

# **Inaugural Lecture by Her Excellency, President Janet Jagan**

## **Sharing the Vision for our Times**

**The Cheddi Jagan Series, York University, Toronto**  
**March 27, 1999**

On Monday last, I had the honour to open a Ministerial Meeting of Caricom and Central America which was held in Georgetown. The meeting was one of great significance to me, and for that matter, for the people of our hemisphere. It was of particular significance to me since it was a major event taking place on the 81st birth anniversary of the late President of Guyana, Cheddi Jagan. It was a meeting Dr. Jagan would have liked to address and an event with which he would have been highly satisfied, since it was part of his vision to see the peoples of the Americas come together, especially at this time of liberalisation and globalisation.

In his analysis of the world situation he recognised the need for greater solidarity among the small economies of the hemisphere. He warned of the challenges, nay dangers, of the rising tides of sea levels and free trade. The recent spate of natural disasters in the Caricom and Central American countries and the inability of those countries to cope with the destruction, brought to the fore the need for those countries to be free from their historical debt burdens, to be given more financial aid without strings and a Regional Development Fund to assist the weaker economies to attain average development levels to take advantage of the coming Free Trade Area of the Americas.

I thought I would start this inaugural lecture with these recollections because at the time of his death on March 6, 1997, these were the ideas and solutions to a critical world situation that were uppermost in his mind.

In my Opening Address to the Ministerial Meeting I referred to an unpublished speech which he prepared in 1997 to give at this same university. He had planned to visit Canada on his way back from England where he had planned to undergo some medical tests. But as fate would have it, he never made that trip.

The part I quoted was this: "While all our countries are individually searching for more aggressive and innovative ways to cope with the growing inter-dependence and globalisation taking place, there are fundamental issues which can be addressed only by new global initiatives. It is clear that if present worldwide trends continue, tensions, conflicts and disorders of potentially disastrous consequences could become the order of the day.

"Disaster can be avoided. As an adjunct to the UN Agenda for Development, Guyana has been advocating a New Global Human Order which must have as its goal human development: meeting the basic needs of the people; cultural upliftment and a clean and safe environment. The proposal is founded expressly on the requirement for guaranteeing to every woman, man and child the rights, respect and recognition that have been so well underscored by international agreements; for ensuring effective, democratic, accountable and transparent governance, gender equality and empowerment of women, reduction of mortality rates for infants and children, primary health care systems to reproductive health services for individuals, diminished prevalence of disease, environment sustainability and regeneration, and basic capacity building for efficiency and effectiveness; for combating the environmental degradation; for attention the root causes of poverty with diametric reduction by the year 2015 for securing the physical and material well-being of people through economic growth and development; and for facilitating these objectives through a global partnership that assures support for their attainment.

"It is relevant to note that Science and Technology today has within its grasp the ability, if properly harnessed, to cut hunger in half within a few years. But this will require a sound scientific development strategy, wider intellectual understanding, strong political will, deeper moral commitment and effective policy measures - a balanced and integrated set of economic, financial and social policies. There is an interconnection and interaction between the economic, political, institutional, ideological, ecological, social and cultural spheres.

"We also need to establish new global institutions to respond to the global dimension of the existing human society. The UN itself has to play a more central role in global economic management and should have access to larger financial resources -- the possible source of which we have already identified. The Bretton Woods Institutions -- the World Bank and the IMF -- have moved away from their original mandate and have to be brought back to doing what were originally intended. They need to concentrate on human development as distinct from the means of development. They have to be more concerned with social and human factors than with statistics of growth. We need structural adjustment with a human face."

