

## **Party Life – the Rough Road of Elections Commission**

**By Janet Jagan**

Since 1967, members of the People's Progressive Party have been sitting on the Election Commission. This began after Independence in 1966 when the first Election Commission was established by law. Sitting on the Commission were representatives of the parties in the National Assembly and a chairman selected by the government.

Later the selection of the chairman was changed under proposals by former US President Jimmy Carter who helped to end the series of rigged elections under the PNC. Under his formula, the Leader of the Opposition would be asked to produce a number of names to the government in office for the post of chairman. If not one was acceptable, then another list would be produced and so on.

But in the days of PNC rule the PNC dominated the decisions of the Election Commission. I served on the 1967-68 Commission and in the softest words I can find, it was a horrific ordeal. My comrades who followed, went through the same ordeal. All the cards were stacked against free and fair elections and against the PPP representative making any headway in bringing about fair play and justice.

I encountered the beginning of the rigging process and made public exposures of what was going on. Of course the PNC representative (Mr. Hoyte) and the UF representative went along with the process under the benign and hypocritical Chairman who allowed all things to happen. The so-called civil society we hear so much about today and the small political parties had nothing to say and kept their mouths tightly shut about electoral rigging – and this position held for many years.

I remember one of my worst experiences was when a delegation of the Elections Commission visited the Minister responsible for elections. He was brutal and of course, could see no cause to worry about rigged elections. As a last recourse, I went to the Governor General David Rose. He kept to his role as a puppet, telling me that he had nothing to do with the elections!

To be on the Elections Commission, one could not be a Member of Parliament or on the Party's list of Candidates. Thus for the next elections in 1973, I became a candidate and a new Party member held the post, Ralph Ramkarran. Comrade Ramkarran was to have a rough job of serving not once or twice but three times. As I watched him, I

could see the terrible strains he was under and sympathised with him. It was a job that required a strong stomach and perseverance in the face of daily frustrations and having to deal with people who had only one objective – to cheat.

Other party stalwarts who held the difficult post for the Party were Cdes. Gail Teixeira and Clement Rohee, both strong enough for the almost impossible task.

In recent years the Party has had and still has strong representatives. Two are from the Civic component, Attorney Moen McDoom and Dr. Bud Mangal with Mohammed Shaw from the Party.

The last years have not been easy ones, with Opposition Party representatives being unable to break out of the mould they cast themselves into since the 1968 elections.

But then, we are lucky that our Party has produced such stalwarts and tenacious members as those who have made strong sacrifices to represent our Party on the Election Commission these past 35 years. Each has done his/her best to have democratically run free and fair elections.

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