

Divisive Mischief

by Janet Jagan

It is regrettable that one of our three daily newspapers, the Stabroek News (SN) continues to spray mischief through its pages. Not only mischief, but rank racism. Its letter columns abound with all sorts of lies, distortions, rumours and vicious racial references. I read one not so long ago, that really turned my stomach upside down. A frequent letter writer called on all Afro-Guyanese to rise up against the PPP/C. The implications of armed struggle were there, hidden under the usual racial garbage.

A newspaper, unless it's openly aligned to a political party or some specific entity, is not expected to be strongly biased one way or the other, but to objectively present the news and through its editorials, express its opinion on various matters that concern the public.

Not so Stabroek! Last year it was a strong, I would say, very strong advocate of the new party, Alliance for Change, led by two strays from the two major parties. To give credit to Stabroek News, it really tried, really! However, the election results must have been discomfiting for the higher-ups in that newspaper. It proved one point quite clearly,

that Stabroek News has little effect on the electorate or the outcome of elections.

Now, SN is trying hard to stir up mischief that the President

I don't know her background as an historian, but as one who has lived through the times she records, she is way off!

She starts out on the

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is considering a 3rd term in office. He has clearly denied this and the PPP General Secretary has labeled it "rubbish," yet SN tries to keep the pot boiling on the non-issue.

In its issue of October 18, 2007, S/N printed Part I of "Reflections on Six Decades of General Elections in Guyana" written by Ms Cecilia Mc Almont.

wrong foot by these words: "As part of our British colonial heritage this practice (free elections and democracy) has been enshrined in our constitutions for more than a century."

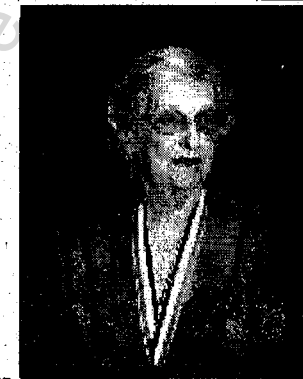
Maybe she was unaware of the restricted voting system up to the 1953 elections when a voter had to have a job of a stated salary or own a

property – which excluded many, many workers and others, as well as women from voting. The Legislative Council had many members nominated by the British Governor, mostly sugar planters and big businessmen. The Executive Council was hand picked.

We didn't get Universal Suffrage until the political movement, started mainly by the Political Affairs Committee in 1946 and the PPP in 1950, agitated for full suffrage nationally for a couple of years.

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I can speak for myself. I was Minister of Labour, Health and Housing (1957-61) and as such, worked out the criterion for distribution of houses in Ruimveldt and La Penitence which was a slum clearance project. I carefully



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gave priority to those most in need, considered their existing housing situation, number in family, income and other relevant factors. Need I mention which group dominated in the allocation of houses? In those days, there was no finger pointing and adding up of numbers.

Also, as Minister of Labour I introduced the first protective legislation for domestics, who at that time – it is different now – were mainly of one ethnic group. In making these small points, I am emphasizing that the PPP was never and is not a party that plays the racial card.

Ms Mc Almont also refers to "the Indo-Guyanese birth rate exceeding that of the other ethnic groups and a pattern of continued racial voting." This is highly offensive to anyone who expects academics to be objective and to do their research carefully, rather

than parroting the race patterns some wish to use to pull down Guyana into racial strife.

But the lady's final jab at the PPP and trying hard to stick a label on that Party says this: "The 1961 general elections served to confirm that 'Apan Jhaat politics' which had visited in the 1957 elections had found a home."

Ms Mc Almont quoted from "The West on Trial," in her article, but heglected to read what Dr Jagan said about that accusation of "Apan Jhaat". On page 114, Dr Jagan explains that Daniel Debidin's United Farmers' and Workers' Party in the early 50's attacked the PPP for its position on Federation. "And so it originated the slogan "Apan Jhaat" (literally, own race) – the use of racism, emotionally to frighten the Indians away from the PPP".

A good editor would never permit such racially divisive and incorrect writings to be published, unless he/she had a specific agenda.

Despite my strong criticism of the content of Stabroek News, I repeat my earlier call for the end of the advertisement ban on that newspaper.

Correction: The "World Bank" should replace the words "World Monetary Fund" in this column last week.