Cheddi Jagan was indeed a visionary and while his detractors would often disregard his analysis as being irrelevant, concrete reality itself bore him out to be correct. And many of his detractors would attempt to wish him and his ideas away as being steeped in Marxism or this or that -ism. The fact of the matter is that those detractors have been proven on many occasions to be suffering from a poverty of ideas and are often more inclined to leave things as they are. But Cheddi was a persistent advocate for change. He never gave up. He was convinced that the world situation would get worse, in spite of the ending of the cold war and the collapse of the socialist world. Not long before

his death, in October of 1996, he attended the World Food Summit in Rome. A commentator, David Bacon has this to say: "None of the new participants in the world food debate had any simple solutions to offer. But they made it clear that pieties are no longer enough. Guyana President Cheddi Jagan, once the target of CIA destabilization efforts, offered the most eloquent testimony for the countries of the South when he called the idea that privatisation, free markets and foreign investment would lead to food security "a myth." Many mistook his warnings as a way of hoping for the return of the bi-polar world. His grounding, however, was far beyond their understanding. He had repeatedly confounded his detractors because they never understood this philosophy. His world outlook cannot be understood within the limited confines of any particular ideology: while he was committed to a Marxist outlook, he saw development of Guyana within the context its own historical experience and modern systems of democracy. Throughout his political life, he was successful in creating more and more political space for his people and country to survive in a world unsympathetic to those who have been historically disadvantaged.

Freedom and equality was his banner. As he promoted the cause of Guyana in the wider world he found that the so called advocates of freedom and equality were indeed the same forces that betrayed those lofty ideals and kept his people and country in poverty and under-development. The open support by the hemispheric superpower for reactionary forces and dictatorship and the suppression of the democratic will of the people was a major disappointment for him. The manoeuvrings of the British colonialists and the connivance of American imperialism to stem the tide for independence and a democratic government in Guyana fuelled his disillusionment with the West and its brand of democracy. It was ironic that those same forces that robbed him of his legitimate claim to lead his people to prosperity supported his efforts to bring back democracy to Guyana. But what trauma a people had to endure! No nation deserves to be put through such a nightmare.

What was good for Guyana was always pivotal to his understanding of the world situation and his analysis of the situation at home and abroad was premised on the firm belief that Guyana must adopt the democratic model but within the framework of self-determination and economic progress. His tactical political platform was always situated within this wider strategy for a democratic, free and prosperous Guyana.

Cheddi's long march from Port Mourant, a small rural village in the eastern part of Guyana, to become the first freely elected President of Guyana, until his return to Port Mourant where he was cremated, spanned a half of a century. During that period, he did what few men have done in their lifetime: he committed himself to a single goal of freedom for his country and people and never, even for once, wavered. In many ways his struggles and his accomplishments are so intertwined with the history of his country that sometimes it is difficult to study one without the other. Having dominated so

much of Guyana's post World War II history, he perhaps contradicted his own view that history is not made by individuals but by the people. But that is only seemingly so. In fact he was the embodiment of the people's struggles. He became their most ardent defender, teacher and organiser. He never marched alone and that is perhaps the most single important reason for his success. He captured their basic interests in his programmatic platforms and defended these with a missionary zeal unmatched by any one in the last hundred years in Guyana. The same way he became their hope for liberation, in similar fashion he was their conscience. He was always there when the people needed him most and they put their faith in him, as one they knew would never betray the cause.

Today, two years after this Guyanese hero passed away, his countrymen continue to be inspired by his lifelong example of struggles, steadfastness, honesty and incorruptibility. This is perhaps what he wanted. All his life he was obsessed with this passion to convince others to understand the reasons for their bondage and for people to immerse themselves in liberating ideas. He knew that his people, having been brutalised under slavery and indentureship, must first liberate themselves and have hope in themselves. Only then can they liberate their country from slavery, bondage and economic backwardness. He has inspired his people to struggle for freedom, to live lives of honesty and to persist in achieving lofty goals in their personal lives and for the country.

Today, as we look back, we ask ourselves: What manner of man was this? What soul was it that went out there to do battle, sometimes single-handedly, with the mightiest of powers in the world? From whence came that inner strength to resist pain and injustice done to him and his people?

