the case for nationalization, pointed to the repatriation of profits by the then owners, and the lack of investment. Moreover, the private owners would be able to benefit from the number of positive potentialities we have herein identified.

### **Whither a Socio-Economic study**

The sugar industry's importance has remained undiminished, and it is generally accepted that its importance has grown to encompass wider social and economic functions. Given its wide scope, decisions cannot be made in a slipshod manner, as the consequences and repercussions can be serious, if not disastrous, for our people and nation. In view of the obvious, the necessity for a socio-economic study cannot be overemphasized. Such studies are an indispensable tool to policymakers in arriving at sound and well-thought-out decisions which are in the interest of the people. We urge, as we have done before, that the Government positively considers pursuing such a study, especially in view of the ramifications of the proposals that are being floated.

### **Conclusion**

At this stage of our country's development, there are no other developed/developing industries that can readily and easily absorb sugar's large workforce, more so with similar work conditions. We hold that the furthering of farming, while seemingly good on paper, still requires more study and examination, and implementation in a proper and pragmatic way. This is still some time off, and can well be pursued on the vast expanses of available land in our country. It can safely be said that closure and sell out of this industry can very well see many ordinary working Guyanese being pushed on to the breadline, with little hope for the future and increasing desperation to survive.

Such a situation is not in the interest of our country, the Government and most of all our people. For the NIS, the situation can become troubling, as many of the redundant workers would have already qualified for pensions when the contributor base would be shrinking. The contagion in the banking sector is another serious consequence that must be borne in mind, as many workers have been able to secure mortgages and other loans and may be unable to service those debts. The reduction in income also has deleterious effects for the commercial sector and all in all Government's revenues and employment in our country would be reduced. Another most significant effect we see is the societal issues that

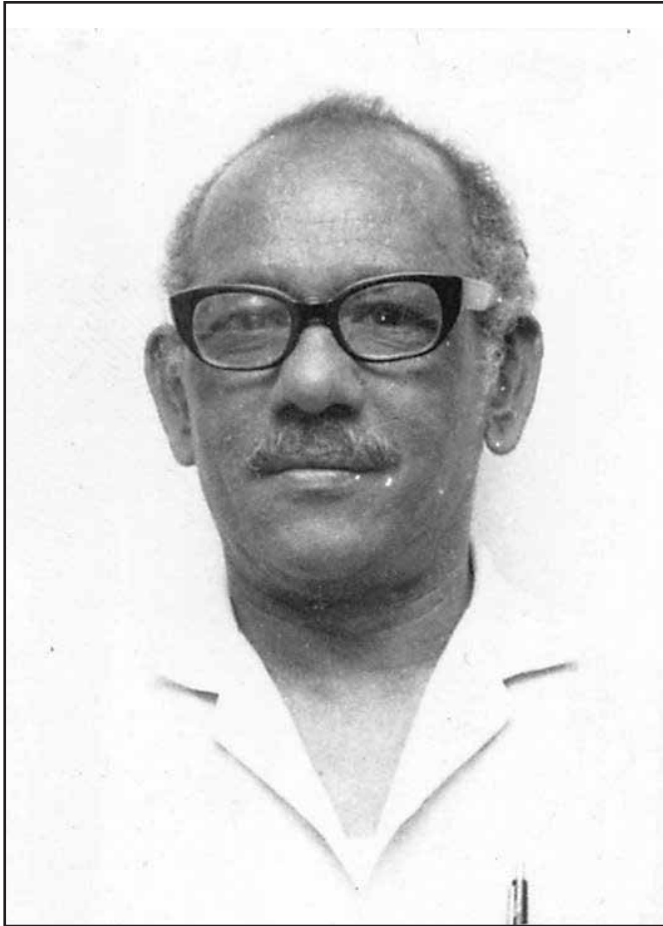
would emerge in the form of criminality, destitution, suicides, divorces and other such ills. The education of workers' children could also be affected, and this does not augur well for our future development. These repercussions, among the myriad that would emerge, would require many billions of dollars to correct and remedy.

GAWU believes that sugar, albeit with a change in its outlook, has a successful future. The proposals we have suggested have taken account of work already done by GuySuCo, and are the right step to secure the industry for the future. The production of higher-value income inelastic goods assures of a stable income and markets for the industry's new products. Moreover, they are aligned with the Government's Green Economy thrust, and improve exports while reducing imports, thus enhancing our Balance of Payments' position.

