

# REMEMBERING THE PAST & LIVING THE PRESENT

by Janet Jagan

I met Mr. Hoyte for the first time when serving on the Elections Commission in 1967-68. I represented the People's Progressive Party and he represented the People's National Congress. I believe that his well-known attitude to me began in those days. It was my task to see that the first elections after those of 1964, which introduced proportional representation, were free and fair.

However, I soon learned otherwise. A process was moving ahead to rig elections and to secure the PNC in office with a sufficient number to allow it to go alone and loose the ties of its coalition partner, the United Force. There had already been the monkey business in Parliament, with Prime Minister Burnham wheeling,

dealing and twisting arms to encourage MPs to cross over, the latest being Zaherudeen who was next on the PPP list, and who would fill a seat made vacant under strange circumstances. These were the numbers Burnham needed to put through the background legislation to rig and control the outcome of the 1968 elections.

These manipulations make laughable even though tragic, the events instigated by the PNC following the 1997 elections and the court decision. If this was all the PNC did in its rigging of four elections and a referendum, it would be bad enough, but these were merely small drops of wrong-doings in a hurricane of evil acts that eroded democracy and made Guyana notorious for fraudulent elections.

I exposed, step by step,

the methods being used to rig the 1968 elections. The Elections Commission was denuded of any authority, fabricated padded voter's lists were legitimatised, overseas voting was introduced and proxy voting was extended. Ballot box tampering took place at the actual elections.

I challenged the validity of the overseas voting and after the lists were out, demanded that I be allowed to examine the records of those on the lists. I had a long battle to achieve this and finally under a heavily monitored visit, I was allowed into the Registration Centre on High Street, Georgetown, apparently off-bounds to Election Commissioners. I picked out names from the lists of overseas voters, at random, and asked to see the registration cards. As



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each one was presented to me, I took quick notes, as they were demanded back speedily. I was able in some 16 cards to note the name, birth date, place of birth and parents' names. I noticed that the handwritings on these cards I examined appeared fake, slant-wise handwriting, etc.

I sent a letter to the Elections Commission with some 16 names and data for each, including place

and date of birth and parents' names and requested that the Commission ask the Registry of Births and Deaths for the birth certificates for these overseas voters. I waited and waited and eventually demanded a reply. I was then informed that the Registry said they did not have sufficient information and could not provide birth certificates, although the name, date and place of birth and parents' names had been provided. That is how it was in 1967-68, when the whole machinery of government, even the Registry of Births and Deaths, was controlled by the PNC. I was the only person on the Elections Commission that recognized that the overseas lists were fraudulent, they couldn't even provide one birth certificate!

The British TV firm **Grenada Television** did a survey of overseas voters in UK and reported that out of a sample of 551 voters registered in London, there were only 117 genuine names and in another sample in Manchester, of 346 registered only 19 were genuine. The title of the programme was "The Trail of the Vanishing Voters." Peter D' Aguiar, by now alienated from the PNC said of the 1968 election - "to call it an election is to give it a name it does not deserve; it was a seizure of power by fraud, not elections."

Little did anyone know at the time, that 1968 was relatively mild in its fraud as compared to that of 1973 and it is said that the 1985 elections, after Burnham's death and entirely in Hoyte's hands, was the greatest fraud of all!