Claude Christian - An Example for All

by Janet Jagan

When we examine Claude Christian’s life and his contribution to our movement, we see it as a guide to our members, for in few others do we find such qualities.

Comrade Christian wanted nothing for himself – neither position, money, power. When he worked – and few have ever worked as hard – he worked for the Party, not for himself. We who have worked with him at Freedom House knew him to work at times from 6 a.m. to midnight, with a bun and sweet drink his only food for the day. When he went on money raising tours throughout the countryside, he was prodigious in his physical endurance. He would drive others to work as hard as him, to be as disciplined and selfless as himself.

He demanded a lot from others, but he did not sit at a desk and make the demands; he showed them how to work and always set the pace. He made our comrades give of their best. I can remember one occasion when there were a lot of items to be removed from Freedom House – heavy items like benches and tables. Some of our comrades at Freedom House, who were responsible for this activity, sat around and left the moving to others. Claude was furious at their laziness or refusal to do manual work. He quarrelled with them, then took off his shirt and began hauling the benches on his back. They soon were ashamed and helped in the work. This is one of the lessons he taught us all – no one is too high and mighty to do any work, no matter what it may be.

Self discipline and discipline for others was his belief and those with whom he worked had to learn discipline. No more coming to work when one pleased, no more half measures in doing a task, no more forgetting assignments or responsibilities. During the two periods of Comrade Christian’s management of Freedom House, he established a high standard of efficiency and dedication to work.

As the Party Chairman said, “Claude shaped the Party’s finances.” This is very true, for it is to Claude that the Party can be grateful for its buoyant financial position. Prior to his management, funds were so scarce that normal payments could not be met. But with his tremendous drive and his wealth of ideas, he soon lifted the financial gloom. Fund raising drives which at one time flopped, under his management brought surprising results. Dances, barbecues, fairs, were not only fun for everyone, but were smashing financial successes. His contribution to our Congress meetings, our educational seminars, our women’s congresses, etc., was sweat and good organisation. He could never be persuaded to receive the thanks, the garlands, the bouquets – he wanted none of that. He was pleased and happy when things went smoothly and his reward was to see that there were no complaints, no criticisms and that everyone was satisfied with how things went.

A look at the books Claude had in his library reveals the man. He believed in socialism. He read books on the subject and although he never considered himself very learned on the subject, he quietly read and quietly digested what he read. He was an anti-imperialist to the bone. No one was more disappointed than Claude when the London conference last year failed to set a date for the country’s independence.
One of Claude's failings was his utter disregard for himself. When his health started failing about three years ago, he had to be forced to visit a doctor. When the doctor advised hospitalisation, he refused, and again pressure had to be put on him to enter a hospital. Even on the last occasion, when he was lying weak in his bed, he insisted that he would leave the hospital in a few days.

While some were fighting to be candidates at elections, officers of the party or to achieve ministerial rank, Claude spurned these honours. He flatly refused to be a candidate at the last general elections and firmly stated that he would make a better contribution to the Party by remaining as office manager.

At the last Party elections he declined nomination to one of the officers’ posts. He had to be virtually forced to become a Minister, always declaring that he wanted no honours—he just wanted to keep the Party organisation and finances in good shape. Money, too, had no real attractions for Claude. Whatever the Party could afford to pay was satisfactory to him.

As a human being, a comrade, a friend, Comrade Claude was all things to all men. Few could dislike this full-blooded, warm-hearted, fun-loving giant of a man who endeared himself to all those with whom he worked, even those who did not agree with his politics. He was a great success as a Minister. When the Leader of the Opposition at the London Conference, 1962, made a scurrilous remark about the type of Ministers the PPP was choosing, and referred directly to Claude, a high Government official curtly remarked that the Minister of Home Affairs was by far one of the most capable men he had known.