We hold the view that the Government of Guyana, the management of GuySuCo, and the Trade Unions and the workers are all key stakeholders with a common objective for the Industry's economic viability. We strongly believe our joint efforts can return viability to the industry.

# Birth Centenary

## BOYSIE RAMKARRAN (1919-2019)



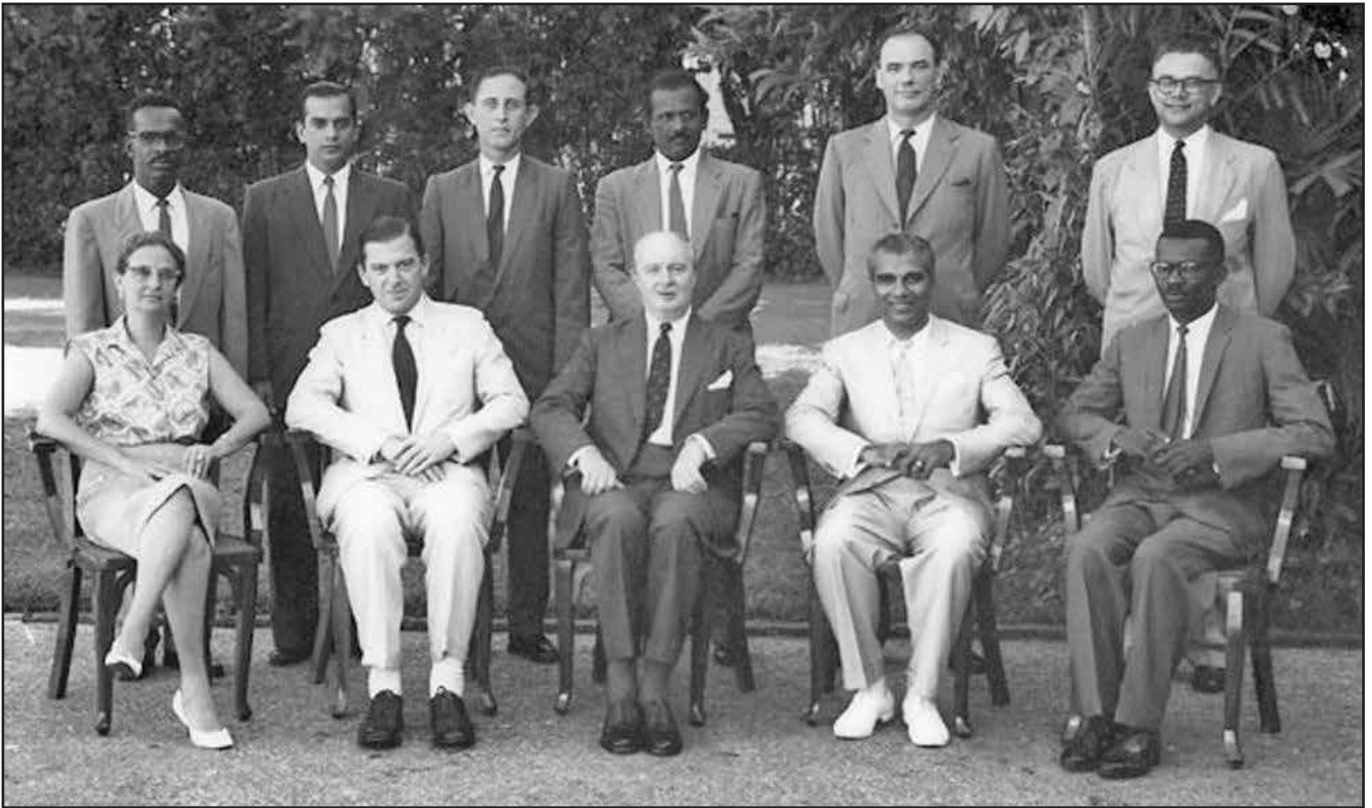
The 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Boysie Ramkarran's birth is on 22 April 2019. He was one of thirteen children, only six of whom survived to adulthood. He was born in Plantation Bel Air, then just outside of Georgetown on the east coast, now part of Greater Georgetown and his name was registered as Karan. Boysie and Ram were added later. Little is known of the history of Bel Air as a sugar estate, but Ramkarran's great grandfather, Beny, and great grandmother, Birmee, and their two children, were contracted ('bound') to Plantation Bel Air on the 19 January, 1875, shortly after they arrived from India. Ramkarran's grandfather, Haripersaud, and five of his children, including Ramkarran's father, Ramlall, remained in Bel Air. He married Surujpati Ramkarran, also born in Bel Air to a modest farming family, in 1942. There are three surviving children. Ramkarran's wife played a major, supporting role in his political life, especially in caring for the children during his extensive

absences, keeping the family together in the difficult times and dealing with the constant stream of political visitors.