Cheddi Jagan was brought up on a sugar plantation. His parents came to Guyana as children of indentured immigrants from India at the turn of the century. Those were hard days in the plantations. His parents began working in the backdam at an early age to assist with the family income. In fact, there was nothing else to do for the children of poor immigrants. At the time of his birth on March 22, 1918, the probability that he would have had any educational opportunity was almost non-existent. As he himself explained in his *West on Trial*, "The planters frowned upon education because they held the view that an educated worker would soon become dissatisfied with his status as an agricultural labourer. What they needed above all was a cheap and abundant supply of agricultural labourer."

Cheddi went to primary school and like most country boys lived and experienced a childhood of intense poverty – the height of satisfaction being the Saturday night treat of sardines and biscuits. His entrance into a secondary school was a major sacrifice on the part of his parents - fees were high. This experience led him in later years to introduce free secondary education throughout the country. A major turn in his life came when his parents decided

to send him to Queens College, the premier secondary, in Georgetown. His student life in the city led him to a keener understanding of class divisions. As he put it, later in analysing the impact of sugar on life in Guyana, the "plantation was a world of its own. Or rather it was two worlds: the world of exploiters and the world of exploited; the world of whites and the world of non-whites."

Cheddi completed his studies in Georgetown and had hoped, at best, for a civil service job in Georgetown. But even this did not come his way. He tried to land a job for a year but could find none. He could have entered the teaching service but first he had to become a Christian: his parents would have none of that. The idea of studies overseas was aroused by friends and in 1936, at the age of eighteen, he travelled to the United States where he spent seven years - two in Washington and five in Chicago. It was during his stay in Chicago that we met, married and came to Guyana.

Those were seven important years in the life of Cheddi Jagan and in many ways were responsible for him becoming such a consummate politician - a man with a mission. It is not without significance that in the chapter of his West on Trial on his years in the USA he quoted these lines from the United States Declaration of Independence: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness." Throughout his political career he was to refer, with great admiration, to the experience of the American Revolution, the ideals of the Declaration of the Independence and his experience in the United States, especially the years of the depression and Roosevelt's New Deal. Up until the time of his death he was to draw from this experience. In his advocacy for a New Global Human Order he had proposed that a special "peace dividend" established from savings made from cuts in arms spending be used, as Roosevelt had done under his New Deal Administration, to embark on a Works Programme for physical and social and cultural infrastructure in the poorer countries.

In America he was to observe the prevalence of racial inequality, and had experienced forms of racism himself. He also saw the great disparity in living standards between whites and non-whites. While studying, because he had no support from anywhere, he was forced to work in restaurants, as a tailor, salesman and elevator operator. It was during these stints that he was to get a better understanding of America and aroused an even deeper urge to understand the real world around him. He became interested in politics, followed events during the war and studied social sciences and so in 1943 he received a degree in dental surgery from North-western University and a BSc from the YMCA college in Chicago.

Cheddi's world view was emerging based on deep sympathies for the working man and the desire to see them live a better life. In a letter he wrote in 1942 to his good and constant friend Dr. Orrin Dummett, with whom he left Guyana to study abroad, he remarked: ".. Now is the time for all suppressed and minority groups to demand not only theoretical but also practical equality, so that the common foe will be resisted by all on an equal footing..... History is in the making – whether anyone likes it or not. There has been an awakening – the status quo that was, is gone. Yes, now is the time for us to organise, to lobby, to make propoganda and demands - for now changes can be most rapid and to our benefit."

Cheddi returned to Guyana in 1943 and I arrived in my new homeland a few months later. His first task was to establish a practice in Georgetown, the Capital. He always enjoyed a good dental practice as he was a first class dentist. His fees were low as he did not want to exploit his patients but this led him into a public battle for a principle he believed in. His low fees were not to the liking of the Dental Association, which had prescribed for example a minimum fee for extractions, which was higher than what he was charging. He maintained that the Association's function was to maintain standards and not fee fixing. "I could not see," he said later, "why it was necessary to earn in a few minutes what it took poor people half a day or a whole day to earn, when they were fortunate enough to find employment."

