

Remembering The Past & Living The Present

by Janet Jagan

Mr. Hoyte has a propensity for making all sorts of allegations - - that the PPP/Civic is illegal, that there is no elected President of Guyana, that the PPP/Civic should demit office, that the electoral lists are padded and in fact, he led his Party to riots in 1997 and 1998, claiming the elections were rigged. His mouth hasn't stopped uttering the most ridiculous and far-fetched accusations. Sad to say, but the most sordid elections in the history of our beloved nation took place after he was installed as President following the death of Mr. Burnham, when he spent 7 years in office in a 5-year term.

"Sordid" is not really my word, I was using one of the words in a statement issued after the 1985 elections in which Catholic Bishop Benedict Singh, Anglican Bishop Randolph George, together with representatives of the Bar Association and the Human Rights Association condemned the elections in these words: -

"... the familiar and sordid catalogue of widespread disenfranchisement, threats, intimidations, violence and collusion by police and army personnel." These factors, they said "characterised the poll."

For those who may have any doubts about the PNC and what it has done and what it stands for, these words have a clarity and truth that should never be ignored - or as it could be said -- to ignore this warning is to put oneself at great peril!

Following these elections, the first one under the presidency of Mr. Hoyte, in which he bears the full brunt of responsibility, there were many follow-up statements of persons involved in the electoral process who felt the full brunt of the electoral fraud.

For example, Navin Chandarpaul, Presidential advisor on environment was a candidate in the 1985 elections and had rights approved by the Chief Elections Officer to enter polling stations during the poll and counting centres for Region 5.

He and another candidate were prevented from entering the Counting Centre. He was blocked at gunpoint by armed soldiers and not a single opposition agent was permitted to be present at the counting of ballots.

Many ballot boxes were held for several hours completely out of the scrutiny or sight of any opposition polling agents.

Any wonder that one of the main demands for the 1992 elections was counting of ballots at place of poll immediately after the close of poll? Sometimes we forget these terrible things that have hurt people and harmed democracy -- set us backwards for years.

Thirty-six prominent Guyanese, members of civil society, put their names to an open letter calling for free and fair elections, one vote only for each voter (some used to vote many times) and an end to an atmosphere of intimidation at elections. This was a bold move, particularly in view of the range of intimidation that was taking place at all levels.

Some 40,000 Guyanese signed a petition calling for electoral reforms. They were part and parcel of the build-up which the PPP and PCD incorporated into their campaign to end fraudulent elections. Finally, former US President Jimmy Carter, on Cheddi Jagan's request, came to Guyana and helped negotiate an end to these vile electoral practices of the PNC. Do we wonder why it is that the PNC is not happy about Carter's return?

Of course, there were many factors not mentioned in this show-down that lasted from 1990-92. One aspect we cannot ignore is the factor of the Western Hemisphere returning to democratic practices after decades of corrupt dictatorships like those existing in Argentina, Chile, Brazil, El Salvador, Uruguay, Paraguay, Bolivia, etc.

Guyana was one of the last states of this hemisphere to return to democratic practices and it was this factor which also led to Carter's interest in our plight. It is more than ironic that the accused has become the accuser, like the thief, being pursued by police, points in another direction and says "he's gone that away."

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