By the time of Ramkarran's birth, Bel Air had become a small agricultural community of mainly subsistence cattle owners and small farmers. From sometime in the 1950s, modest employment was provided by the Bookers Dairy, which operated a large cattle farm, until the 1970s. The African Guyanese population of Bel Air worked in the city in laboring or service jobs.

Ramkarran's father, like his father before him, had been a cattle farmer whose flock never exceeded more than a dozen at any one time. Ramkarran, the eldest child, was born in this poor but typical family and community, without electricity, running water, roads, or a school, but was the first in Bel Air and the only one of Ramlall's children, to have completed primary and attended secondary school – Modern High School. In 1937 at the age of eighteen he commenced work at the Transport and Harbours Department (T&HD) where he remained until 1953, ending his service as a booking clerk, but serving as a train conductor for many years during which he became widely known on the East Coast, an important factor in his support for and the success of Cheddi Jagan when he contested and won a seat to the Legislative Council in the 1947 elections. He resigned from T&HD in 1953 to contest the West Central Demerara constituency in the first elections under universal adult suffrage, as a candidate for the Peoples' Progressive Party. He won and was elected as a member of the Legislative Council. Three months later the constitution was suspended, British troops landed and he and the elected PPP Government were out of office.

The sixteen years Ramkarran spent at the T&HD were his most formative and shaped the remainder of his life. T&HD was, during the period, the single largest department of government and employed the single largest number of people. After a history of struggle by working people in British Guiana, the British Guiana Labour Union (BGLU) was established among dockworkers in 1919 by Hubert Nathaniel Critchlow. It influenced trade union activity in the colony, including the formation of the Transport Workers Union (TWU) in 1938. Ramkarran became a founding member and eventually served on the executive committee.



In the ensuing period, during which the TWU overtook the BGLU as the largest and most militant trade union in the colony, the TWU called what became known to history as the Teare Strike in February, 1948. The strike protested the dictatorial behavior of the British general manager, Col. Teare, the final straw of which was the suspension two employees. It lasted for three weeks and shut down the entire colony. A great victory was achieved when the suspension was withdrawn and the colonial government agreed not to renew the contract of the general manager upon its expiration. T&HD workers, flush with victory, rendered much needed solidarity to sugar workers in their June 1948 Enmore strike and the succeeding protests, after five of them were shot and killed by colonial police. They are now celebrated as the Enmore Martyrs. Workers also formed the urban base of the PPP and supplied many of its militants between 1950, when it was established and the split led by Forbes Burnham in 1955.

During his time at T&HD, Ramkarran became heavily influenced by working class struggle for better conditions and against oppressive employer conduct. At the same time, he was introduced to anti-colonial and left wing politics by Frank Van Sertima, a fellow employee of the T&HD and the eventual manager of the Georgetown Stelling. Frank Van Sertima was a unique personality. He was a member of the white/coloured middle class and had attended Queen's College. In colonial British Guiana, had he followed the customary loyalty of his ethnic group to the colonial authorities, he would have

been expected to rise to the top rungs of the T&HD or some other government department. Unusual for a person of his ethnicity, like Jocelyn Hubbard from the same ethnic group who, with the Jagans and Ashton Chase, was a founding member of the Political Affairs Committee (PAC), he somehow fell under the influence of the world wide anti-colonial struggle, which led him to develop an interest in trade unionism and left wing politics. He gathered around him many young workers of T&HD, to whom he was seen as a mentor, and to whom he inculcated his political views and circulated pamphlets promoting trade union and left wing and anti-colonial political activism. They were much influenced by the British Labour Party, but the Soviet Union was also popular.