Although he liked his profession, at the same time he longed to identify himself with something more meaningful. In those days, there were no political parties. The planter class dominated the Legislative Council and though some union leaders such as Hubert Nathaniel Critchlow, who formed the BGLU in 1922, spoke in the legislative Council on behalf of workers, they had no mass political organisation. In existence then were the League of Coloured People and the British Guiana East Indian Association. The LCP did not interest him much since they opposed adult suffrage. The BGIEA supported constitutional changes and universal adult suffrage but was unsympathetic to the plight of the working man.

The dental surgery became a hive of activities and through it we made many important contact, many patients being ordinary rural and urban workers. Cheddi's name began to spread in the sugar belt –coming from a sugar estate and as well a doctor who listened to ordinary people. On many occasions he would be invited by workers to speak and advise them on industrial matters in various parts of the sugar belt. Due to his increased contacts with workers, he became involved in the two trade unions in the sugar industry, one of them being the Man-Power Citizen's Association.

In 1945 he became treasurer of that union, but was removed after a year when he objected to the glaring reluctance of the union to defend the interests of the sugar workers. It was, he discovered, a company union. Those were the days

when many things were happening. The Royal Commission on The West Indies headed by Lord Moyne had published its report, which horrified many as it related in concrete terms the miserable conditions of the workers and farmers. The war had created its own difficulties in Guyana and the region. These difficulties had stirred widespread debate in which Cheddi and I took an active part. We used to take part in discussions over a wide range of subjects at the Carneige (now National) Library. An important event in that year was the convening in Georgetown of West Indian Conference attended by such leaders as Grantley Adams, of Barbados, Norman Manley and Richard Hart of Jamaica, Albert Gomes of Trinidad and H.N. Critchlow of Guyana. The Labour Party had just won the elections in England and many were openly talking of socialism. H.J.M Hubbard, an avowed Marxist was at the time the General Secretary of the British Guiana Trades Union Council.

In 1946, four of us, Hubbard, Ashton Chase assistant secretary in the British Guiana Labour Union, Cheddi and myself formed the Political Affairs Committee and established a PAC Bulletin, of which I was the editor. The PAC was labour oriented. All four of us were working in trade unions. I was at that time in the Clerical Workes Union, now the Clerical and Commercial Workers' Union. In the same year, the Women's Political and Economic Organisation headed by myself, Winifred Gaskin and Frances Van Stafford, was formed. Through these forums we put forward our ideas and started to mobilise people. In 1947 the first elections since World War II were held. There were 14 elected seats to be contested. Apart from the middle class organisations, the LCP and the BGEIA, a Labour Party was formed but this organisation was a group of individuals put together quickly and without any mass base.

Cheddi and I ran as independent labour candidates - I contested in Georgetown and Cheddi on the East Coast of Demerara. I lost to John Fernandes, a businessman and catholic, who invoked the bogey of anti-communism, which was then becoming a popular weapon of the plantocracy.

Cheddi fought against some well-established people such as Frank Jacobs, a lawyer, and John D'Aguiar. The latter was clearly the most powerful as he had represented the constituency for some time, was wealthy and had enormous influence. Cheddi had worked among the sugar workers for some time and was assisted by Eusi Kwayana (Sidney King) and Ram Karran who lived in the constituency. His patience and dedicated work among the workers paid off. At the end of the count, Cheddi was declared the winner. Many in latter years described this victory as a turning point for Cheddi, and in many ways, a significant event in the history of Guyana. Cheddi himself reflected later that getting into the legislature was an end of sorts but "only the beginning of the long and had struggle ahead." Cheddi was elated. He was never to forget in his entire life that it was the workers who elected him and elected him because of the promises he made to them that he would take their cause to the legislature. He said as much in a post-ballot speech when he declared "We the people have

won. Now the struggle will begin." Forty-five years later, at another historic occasion, his swearing in as the first freely elected President of Guyana in 1992, he was to repeat those same words "...we the people have won."

