

All that Glitters is not Gold

by Janet Jagan

It has an excellent cover – the Guyana flag, pictures of Burnham, Jagan and Rodney, an uninteresting title “A Dream Deferred – Guyana’s identity and the shadow of colonialism” by Stephen Spencer published by Hansib. The back cover describes the author as having researched ethnic relations in the Caribbean and Australia. “He is a senior lecturer in Sociology at Sheffield Hallam University where he has produced several books...”

I believe, but not certain, that it was launched or put out for sale by Hansib during Carifesta. A friend loaned me the book, saying that she read the first few pages and found it “reasonable.”

Yes, the first few pages were interesting, but by page 10 I started to wonder about the accuracy of the contents. The author gives a breakdown in the population of Guyana related to race and then notes the number of Guyanese living abroad. In his words: “conservative estimates of Guyanese living in other countries (especially US, Canada and UK) could be close to 700,000 (around

825,000.” I started then, to wonder about the author’s accuracy and scholarship.

This is not an isolated error; there are others quite worse. This one is the craziest of all the author’s errors. On page 79: “As David Hinds (who was President in 1997) suggested, in an article a few years ago, Guyana has developed such irrecon-

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cilable ethnic rivalries constantly relied upon and manipulated after independence. The struggle for power became a zero sum game between two iconic leaders.”

“Dey needed one another to be what dey became. You tek dat from me. Burnham frighten Black people wid Jagan jumbie, and Jagan frighten Indian people wid Burnham jumbie. In de end Guyana

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But that, of course, is not all! On page 54, the author discusses the post Burnham period and praises Mr Hoyte for “abolishing the shady practices of the so-called ‘overseas’ vote.” But he fails to recognize that the

has it wrong and didn’t mention the 1985 elections under Hoyte.

Referring to the Wismar massacre of 1964, his remarks indicate a lack of understanding of the time frame of the attack: “Nevertheless it seems that the government (if indeed not directly responsible for such acts) was reluctant to curb



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tents and tell the Commissioner “I just finished reading all of this in the newspaper.” They kept the secret information for themselves. In the case of Wismar (like the X-13 report which I had to uncover on my own) I reported to the Commissioner that there would be trouble there soon and the lives of the minority East Indian population must be protected. I ordered that reinforcements be sent to Wismar immediately, but he refused. Then the horrors began and the entire East Indian population of Mc Kenzie/Wismar i.e., those still alive after the murders, rapes and mayhem, had to leave.

It was because of the attitude of the British Governor and Police Commissioner in refusing to listen to the truth about Wismar, that I resigned my Ministry and

research centres, if the author had any interest in historical facts and accuracy!

The author further messes up his book by devoting more than four pages trying to establish that the caste system is still an important aspect of life in the Hindu community of Guyana. He’s way off from reality on this score, and his study of race relations is purely anecdotal one after the other. One would presume that a Senior Lecturer in Sociology at a respected University would be analytical, but he just pushes out the usual taxi-driver’s stories of race relations like a hack.

The rush to print is a sickness that is worldwide I believe. We see it right here in Guyana and especially during Carifesta when so many books were launched. Many, as we know, are valuable contributions to our culture and we can be proud that literature has developed so well in recent years. But unfortunately, like the book examined today, authors are careless not only in their research, but in the writing. There are those books published which are not yet ready; the authors need to be more serious about their works and go

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cilable ethnic rivalries constantly relied upon and manipulated after independence. The struggle for power became a zero sum game between two iconic leaders."

"Dey needed one another to be what dey became. You tek dat from me. Burnham frighten Black people wid Jagan jumbie, and Jagan frighten Indian people wid Burnham jumbie. In de end Guyana become a jumbie country Boy, both of dem deform me, dat today none ah we can see pass we nose. Dats why Guyana gone fuh channa" (David Hinds, Saxakali 1997)

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But that, of course, is not all! On page 54, the author discusses the post Burnham period and praises Mr Hoyte for "abolishing the shady practices of the so-called 'overseas' vote." But he fails to recognize that the 1985 elections when Hoyte was President were as massively rigged (or even more) than the previous ones. On page 48 the author refers to the rigged elections of 1968, 73, 78, 79 and 80. Again, he

corrupt police and security forces that were able to rob and terrorize Indian citizens with little chance of reprimand or enquiry." I was Minister of Home Affairs when the Wismar tragedy took place. Working with a hostile British Commissioner of Police Peter Owen, and the Governor, I had to have my own sources of information, as they sought to keep me in the dark on all matters. For example, each morning, Mr Owen would come to my office and hand me the secret and confidential Police reports of the previous 24 hours. I would open the envelope, read the con-

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It was because of the attitude of the British Governor and Police Commissioner in refusing to listen to the truth about Wismar, that I resigned my Ministry and issued a statement fixing the blame where it belonged. The PPP never filled the post after that. And contrary to the author's point, there was an enquiry. All of this can be found on the internet and in

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