Ramkarran was Van Sertima's most successful student. He influenced Ramkarran to join the Political Affairs Committee (PAC) in 1947, a few months after it was established. While the PAC had no formal structure, Ramkarran belonged to the group that met in Kitty and he acted as the chair of that group. At around this period he played an influential but unpublicized role in persuading Cheddi Jagan to contest a seat in the 1947 elections. He did so by personal interventions and led a delegation of East Coast community leaders to persuade him. By the time the Peoples' Progressive Party was formed on 1 January 1950 he had surpassed his mentor and established himself sufficiently to be elected to the executive committee of the party and as its treasurer,

a position he held until the post was abolished in early 1970s when the PPP changed its structure. Van Sertima was a candidate for the PPP in the 1953 elections but was unsuccessful. His health declined thereafter and so did his engagement in politics. He was the father of Guyana's well known historian, Ivan Van Sertima.

The suspension of the constitution in 1953 was very traumatic for Ramkarran's immediate and extended family. He was living in the family home with his immediate family, father and four brothers and sisters, all of whom he helped to maintain. After the constitution was suspended in October 1953, he became unemployed, his movements were restricted to between Kitty and Sparendam and he was required to report to the Kitty Police Station before 9 am every morning. The harassment was intensive and included police searches of his home.

The PPP decided that its leaders must violate the emergency regulations put in place by the colonial government after the constitution was suspended, to put pressure on the colonial authorities and mobilise support against the suspension. On the excuse of an injured foot, Ramkarran did not report to the Kitty police station one morning in March, 1954. The police came for him the same day. He was charged, found guilty and imprisoned for four months, which he spent at the Georgetown prison in Camp Street and in the Mazaruni prison. Cheddi and Janet Jagan, and several other PPP leaders were imprisoned by following the party decision and violating the emergency regulations. Among those who declined to defy the British was Forbes Burnham.

This period was the worst for the Ramkarran family. He had no income, could not obtain employment because he was restricted and after he came out of prison he was regarded, not merely as a convict but worse, a political convict. Eventually in 1955, he secured permission to be outside the restricted area of Kitty/Sparendam between 7 am and 5 pm to seek employment. He was employed by Edward B. Beharry and Co Ltd (Edward Beharry had been a colleague at T&HD) for a short while until he purchased a business in Stabroek Market, from the proceeds of a small house he had owned in Bel Air, in which he had intended to move with his family. He sold his business in 1957 after the PPP won the general elections of that year and he won the Demerara-Essequibo constituency.

He was appointed as Minister of Communications and Works in the PPP Government of 1957-1961. Ramkarran's term of office in this important ministry was very successful. There was a vast expansion of steamer and ferry services and expansion of roads in general and paved roads, in particular, despite the limited funds that were available. In 1961, he won the Mahaica constituency and was appointed to the Ministry of works and Hydraulics in the 1961-1964 Government. The communications portion was made into a separate

ministry. One of his more notable tasks in this period was to manage the supply and distribution of scarce goods and services during the 1962 emergency period when fuel and other commodities were in extremely short supply and bombs were going off on the wharves to intimidate the countries which sent vessels with goods to British Guiana, mainly Cuba. Despite these difficult times, major infrastructural and drainage works were initiated which still contribute in material ways to Guyana's economy. These include the MMA-ADA scheme, the Tapacuma project and many roads and drainage works.

The years of violence and upheaval from 1962 culminating in the removal of the PPP from office in 1964 had left the party battered and broken. It required a great deal of effort to rebuild its strength and restore the confidence of members and supporters. Ramkarran plunged into this effort and was a leader in this drive, traversing the entire country, speaking at hundreds of meetings and party groups. After just over a decade, during which he also served at Gimpex and the Michael Forde Bookshop, he returned to his original calling, that of a trade unionist, when he was appointed General Secretary of the Guyana Agricultural and General Workers Union (GAWU) in 1974.

This was an extremely critical position and at that time, perhaps the second most important to that of General Secretary of the PPP which, of course, was held by Cheddi Jagan. Sugar workers were then the most militant and influential supporters of the PPP, comprising about 20,000 workers supporting about 100,000 persons. Apart from those factors the sugar industry was a major source of foreign exchange. Industrial relations stability was vital for the economy which was struggling. More important, however, during the period of the 1970s and 1980s, GAWU was at the forefront in the struggle in Guyana for the trade union and economic rights and immediately behind the PPP, to which it gave muscle, in its struggle for political rights of the Guyanese people.