From then on the legislature became a battleground. Cheddi soon mastered the art of debate in Parliament and prepared himself well before each sitting. He would constantly expose the exploitative nature the colonial rulers and dominance of the Bookers group - Guiana was then known as Bookers Guiana. He exposed the alarmingly poor conditions of the people and the fact that the legislature was simply a tool of the planters. What was also significant was that during this period, it became clear that he, unlike other legislators who claimed to speak for the masses, was not for sale. His name as an honest politician, a man of integrity grew from this time on.

A different kind of politics was taking shape. Cheddi would take the interest of the ordinary man into the legislature and would later take to the street corners to expose the rulers and their ploys to continue to exploit the people. In the legislature, for a while, he teamed up with the labour Party which had won 6 of the fourteen seats but soon broke ranks when he found they were not willing to speak out against the planters and would not oppose the various manipulations used by the colonialists to remove the wealth created by the people out of the country.

As conditions worsened in the colony, the industrial struggles began to intensify. As part of our efforts to organise a mass-based national movement, we moved even closer to the trade unions. Cheddi agitated among workers and became President of the Sawmill workers Union. The colonial government became more oppressive and the need for a national political organisation became more pressing. Matters came to a head when in 1948, during a strike at Enmore estate, sugar workers were gunned down by the colonial police. This tragedy sent shock waves throughout the colony. Cheddi described the incident thus: "The Enmore tragedy affected me greatly. I was personally acquainted with all the young men killed and injured. The funeral procession headed by my wife, other leaders and myself to the city 16 miles away became a mass protest demonstration. At the graveside the emotional outburst of the widows and relatives of the deceased had been intensely distressing and I could hardly restrain my tears. There was to be no turning back. There and then I took a silent pledge – I would dedicate my entire life to the cause of the struggle of the Guyanese people against bondage and exploitation."

The stage was set to carry out the objective set by the PAC – the formation of a political party. And so in 1950 was founded the People's Progressive Party with Forbes Burnham as Chairman, Cheddi as Leader and myself as General Secretary.

From its inception, the colonialists attacked the Party but we maintained a clear focus on the 1953 general elections. For the first time we saw people coming out in numbers to demand a better deal and against the colonial masters in an organised way. A development, which helped the situation, was the winning of the right to adult suffrage and the removal of the property and education requirements for voting.

Practically, all the forces ganged up against the PPP. The anti-Communist bogey became a main weapon against the Party. The church entered the fray mainly because of our policy to bring education under government control. These attacks failed to have much impact on our support and at the end of the polls, the PPP won 18 of the 24 seats.

It was a resounding victory. The PPP had succeeded in rallying all sections of the population to stand up for a free Guiana. The new government was formed, headed by Cheddi as Chief Minister. Real power, however, continued to reside in the hands of the British. We were in office but not in power. In spite of constitutional limitations, the government introduced progressive measures to ease the plight of the working people. We implemented changes in the educational system, reform to local government, giving more rights to farmers, increased rates for workers and improved drainage and irrigation to boost agriculture. These changes seemed modest given the many demands of the people but these drove fear in the British. Every move was deemed communist by the British and local reaction. The planters were angered when we introduced the Labour Relations Bill, fashioned after American and Canadian legislation, that provided a poll to determine the union of the workers' choice. Big business opposed the action since they were favour of company unions, which betrayed the cause of labour. It became very clear that the British were not prepared to allow us to govern. Thus, the British sent troops into Guyana, suspended the constitution, dismissed the government and created a nominated legislative council made up mainly of stooges who were rejected by the people at the polls. Cheddi recorded this episode thus: "Our 133 days in office had demonstrated our concept of democracy. Now the British and our opponents in Guiana demonstrated theirs." Incidentally, the Americans gave their blessings to the British gunboat action.

