

# Trying to Rewrite History?

by Janet Jagan – Feb. 24, 2007

I have observed, over a fairly long period of time, a tendency, particularly in the letter pages of the *Stabroek News* (SN) to give a new slant on the history of the time when the PNC held power – from the 1964 to the 1992 period. The tendency is to reform or rewrite history, to denigrate the role of the People's Progressive Party during this era and to prop up the names of hitherto unknown "heroes" who "led" the struggle against tyranny.

As recently as last week's Saturday *S/N*, a writer gave a list of those who led the struggle and wrote: "When the PPP was still in the wilderness and clutching at straws, with no kind of plan to unseat the government of the day..." And it named the heroes of the struggle.

At least one of Guyana's historians should research this period in Guyana's history and come up with the truth.

I was there, along with numerous members of the PPP who can testify to this day the leading role the Party took in building resistance to the pernicious Burnham/PNC regime.

Many brave people struggled and were hurt in many ways during the long 28 years before the uprooting of the PNC. Beginning right after the 1964 elections many PPP leaders, including Brindley Benn and Cedric Nunes, both ministers of the PPP government, were detained at Sibley Hall, the Mazaruni Prisons, some for as long as two years. Large numbers of PPP activists suffered devastating police raids on their homes and businesses. PPP activists like the late Fazal Ally were falsely charged and imprisoned on trumped up charges. Large numbers of PPP members and supporters lost their jobs. The government controlled the movement of people and many were denied passports, or their passports were taken away.

Protests, like one particular event of workers marching peacefully in government protest from Berbice to Georgetown, were met with pointed rifles and tear gas.

I represented the PPP on the Elections Commission for the 1968 elections when Mr Hoyte represented the PNC and there was a rep of the United Force. Early in the game, I discovered the several ways which were being put in place to rig those elections. No one, no group, no media except the *Mirror*, carried my press releases outlining the plans for rigging. Not one voice, aside from the PPP, was uttered in protest. That's how it was in those days – everyone, including the "heroes" named in *S/N* lacked the guts to open their mouths – and so it was for many years while the PPP stalwarts laboured amongst the people to keep their spirits up and not be afraid to take action to expose the deceit of the PNC.

And many took the blows on their chins. At Black Bush Polder, a known PPP stronghold, the PNC started breaking down settlers' houses. Many mean acts took place and organizations like GAWU and the RPA led protests and fought back, always waiting for the rest of Guyanese to wake up and stop being afraid.

Stabroek News always has had nice things to say about former President Desmond Hoyte, because he helped the newspaper get established. Did S/N ever have one word of protest about the 1985 electoral rigging under Mr Hoyte? Of course, it didn't take me 21 years to learn that he, as well as all the top PNC members, including some of international fame, were all part and parcel of the rigging process. I saw Hoyte upclose during the 1968 rigging.

And yet we read in S/N about the vigorous role that paper played in the restoration of democracy. Show me one word of protest over fraudulent elections when they were happening, by S/N and I'll apologize.

The Mirror, which many like to downplay now that we are enjoying all the freedoms guaranteed in the UN Declaration of Human Rights, played a most important role in the struggle to win the return of democratic rights. It suffered bans on newsprint, ink and printing machinery. Its role during those years should be better known and respected. Its vendors used to be beaten up by the PNC thugs – things people tend to forget as they look for new heroes of democracy's return.

It was after the disgusting Hoyte – rigged 1985 elections that the Patriotic Coalition for Democracy (PCD) was formed, and the opposition to the PNC was strengthened, that the struggle intensified and the reins of power and terror were weakened, that we approached the end of the tyranny that almost destroyed Guyana.

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