

# What a Record!

by Janet Jagan

Montalembert, a 19th century scholar said in 1863, this: "To judge the past, and really know what one is talking about, it is necessary to have lived the past. To condemn the past, one needs only to feel that one owes nothing to it."

That quotation passed through my mind when I read the PNC/Reform statement on Independence. The contents struck me as being in conflict with the reality and truth of the past.

The first is the PNC's claim that "it is proud of the central role it played in achieving political independence for Guyana in 1966." In one sense it is true - in that the PNC struggled very hard and played every trick in the deck to ensure that independence did not arrive when it was out of office. They joined all forces, including working with and taking funds for dirty work from the CIA in order to delay independence.

The delay in independence, scheduled for 1963 when the PPP was in office under Premier Cheddi Jagan, satisfied the PNC, the United Force, the US government and the British Colonial Office. The PNC election slogan tells how much it supported independence — "No Independence Under Jagan."

The delay in independence was achieved by destabilizing the PPP government, but resulted in many deaths, many injuries, loss of many properties by fire and bombs and played on race, intensifying racial conflicts. So, yes, the PNC did struggle to prevent independence until all its allies maneuvered it into office by many means, including altering the whole voting structure to bring into being proportional representation (PR) which neither the USA or Britain would NEVER, EVER, contenance for itself, or, for that matter, any other British colony.

The joke of that is - that is if one has a sense of humour - that now that PR has enabled the PPP to win government three times at general elections and at local government elections, the PNC wants to change the system and is doing its best to move closer to the former first-past-the-post system under which the PPP won three elections previously.

The second astonishing aspect of the PNC statement on Independence is this: "Our record in office aptly demonstrates our deep understanding and relentless efforts towards realizing this aspiration; true, the road has not always been smooth: our efforts, though all well-meaning, were not always successful and better decisions could have been made in instances. But the commitment of the PNC to nation building is indisputable... For too long the rights of our citizens have been trampled upon, to the extent that today the governing party believes it has the right to kill our fellow citizens at will" and so on.

So, according to the PNC's understanding of its 28 years in office, it did a good job. In their way of thinking - yes - they did a good job - a good job of maintaining itself in office by massive electoral fraud - even killing two young Berbicians in the process! Police raids were rampant; PPP members were jailed and in one notorious case I recall - a prisoner was put in an ant's nest in a lock-up in West Demerara.

Our civil rights were violated; the press was not free. I remember the trouble Mirror had when I was Editor, to get newsprint and supplies and to get printing equipment. Both the Mirror and the Catholic Standard were gagged by Burnham's ingenious method of not banning the newspapers, but banning the newsprint!

Our mail was no longer private; our telephones were tapped; some were denied freedom of movement and could not leave the country. Parliament was a farce; paramountcy of the party was vaunted so shamelessly that the PNC flag flew over the Court of Appeal building in High Street.

The PNC accuses the PPP falsely, saying that the PPP believes it has the "right to kill our fellow citizen." What rubbish! A Commission has been set up to deal with the accusation about a phantom gang which the PNC hasn't the common sense to welcome, because it has no evidence to offer.

People have been asking for too long, with no answer, about the brutal deaths during the PNC regime of Dr Walter Rodney, Father Darke, Vincent Teekah, Michael Forde at the Freedom House bombing, and others. Who was it that nourished and protected the deadly House of Israel? The list of criminal acts by the PNC is long and frightening. There is still a strong view that the PPP/C erred, when it took office in 1992, in not doing what was done in South Africa, having a national enquiry or a truth Commission into all the wrong-doings during the 28 years the PNC held office, and to lay charges against those guilty of misconduct.

Yes, the PNC has a "record in office" that bears close examination, but it is not a record of service to the people. The PNC built up a massive foreign debt with nothing to show for it - a debt which the PPP has had to deal with and which harmed our economy and the welfare of its people. So poorly handled were the social services, that the PNC had to close down its Housing Ministry.

Another touch of humour is when we hear PNCites screaming that the Housing Minister isn't doing his business to their satisfaction! - after he's distributed over 60,000 house lots, caused thousands of new houses to be built and has regularized the squatting areas that grew during the PNC regime because it had no housing plans or policy!

So much for their "record in office." I don't have space to go on, but everyone who has lived through the 28 years knows what it was all about, including the ban on bread, flour, peas and so on. It was a "record in office" so great that the PPP/C in the first free and fair elections since the 60's, won more votes than it did in any previous elections - well over the 50% needed to form the government!