A wave of terror against the PPP, its leaders and the working people ensued. Cheddi's movements were restricted. As part of the Party's civil disobedience campaign he broke the restriction order by the colonialists, was arrested and sent to jail for six months. But not before he had his say in the dock. "Today," he declared, "Guyana is a vast prison. Whether I am outside or inside matters little. Prisons hold no terror for me. I expect no justice from this or any other Court. Justice has been dead since the British troops landed. I am hoping for the day when there will be greater justice in Guiana."

At this juncture, Guyana experienced a bitter period in its history and many of our current problems can find their roots in the sad days of British occupation. The British used all its experience at subversion and division to maintain its rule. It did everything possible to break the PPP and its mass support. And there were many willing opportunists of the local brand ready to do their bidding. The most significant success of the British was the split in the PPP in 1955. At a time when the people needed a united national front against colonialism, it was the same time that Forbes Burnham and others saw it fit to split the movement in pursuit of personal ambitions. It was clear that the British engendered the split. When the British thought it had everything under control, and had manipulated the constituency boundaries, it held general elections in 1957. The results astonished them and proved to all who had the support of the people. The PPP won 9 of the fourteen seats, the PNC three. In fact the votes received by Cheddi were more than the combined support of the 5 opposition seats.

The fight for Guyana's independence remained the core objective of the People's Progressive Party. In its founding manifesto, the struggle for independence from British rule was adumbrated as the objective of the party. It was the first time that a political party in Guyana set itself such a goal. The PPP actively promoted the cause and organised support inside and outside the country to achieve this end. The British and local reaction rallied to stop the march for independence. The PNC raised high the banner that under no circumstance were the British to consider independence under Jagan. They concentrated their attacks on the PPP and its leading members who were harassed, framed on trumped-up charges, jailed. They plotted and planned and unearthed every conceivable trick to destabilise the country. The communist bogey was always used as a pretext. But the PPP went on to win the successive elections.

However, the reactionaries succeeded in dividing the country along ethnic lines and in the early sixties the country erupted in bitter racial conflicts. It was all done in the name of freedom and liberty. In 1964, the British were finally able, with clever constitutional manoeuvrings, changing the whole system of voting to PR, to remove the PPP from office. While the PPP won 46 percent of the popular votes, the PNC and the big business mouthpiece, the United Force, led by Peter D'Aguiar, formed a coalition. Burnham at last had achieved his objectives. And so did the British and American governments. Their involvement in fomenting racial strife in Guyana is well recorded and more recently the Central Intelligence Agency's role in those murderous events was fully exposed when official documents were released. But, contrary to their predictions, that was not the end of Cheddi Jagan.

The Burnham-D'Aguiar coalition soon collapsed and Burnham took full control. For the next twenty-eight years, a virtual dictatorship ruled Guyana, with election after election being blatantly rigged. The British and Americans, and Caribbean leaders turned a blind eye to the situation in Guyana.

The British granted independence to Guyana in 1966. It was a proud moment for Cheddi and though he was now in the opposition he was considered as the father of the independence struggles. He warned, however, that while we took pride in nationhood, the road Burnham had taken, and the divisions in the society, would lead to further impoverishment.

In 1980 Burnham changed the Independence constitution which gave him supreme powers and he ruled with an iron fist. Political opponents were constantly being harassed. At every turn they tried to silence the PPP, Cheddi and other leaders. There were several political assassinations, the most dastardly being that of the brilliant historian and politician, Dr. Walter Rodney. A massive exodus of our most skilled people left Guyana to seek greener pastures in the Caribbean, North American and England. When Burnham died in 1985, Desmond Hoyte assumed office and that same year, Guyana witnessed the worst ever electoral rigging. When the PPP left office, Guyana was rated among the Highly Developed Countries in the Caribbean with a growing economy, a highly educated population and a high living standard. At the time of the 1992 general elections, Guyana was rated among the Least Developed Countries in the Caribbean. In the hemisphere Guyana was rated as the second poorest nation, just a little bit better than Haiti.

