

By Janet Jagan

I remember during the 1997 elections, when the returns from the polling stations indicated clearly that the PPP had won an overwhelming majority, the highest of any party in any free and fair elections in the history of Guyana. It turned out to be 55.7%. (The PPP won 18 out of 24 seats in the 1953 elections, but I do not know the percentage).

Overseas journalists were already interviewing me, but the recalcitrant PNC Couldn't have it. So accustomed were they to the results of rigged elections from 1968 to 1985, that they could not accept defeat. They rushed to the courts to try to prevent me from assuming office and it was my turn to out maneuver their dirty tricks. I was sworn in legitimately, and not as the PNC says, secretly. I don't think a ceremony is secret if more than 35 are present, and that's how it was.

Much was made of my tossing the Order restraining me from being sworn in as President, over my shoulder, at the public ceremony welcoming my ascendancy to the post of President. When I look back at the incident and analyse it thoroughly, I find it was done instinctively, without any premeditation. Why did I have this reflex to rid myself of this document which would have prevented me, for how long I don't know, from be-



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ing sworn in as President if I had not already been sworn in?

The following from Guyana's history will help with an understanding. All through the years of its existence (and even now) the People's Progressive Party has been plagued and harassed by elements bent on denying the Party its just rewards. Starting with 1953, the PPP had fought for and won from the British an advanced Constitution that introduced for the first time universal adult suffrage and a ministerial system - the first step on the road to independence. After 133 days in office, the Colonial Office suspended the Constitution and threw the legally elected government of the PPP out of office.

An interim, non-elected government (maybe like the one the opposition parties tried to get in place before the March elections) was established from 1954 - 1957. Then, after the Colonial Office believed that the split in the PPP engineered

by Mr. Burnham would have wrecked the PPP under Dr. Jagan's leadership, new elections were held. But the British wanted to be certain that the PPP (J) would lose so it manipulated the constituencies against the Party. For example, Dr. Jagan in his Corentyne constituency received 23,443 votes, more votes than the total of all the five elected members of the three parties that fought the PPP. In spite of the rigging of the constituencies, the PPP won. That was for the period 1957-61.

For the 1961 elections the British again rigged the constituencies, a maneuver known as "gerrymandering." The British used a boundary commission to re-arrange the constituencies to prevent the PPP from winning again. Again the PPP upset the Colonial Office calculations and won 20 of the 35 constituency seats.

The period 1961 - 1964 was tumultuous with killings and bombings and burnings by the PNC, backed by the puppet TUC and the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). The aim was the destabilisation of the PPP Government and this was encouraged by the Governor and the British Commissioner of Police. All efforts to depose the PPP government culminated in the change in the electoral system from first-past-the-post to Proportional Representa-

tion (PR). One year was cut from the PPP's term of office and elections were held in 1964.

(It is ironic that the PR system which the PNC supported and under which it held office for 28 years no longer serves its purpose. It has made many efforts to change the system, as it no longer brings the PNC the victories it had hoped for).

In the 1964 elections, the PPP won the largest per-

centage of votes of any single party, but under 50%. The British, backed by the USA, manipulated a coalition between the PNC and the United Force, even though Mr. Burnham at the 1964 campaigning vowed that he would never join the UF, but he did to keep the PPP out of office.

We know of the subsequent gross rigging of the elections under the PNC of 1968, 1973, 1980 and 1985.

When Cheddi Jagan and the PPP won the first free and fair elections in 1992, again the PNC tried to prevent his taking office.

So, this history of outrageous conspiracies to prevent the PPP from taking office in the face of overwhelming people's support at the polls is the background for my rejection of yet another attempt to deny the PPP its legitimate right to office.

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