

## That Mustique Affair

by Janet Jagan - May 5, 2007

During the period I served as President of the Republic of Guyana, I attended all the Caricom heads of government meetings. I was on friendly terms with all the island prime ministers and found them to be affable conference mates. One who was always there, polite almost to the extreme, courteous, friendly was Sir James Mitchell of St Vincent. I know this island, having visited it twice – once I was banned from St. Vincent, but because of the infrequency of air and boat travel, remained for two weeks. My other visit was memorable, as I was the house guest of one of St. Vincent's national heroes – Captain Hugh Mulzac, the first black man to captain an American vessel (World War II). Despite our sharp political differences, we got on very well.

It was thus not unexpected that I read a review of his autobiography "Beyond the Island" in Stabroek News (April 29, 2007) which revealed a side of his character which I had discerned – his frankness. According to the review: "... and another concerning the secret agreement between Desmond Hoyte and six Caricom leaders on the island of Mustique in the Grenadines in January 1986. More than a footnote in history, Mitchell describes how in a compromise put forward by himself, the leaders agreed not to challenge the legitimacy of the Guyana December 1985 poll, albeit for the last time. In exchange there would be a change in Burnham's "leftist policies" and all future elections would have to have observers."

The reviewer, whosoever he is, erred in not remembering that Mr Burnham died in August 1985 and Mr Hoyte was in charge of the 1985 electoral rigging, so the reviewer must have meant that Hoyte change the policies of his deceased leader.

Be that as it may, the fact remains that Sir James Mitchell's autobiography places the seal of authenticity on the charges made by the People's Progressive Party that the Mustique meeting, was rigged to protect Hoyte from attacks by Caricom as to the absence of free and fair elections in Guyana. However, Mitchell leaves out one very strong part which the PPP has always exposed – that the USA was behind the whole Mustique fiasco, pushing it on and financing the high expenditure. After all, it was the island of wealthy visitors and posh homes, Princess Margaret being the best known

The PNC has not done well in recent years in its public relations and has proved careless in many ways, the most recent being the exposure of its internal problems. One of its most obvious mistakes has not yet been commented on – am I the first to note that its newest acronym is PNCRI-G, or to me, PNC Rig? How could anyone be so stupid as to allow that to happen? I'm not being subversive or nasty in recalling the PNC's horrid history of rigging, but it's part of our history and I, for one, who lived through the ghastly elections of 1968, 1973, 1980 and 1985 know how they traumatized the population and the heavy blows they dealt to the concept of democracy. I even wrote a booklet outlining all, and there were many, the methods of rigging used in the 1973 elections that future generations would not gloss over what happened, but would see that it never happened again.

Thus I find it distressing and I won't call names, to see some of those who actively carried out electoral rigging, the consequences of which almost destroyed Guyana, being honoured, yes honoured, at universities and by international bodies. It is almost obscene to see this happening, but some tend to have short memories, or is it just sheer opportunism?