For twenty-eight years, Cheddi Jagan and the PPP were in the opposition. He confronted the regime and campaigned at home and abroad for democracy, peace, progress and harmony in Guyana. Due to his consistent efforts, a growing unity was developing in the country for the restoration of democracy. The pressures at home and abroad intensified and the PNC had to succumb and give in to electoral reforms. This process was helped by the good work of former President Jimmy Carter. Many believed that the PPP was dead and Jagan would never come back. But as he did in the past, he confounded his detractors, and led the polls in 1992. After twenty eight years of dedicated work, Cheddi was declared first freely elected President of Guyana.

Due to the astute statesmanship and leadership of Cheddi Jagan Guyana once again became a proud nation in the Caribbean and until his death, presided over one of the fastest growing economies in the Americas, averaging a GDP growth of almost 7 percent. In a few years, the PPP brought hope to the people as step by step, the wreckage left by the PNC was being rebuilt.

In his fifty years of struggles, Cheddi travelled and mingled with the highest and the lowest - he dined with Kings and Presidents and also felt comfortable at the table of the humblest worker. He was a man of the people. In Guyana he has earned for himself the honour of being called the Father of the Nation.

Today as we celebrate his life and times, it is necessary for us to focus on his main contributions to Guyana, those aspects of his legacy, which will live on and inspire others to follow his footsteps. First he was a man committed to his

country and people. His goal in life was to bring freedom and equality and prosperity to the Guyanese people. He was a political leader, teacher and organiser of the working classes. He believed in national liberation, a staunch fighter in the fight against colonialism, and an internationalist, joining the fight against injustice and poverty all over the world.

In his later years, especially as President of Guyana two crucial issues were central to his work: the achievement of economic growth and human development and national unity. In his analysis, this was the critical damage done to the country by the colonialists and the PNC regime. During his four and a half years as Head of State Cheddi had proposed a profound vision for Guyana and had outlined his basic world view in many of his speeches and writings which have been published over the years, the latest being "A New Global Human Order", released a few weeks ago.

In his latest epilogue to the West on Trial, completed in 1997, he outlined a basic programme for the government within the context of people-centred development. This agenda he described thus:

- Good governance – a clean and lean government – with equity;
- Democracy in all its aspects – political, Economic, industrial, social and cultural – and the empowerment of the people at all levels;
- The fullest exercise of human rights – civil and political, as well as economic, social and cultural in keeping with the United Nations Covenant on Human Rights;
- A mixed economy with the private sector being the engine of growth;
- Economic growth with social justice and ecological justice;
- Balanced agricultural/industrial and rural/urban development;
- An integrated programme of human resource development, and
- Multiculturalism – unity in diversity.

This agenda was what guided the preparation of the National Development Strategy, a comprehensive document on how Guyana is to develop well into the next century, a strategy, which was painstakingly done under his direction. This development strategy could very well be a subject for possible discussion by the organisers of the Lecture Series.

The other fundamental aspect of Cheddi's political agenda was the creation of a truly harmonious, multi-cultural society. The rifts created by the colonialists and later by the PNC, he would often say, cannot be healed and resolved in a meaningful way without a political solution, the same way he had long advocated that there can be no development without democracy. From the time he entered politics, all his programmatic platforms recognised the multicultural nature of the society. His policies, adumbrated both in and out of government,

exposed a deep appreciation of the need to develop Guyana so that wealth and opportunities are seen to be fairly distributed. His class outlook and analysis made him in real terms colour-blind.

Cheddi was a humble man of no pretensions. He could have been a rich professional, but he chose another path. He was disinterested in the material things of this life. We lived in rented homes for 25 years of our marriage, on often a very meagre income. He pursued his political goals of independence, restoration of democracy and the ending of poverty with doggedness, determination, full concentration and dedication. He loved people and used to tell me that he felt invigorated when he met people – workers, farmers, students, children, etc.

