

Those two words – “Responsible Opposition”

By Janet Jagan

There are two words one rarely reads in the newspapers or hears on television – “responsible opposition.” All the pundits in the letter columns, the anonymous businessmen in their lavish full-page advertisements, the so-called representatives and spokespersons of civil society, etc – all of them and more – are afraid (that’s the kindest word I can find) to mention those two words. Yet they are fulsome in their expressions of the need for “good governance.”

It should be abundantly clear that a democracy is made up of many facets, the first being the right of all citizens of a country to elect, at free and fair elections, the government of its choice. This is guaranteed by the United Nations in its Declaration of Human Rights.

Democracies depend on stability and growth in several areas – the government or executive powers, the legislature, the justice system, the media, and of course, the opposition party or parties.

When we look around the world, we find this pattern exists – in our hemisphere, in Europe, Asia and Africa. The weak areas are those with doubtful methods of elections, like Pakistan, Zimbabwe, Iraq, Iran and others.

Each country has its own problems whether it be religious as in Israel, India and Ireland, ethnic as in Rwanda, Mexico, England, Guyana and many other, tribal, ideological as in Colombia, etc. Problems exist all over, some manageable, some with solutions, some with none but time.

Yet, under not one of these problems does the solution lie in changing the basic form of democracy – free and fair elections held periodically. History shows that in many countries where it appears that the losers, the opposition, will never gain power at free elections, they or their allies eventually do.

Cheddi Jagan and the PPP should have hit the Guinness Book of Records for having, probably, been out of office longer than any other political group, for three decades, and then legitimately winning office.

A responsible opposition is crucial in any democracy. Without it, there is turmoil, instability, lack of progress. A responsible opposition is part of the democratic process and the sooner this is recognised by those seeking stability and progress, the better.

There should be an end to the false “plague on both houses” theme and a recognition that pressure and public ^{opinion} must be focused on the need to push the PNC into its responsibilities. Its boycott of Parliament, its uncivilised stance on crime and its refusal to come to terms with the efforts of the “social partners” and re-enter dialogue are vital to the welfare of the nation.

When the PPP was in opposition in the period of 1996-92, it entered dialogue with the PNC. Why should the PNC use every ruse to stay away from the dialogue which began so hopefully after the last elections? A poll would show that the vast majority of Guyanese, and including those who voted PNC are in favour of dialogue.