

Why did Rai join the PPP?

by Janet Jagan

Dear Sir,

In the interest of historical accuracy, I wish to comment on a letter by Mr Ramharack in the Monday Stabroek News entitled "Mr Rai Backed Dr Jagan's candidacy in 1947."

Mr Rai's contribution to urging Dr Jagan to fight the Central Demerara seat in 1947 was very slight. I was present at our Kitty home when a group of residents and farmers from Beterverwagting came to see him and asked him to contest. They said they were fed up with John D'Aguiar and wanted new blood. I am not saying that Mr Rai was not around, but I really cannot remember him playing any major role in the 1947 elections. The two names that I am familiar with in those elections were Sydney King and Ram Karran, who campaigned with Dr Jagan.

I cannot comprehend Mr Ramharack's point when he wrote that Mr Rai, when he returned from UK after completing his LLB Degree "understood the implications of what a Marxist Party was up against in colonial Guyana" and "his ideological and political opposition to Marxism." Then why did Rai join the PPP?

Mr Ramharack gives to Mr Rai credit for what others did. I must know. I was there. For example he writes about equalisation of the three major religions - "recognition of equal status of Pandits and Imams at official state functions.." Mr Ramharack couldn't know, but I am sure Mr Rai will recall that I was the one who raised objections to the presence of a priest and no other representative of the two other religions when I opened the Port Mourant hospital in the 50s. I thought it unfair and raised the matter with Dr Jagan; the practice of inviting representatives of the Christian, Hindu and Moslem religions to official openings, etc. began then and continues to this day. This was the basis for Mr Rai's introduction of amendments to the Marriage Act which appoints Pandits and Imams as marriage officers. And anyway, no particular legislation or acts by ministers were done individually, but within the context of joint responsibility in the cabinet.

Mr Ramharack's letter states that Mr Rai, when Home Affairs Minister issued several directives regarding height, physical make up etc. leading to increased recruitment to reduce "ethnic imbalance". Whether this is true or not, you can judge.

But I do remember with clarity when I challenged the British Commissioner of Police Mr Owen and asked him why there was a marked imbalance in the police force. He told me that few other racial groups could pass the examinations, which included oral and written tests as well as stature and height. I told him that as far as I knew, there were no differences in mental aptitude. I enquired about the height requirement for policemen. In that conversation, Mr Owen indicated that Amerindians, Chinese and East Indians were short and not big enough to be policemen. I challenged him and reminded him that there were many countries in the world with people of small stature, but all maintained security forces.

I then asked to see the examination papers, which he was very reluctant to show me. Eventually he produced these papers and it turned out that there were two very different exam papers - the one for urban applicants was far easier than the one for rural applicants. One aspect of the exam papers required the applicant to write down the word called by the examiner. In the rural test there were difficult words and some I never knew existed. Just to be sure I called in my permanent secretary Mr Seelig, a highly educated man and asked him to spell two of the words listed. He told me he had never heard of these words and had no idea of how to spell them. These words I mention were three and four syllable words and were not in common usage.

Thus I had to speak in strong terms with the Commissioner of Police and told him to stop his nonsense and allow a fair system of recruiting to exist. The two examination papers system came to an end.

I do not know if Mr Ramharack was present during the early 60s, but he presents such outrageous charges about Dr Jagan's ministers being cowards, that I am bound to remark that he is not being fair and must have a reason for trying to denigrate the PPP ministers - Dr Jagan, Ram Karran, EMG Wilson, Fenton Ramsahoye, and others. I am sorry, Mr Ramharack, call us what you will, but the PPP has never yet been charged with cowardice. What is your purpose in trying to slam the PPP in your letters?

I could mention in the same breath that I had innumerable problems with Commissioner Owen. He felt that security was in his and the Governor's hands. He was giving up any of his territory and as I learned after, his policy was to exacerbate the conflicts in the then British Guiana.

We know of the infamous paper "X - 13 Plan" of the PNC to destroy the PPP government. He never gave it to me, although it was an official police document, researched by police. I had to get that and other important information from a friendly policeman who I used to meet secretly.

Yours faithfully,

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President

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