

Janet Jagan Centenary – A Reflection by Eddie Rodney

100 years ago, when the world capitalist system continued to experience crises aggravated by the so-called Great War (1914-1918), particularly in terms of Wall Street share price fluctuations and the 'socialisation' of organised labour locals in North American centres, Janet Rosenberg was born in Chicago.

According to the conventional narrative her Jewish family origins afforded her the kind of cultural opportunities that characterised a yearning for education.

It must be recalled that European migrants Italy, Ireland/Britain as well as Germany and the 'Oster-Reich' had contributed towards the development of diverse immigrant communities wherever scarce employment could be made available during the 1920's and the decades of the Great Depression.

Janet Rosenberg to the extent that she made appreciable progress at the collegiate level, would have become conscious of the racial and ethnic *division of labour* of cities such as Chicago, Detroit and New York.

Guyanese born Cheddi Jagan and his dedication radicalised by British colonialism and the hierarchy of Plantation 'propertial' norms, would have presented to Janet in her early adulthood, an individual she could identify with chivalry and a certain quality of 'liberte et egalite' that was rare.

At least this is the impression one could abstract from various publications; even more so, that from the modesty and reserved conversation as set out in *the West on Trial*, 1966; pp 55/56.

American Political society and its institutions were regulated by the hegemony of monopolies that were during the Great Depression strategically placed to garner huge war profits. Or as described by the Socialist Party leaders of the period the armaments industry based on contracts that invested billions on the construction of armoured vehicles, artillery, military aviation and especially, destroyer ships and submarines amongst other similar industrialisation.

To coerce the industrial workers movement into supporting the **Antifascist** war against the **Axis** powers, the ruling circles launched systematic attacks against workers through job cuts, banning of strikes and Special Emergency Laws proscribing the Communist Party as an illegal organisation.

In fact, as early as the 1940-1941 calendar the Roosevelt Administration was instrumental authorising indictments (through the United States Department of Justice (USDJ) *against 29 members of Local 544-CIO and the Socialist Workers Party of James Cannon*. Coupled to the anti-labour attacks were the ingrained **Jim Crow** racism against Blacks.

Janet Jagan upon her marriage to the young Cheddi Jagan had already become a professional in the medical health-care community. In practical terms despite the constraints imposed by gender prejudices Janet Jagan could have become an 'associate' editor of any prestigious medical journal such as those based in New York University or Illinois.

Racial discrimination and political intimidation served to create a generation of Antifascist and Anti Racist dissenters. These social and class tendencies were not the same as the 19th century 'Communards' and Anarchists (Debray Regis and Beard Charles). Historically, with the expansion of American colonialism in the Pacific and Puerto Rico, **Anti-Fascist** dissenters eventually were aligned to militants supportive of Civil Rights in the United States itself.

Cheddi Jagan himself has recounted the tremendous presence of Paul Robeson as a cultural icon and role model for the Civil Rights movement. But Robeson although provided with sanctuary by *Stalin communism* during the decades described by Leon Trotsky as the "Left/Turn", was never known to be a card registrant

member of the CPUSA. (See **West on Trial**, p.98, where the author identifies Paul Robeson and Henry Wallace as the founders of the Progressive Party (PP/ USA).

Both the Jagans therefore, became 'acculturated' into Freedom-Ways of thinking and action even before the Cold War declaration by President Harry Truman in 1947?.

If there developed a revolutionary Left politics in America that avoided the risks of demanding a Union of Socialist United States at a time of widespread social distress, deprivation and homelessness that was juxtaposed to 'cyclic' phases of dramatic capitalist accumulation defined as the Boom years, then it would be historically necessary to investigate the impact of both the Great French episode of 1789, and of course, the victory of the Black Jacobins in Hayti (Lenin, VI, *State and Revolution* and CLR James, *Black Jacobins the Haitian Revolution*).

Returning to British Guiana the Jagans had fortunately prepared themselves to confront challenges and colonial subterfuges. That is the story that provides a realistic grasp of what comprised of the first mass based political organisation of the working-class movement.

However, as related by Ashton Chase in his *History of Trade Unionism in British Guiana* (New Guiana Company 1961) the colonial masters had gained the support of the traditional if we like, Man Power Citizens Association (MPCA). Other unions including the British Guiana Labour Union (BGLU), led by Hubert Nathaniel Critchlow, did not retain either the class formation depth, or the theoretical refinement that would enable a fundamental seizure of political power from the elements determined to maintain the status quo (*Leslie Melville A History* as well as the essential PAC *Bulletin* prior to January 1950).

To conclude this segment, the following could be cited:

- (i) That the McCarthyite Anti-communist campaigns of the 1950s influenced the core organisations within the then West Indies, i.e., all the political organisations that emerged in the Eastern Caribbean.
- (ii) The Jagans survived antisemitism including the slurs bandied around during the frame up trial and execution of Ethel and Julius Rosenberg.
- (iii) CIA intervention in Guiana utilised not dissimilar tactics adopted by the AFL CIO elites and bureaucracy that were deployed against American labour including offshore seamen on ocean going vessels that would schedule destinations including Port Georgetown.
- (iv) LFS Burnham's attempt to seize power and capture the PPP had a mentor in the experience of the nationalist movement for Puerto Rican Independence of Pedro Albizu Campos as well as the Sandinistas and the Contras in Nicaragua.

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