Claude was rough and tough when his orders were not obeyed or when he felt an injustice was being done. He could shout and curse with the best, but when he was finished, he carried no malice to the wrong-doer, the incompetent or the one who miscarried his directions. He was a humble man, and knew no false pride. If he was wrong, he admitted it; he was not afraid of criticism, nor was he afraid to criticise the highest if it was necessary.

In short, Comrade Christian brought discipline, efficiency and organisation to the Party. He personally set a high standard by his own devotion to duty, respect for his seniors, absolute honesty, and his love of Party and country. He was a reliable and trusted comrade, a man of good humour and amazing generosity. He set the pace for many to follow. We need more men of Claude Christian’s calibre in the movement. His contribution will never be forgotten.

(Thunder, June 1963)

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**COMRADE CLAUDE -- AN EXAMPLE FOR ALL**

**By JANET JAGAN**

When we examine Claude Christian's life and his contribution to our movement, we see it as a guide to our members. He wanted nothing for himself -- neither wealth nor power. But he worked and -- and in the end the Party did not forget him. We who have worked with him at Freedom House knew him at work at 4 a.m., at midnight, as a hard worker and a hard drinker. On the day he went on money for the British Library in London, if you talked to him, he was passionate in his personal relationship; a man whose words were so strong, to his beliefs to work as hard as he was, to his independence and self-control in all things.

He demanded a lot from those in the movement. He never stopped at the call and made the demands of the organisation. His work and always set the pace. He made our commitment give our best and we can remember one occasion when there were a lot of orders to be reformed from Freedom House. Claude was among the last to arrive, he was the last to leave. In the end, he had a number of men working with him. He took off his shirt and inquired about the working of the men. They soon were working as ordered by him. He was like that throughout the movement.

*Life for Comrade Claude was not all work and no play.* He had an amusing good sense of humor. Everyone remembers the photograph of Claude and comrade Sherrin who was taken at the dinner in honour of the Premier, shortly after the 1961 elections. The two were eloquently changing jokes.

**TRIBUTES**

Campbellville, Thursday, 1977:

Comrade Claude was a very dedicated worker in our movement and was instrumental in achieving socialist and independence for St. Lucia. We regret that death prevented him from seeing these realities. This contribution he will always be remembered for.

Comrades Mrs. FPP, Mr. and Madame R. B. "We must pledge ourselves that his death shall not be in vain in our lives."

W.D.B. "On behalf of the 381 million young people, members of the FPP. Claude was a very important leader in the struggle against capitalism and imperialism in the world today."

Canal No. 2, Fisher, FPP: "We know that our country has lost one of its outstanding and a movement member of the Party. We deeply regret that the last burial rites could not be conducted in memory of such a great man. We stand in the memory of our fallen comrades and comrades Claude Christian. We all realize the great role he played in our movement. May God bless his soul!"

Senior Comrade of Commerce: "Our condolences are fully based on the Movement of one who was our able ally and precursor to his immediate family but also a figure among the people in our country today."

**GAYA Tzikay:** A Pen to the soul, there were many startling incidents he witnessed. He was honest. He was dedicated as he was worthy.

Dr. Claude Jagan: "The death of Claude Christian has left a very significant loss to his community and of one of our friends. It is a heavy blow and we congratulate all the people of new Gayat and large community of the life of Claude Christian."

P.T.O. - Claude Christian was a man of the people, and as he rose to higher heights of national service, he never lost contact with those he served. He died young, but few men have succeeded in so short a time as to make a name for him. We regret his death and hope that he will be remembered as such a great human."

**In 1957 Claude went to Canada where he remained until the Party requested him to return in 1960. His three years in Canada were dedicated in his library and allowing him the opportunity for formal study.**

Comrade Claude helped the Party clear its mortgage on Freedom House. He went there without taking the time to pay off the General Secretary in 1961.

**Comrade Claude with the skill of a giant of a man he was chosen to stand for the Prime Minister spot to become Minister of Home Affairs in 1957.**

Claude was a great man and his death has left behind a great example for all to follow.