

## **No Case for New Elections**

by Janet Jagan

It would be well for us to examine, the question of Proportional Representation and new elections. Actually, the issue of PR does not arise unless there is a strong case for new elections.

Is the case for new elections very strong?

The argument bandied about by the People's National Congress and the United Force is that the PPP received less than a majority of the total votes in the 1961 elections and thus cannot speak for the majority of people.

If this argument were to hold water, it would mean that the first-past-the-post system which is inherent in the Western democracies does not work. So it would mean not only the condemnation of our electoral system, but also a complete denial of the use of this system in the countries which use it. Britain and the USA have governments, like ours, in which the ruling party does not necessarily receive the majority of the total votes.

### **Independence**

But a stronger argument against new elections is the fact that in 1960 there was a Constitution Conference in Britain which may be regarded as the prelude to independence.

At this conference, the PPP delegation put up a strong case for immediate independence. This was not supported by the PNC, which at that time was riding the Federation issue, and felt that independence would interfere with BG's entry into the West Indies Federation.

Thus, their cry was "Self-Government, Not Independence." The PNC brought up the proposition of PR at that time, but it was thrown out and given little serious consideration by the British, who could hardly be expected, in view of their own electoral system and that of the Commonwealth countries, to view it as a workable proposal.

But what is more significant to the question of new elections before independence is the intention behind the introduction of a new constitution which gave internal self-government to BG.

The self-governing constitution, under which we now operate, was discussed at the 1960 London Conference and introduced with the August 1961 elections.

This Constitution stated that elections would take place every four (4) years and put the winning party in office for a four-year period.

### **Significant point**

This is the significant point for, at that time, arrangements were also made for the next stage to independence.

The British Government, at the 1960 conference, accepted the principle of independence for BG and stated that a conference to discuss the issue would be convened one year after the introduction of the self-governing constitution or after the West Indies Federation obtained its independence, whichever period was shorter,

Therefore, the intention was clear that roughly one year after the introduction of internal self-government, talks would be held for transfer of the remaining power held in the hands of the British over to the Guyanese.

### **New elections**

Now, if it was intended that a new elections would be required before the country moved into independence, the self-governing constitution would not have included the clause for elections of a four-year duration, but would have provided for elections after one or two years.

Thus, it is clear that the British Government had not conceived the idea of any new elections when the country became independent. The British Government at the 1962 London Conference had only one role to play, and that was to rule out the contending point of new elections.

And this is where the British Government was dishonest in taking a neutral stand, or no stand, on the so-called deadlock issue.

(Thunder, 24 November 1962)

Copyright © Nadira Jagan-Brancier 2009

Cheddi Jagan Research Centre