After decades of struggle, GAWU was eventually recognized as the official bargaining agent for sugar workers in 1976 after the historic 135-day strike for recognition which Ramkarran led, following the approximately 100-day strike in the earlier crop, which was 'adjourned' to be continued. As an officially recognized trade union, GAWU was admitted to the Trades Union Congress (TUC) which had a constitution designed to minimize the representation and influence of a large union like GAWU and maximize the influence of small unions, which were mostly aligned to the Peoples' National Congress (PNC) Government.

A new era of trade union, economic and political struggle in Guyana had begun. GAWU's membership of the executive of the TUC enabled it to influence TUC policy to resist austerity, particularly in wages and salaries,

legal restrictions on increments in wages and salaries, and to struggle against a deteriorating economy, rigged elections, the erosion of democracy, restrictions on the freedom of expression and authoritarian rule. GAWU was able to obtain TUC intervention with the Government in strikes which it called during its many acts of industrial struggle. Its presence in the TUC also enabled it to make alliances with other trade unions. As industrial activity and political unrest increased to counter economic difficulties and authoritarian practices, GAWU's presence in the TUC was an important influence in nudging the TUC's towards its modest resistance.

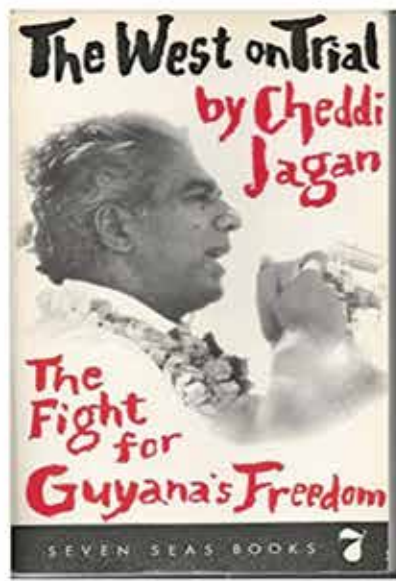
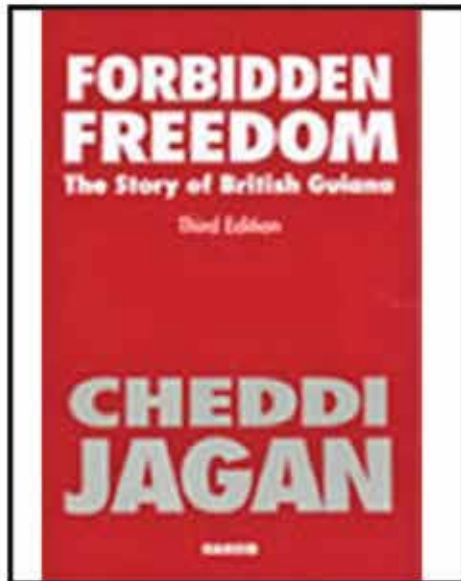
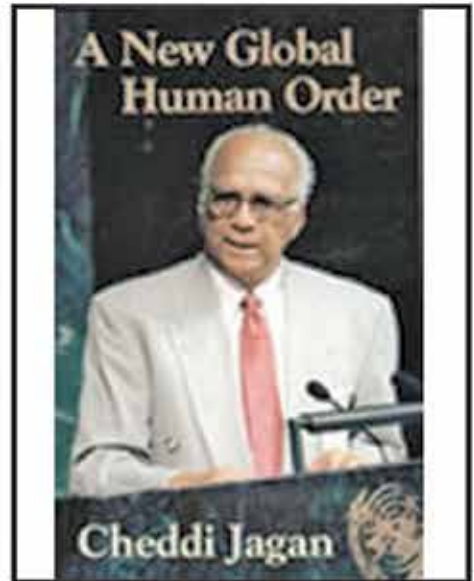
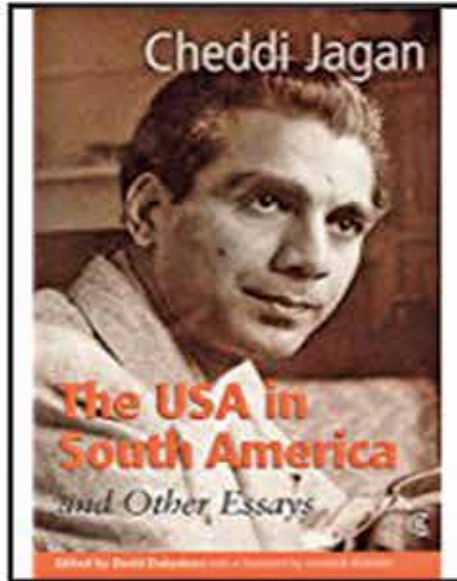
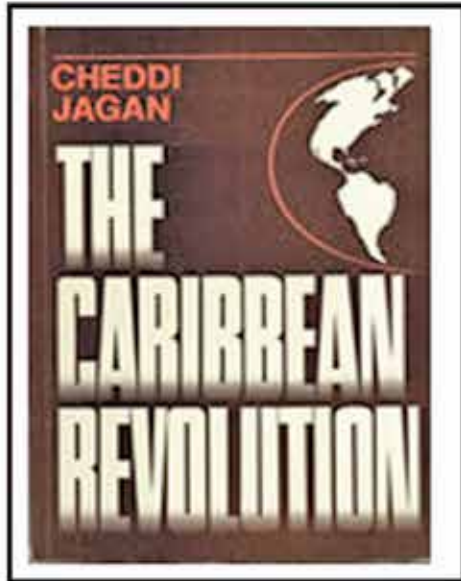
Ramkarran was able to rely on the numerous interventions of Joseph Pollydore, who he had known since the 1940s. Pollydore's mother union was the TWU and Ramkarran had served under him when he was general secretary of that union in the 1940s. Pollydore played a critical role in resolving purely industrial disputes between GAWU and Guysuco and shielding GAWU from even worse repression than it had to endure, although he couldn't protect it from hundreds of arrests, fictitious charges, police beatings and intimidation, strike breaking and other similar, intimidatory, activities every time there was a strike. The alliances it built with other trade unions enabled it to take solidarity strike action, especially with bauxite workers. These were contributory factors to the growing upsurge of the struggle against rigged elections and authoritarian rule in Guyana. The most productive contribution of sugar workers and their families to the struggle for a free Guyana took place during the decade of 1975 -1985, when Ramkarran served as General Secretary. He retired in 1985.

