

## **On Independence**

(Article by Janet Jagan in 1961, first published in Thunder, tells of some of the forces who opposed independence for Guyana.)

During the Independence debate in the Legislative Assembly, Mr. Burnham spent some time on the question of guarantees and the liberties of the people. What guarantees, he wanted to know, will there be for the rights of the individuals, after independence ?

He was then reminded that at the initiative of the Majority Party, the Constitutional Committee had unanimously agreed that the new constitution should have a Bill of Rights providing for freedom of the individual as set out in the thirty articles of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights.

But that did not please Mr. Burnham. Any government in power, he stressed, could change the constitution and take away from the individual the rights he enjoyed under the constitution. It must be made difficult to amend the constitution and urged that amendment must be by a two-thirds majority of the House.

Then Mr. Burnham was reminded that this very matter came before the Constitution Committee but his members voted against it. The voting on the motion that power to amend the constitution be vested in the Legislative by a two-thirds majority of those present was as follows:

### **How They Voted**

FOR :Mr. Hubbard, Mr. Fredericks, Mr. Davis, Mr. Jai Narine Singh, Mr. Ajudha Singh, Mr. Saffee, Mr. Rai, Mrs. Jagan and Mr. Benn.

AGAINST: Mr. Tasker, Mr. Jackson and Mr. Kendall.

DID NOT VOTE: Mr. Bowman.

What better guarantees are wanted? In the existing Legislative Assembly there are 35 seats of which the Majority Party with twenty seats do not have the majority of representatives on the Constitution Committee. [The weakness of the members] of the Opposition is that their arguments are based on the wrong premises. They assume that the PPP, which is apparently the winning political party in BG (having won now three consecutive elections) will take away from people their liberties.

The shoe is really on the other foot, for it is the PPP which is the only political force in British Guiana which has consistently fought for the rights and liberties of the people. The PPP opposed the Emergency Laws, the legislation restricting the importation of literature, the bans preventing persons from entering the country, the detention without trial of persons.

More important than all, the PPP has fought fearlessly for independence which is the liberty of the nation to rule itself, which is really the basic human right.

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