His honesty, which gave people of all ranks of society confidence in him, was apparent – one could literally see it shining from his features. He was a kindly man, believing in people – some said he trusted people too much – but that was part of his character. He saw what was good in people. He loved all of humanity.

He was frugal – he could not stand waste and extravagance and carried this all through his political life. He was a family man and helped his brothers and sisters become educated. I remember when his father, Jagan, said to him on his return – "now you take over all my family responsibilities." – and he did.

He was besides being an astute and wise politician, a scholar of note. He spent long hours in study – a part of him only recognised in recent years. He loved writing. He produced an enormous volume of books, articles, analyses and research material which will soon be housed at the Cheddi Jagan Research Centre in Georgetown.

He was above all a humanitarian – genuinely devoted to the cause of liberating mankind from poverty and exploitation.

I wrote in an article on the 1<sup>st</sup> anniversary of his death: "he left behind a legacy that enriches our lives, that reminds us that on this earth there walked a man of unusual moral and intellectual status who blended his ideas with a vibrant activism, not often seen in this special combination."

National unity was what brought about the first people's victory in 1953 and he had often called on politicians and civic forces to work towards bringing back the spirit of the fifties. He knew that without national unity, it was impossible to force the British out of Guyana. Similarly, without national unity, the development of Guyana will be delayed.

Dr. James Rose, lecturer at the University of Guyana, and a close friend of Dr, Jagan, said recently in a tribute to the late President that: As was his custom

he seized every opportunity to advocate the cause of national unity" in spite of the fractures in the national movement and the racial conflicts of the early 1960s. Dr. Rose surmised that Jagan might have been forgiven if he had lost faith in ever cementing another nationalist coalition. But Cheddi did not lose faith. The injustice done to him and his people by the British and the American, being robbed of political power in successive rigged elections did not deter him from pursuing this objective. As a matter of fact, this negative development served to increase his resolve and commitment to national unity. Throughout his years in opposition he fought for cross-party alliances. In fact at every congress of the party and central committee meeting, a permanent agenda item was the search for alliances and the building of national unity.

In 1977 he announced concrete proposals for the creation of a National Patriotic Front Government. Burnham was not comfortable with the proposals. At the time of his death, however, the two major political parties were having dialogue. These were discontinued just after Desmond Hoyte became President. (Recently, you must have heard that Hoyte again broke off another set of talks) Following the rigged elections in 1985, through the efforts of Dr. Jagan, the Patriotic Coalition for Democracy was formed. The PCD did not last long enough to contest the 1992 elections as a single force. It was ironic that after all these years of struggles, those in the PCD sought to deny Dr. Jagan a chance to run as Presidential Candidate.

Master politician, as he was, Cheddi read into the situation the advantages of the PPP forming alliances and facing the elections together with other forces. Thus, he promoted the idea of creating a PPP/Civic alliance. He opened the PPP electoral list to prominent professionals, academics and businessmen, many of them previously supporting other political forces. Today, the Cabinet that I lead, is based on that formula. Half of the Cabinet are persons from civil society.

Dr. Jagan always warned of the dangers present in a situation when there are divisions and when poverty is pervasive. He continued to remind us of these dangers because he wanted responsible leaders to seize the opportunity to find urgent answers to the outstanding problems facing Guyana and the world. Dr. Jagan is not with us today. But unfolding events are themselves reminding us that Dr. Jagan was right. When we turn on the television we see the tragedy of continued war, ethnic violence, poverty and the suffering of women and children. Then we know that there has to be an answer to all of this.

I want to thank the organisers of this lecture series and hope that in the coming years we will see many profound studies and discussions on the life and times of Cheddi Jagan. This is a wonderful and profound way to remember him.

Thank You.

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