Ramkarran served as a legislator for three months in 1953, then from 1957 to 1985. He was in the Legislative Council for three months in 1953, then in the Legislative Assembly from 1957 to 1966 and in the National Assembly from 1966 to 1985. For seven of those years, 1957 to 1964, he was a Minister of Government. While he served as Minister, he acted on occasion as Premier in the absence of Cheddi Jagan.

His parliamentary career in opposition was marked by his service as Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee and Deputy Speaker at different times. His contributions to debates were characterized by criticisms that were sharp, fearless and displayed his wide experience in government and politics. His fierce defence of workers' rights and the disadvantaged, and his attacks on the erosion of democracy, rigging of elections, the creeping police state and authoritarian rule were unrelenting. He was a parliamentarian of stature who was well respected on both sides of the aisle. He was listened to with respectful attention, partially because he always advocated a measured approach on issues and consensus with opponents, and partially from fear of his devastating wit and repartee, for which he was well known and which

was enjoyed by both sides of the House.

Although regarded as a loyalist, he had many major disagreements with the leadership, both in government and in opposition, which were not known outside the PPP. On several occasions, he threatened to resign from the Government and on two occasions he withdrew altogether from political life, once for as much as four years in the late 1960s to the early 1970s. But there was always a reconciliation of sorts. Ramkarran never forgot that he was serving a higher purpose, the working people of Guyana and their freedom. He returned time and again to the PPP, the vehicle that he helped to create, to fight for the ideals he believed in, setting aside grievances. He was a popular figure on the east coast, where he was well known from his train conducting days, and a revered figure in the multi-ethnic Bel Air community of his time and among the largely African Guyanese transport workers during his and their lifetimes. After he left active trade union and political work in 1985, he continued to give service as a member of the Public Service Commission on which he served for several years, until his passing on 24 July, 1990.



The Cheddi Jagan Research Centre is dedicated to making available to the Guyanese and international communities the Legacy and Work of the Late President of Guyana Dr. Cheddi Jagan through research and education. The Centre is a non-governmental, non-profit organisation located at the Red House. (picture below)



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