

Our Gains are Monumental

by Janet Jagan

Just a few days off is the 12th Anniversary of the PPP/Civic's monumental triumph over the Burnham/Hoyte 28 years of rigged elections and the denial of the most elementary democratic practices.

The restoration of democracy and the end of fraudulent elections that held Guyana and its citizens in agony, fear and chains of many kinds was spearheaded by Guyana's outstanding leader Cheddi Jagan who had just the qualities needed at that particular historical moment.

We can only wonder what our position today might have been if he had not been at the helm of the Party he built and cherished, the People's Progressive Party. He had the brains and the determination to rid the county of the dictatorship that ruled mercilessly, corruptly and which had destroyed basic democratic practices. He was the Leader most needed at that historical time and he did what he was destined to do – lead the nation out of the morass of pain, indignity and chaos. The Party he and so many other stalwarts had built and nourished was there to provide a strong following for a strong leadership.

Few could have forgotten those heady days after the October 5, 1992 elections, when people could once again speak out without first turning their heads to see if anyone would report on them to the Kabaka's successor or his minions. Press freedom was declared, the media was at last free after 28 years of muzzling; people could go and come as they pleased; Parliament was now an open forum, no longer held in obedience to the powers who held office as a result of electoral rigging. Businesses could operate without forced payments to the robbers at Sophia and the ordinary man and woman were free. I remember one man saying to me a few days after October 5th: "I can breathe freely again without fear."

It's now 12 years after that great day of liberation, seven years after the death of Cheddi Jagan, who led us on the path of freedom. In the five years he lived and served as our President and Leader, he molded the thrust of the nation to a better life, with a great deal of the resources of Guyana diverted to the betterment of the condition of life of the working people and a reduction of the terrible poverty, a legacy of the Burnham-Hoyte years of repression. All he started has continued. A few, once close to him, even decry his good work and others try to misuse the freedom of the media, to mock the progress made.

I am often astounded by the manner in which supposedly intelligent people say we have no democracy and others, pushing to get what they perceive to be their share of the government process, the nonsensical concept of "shared government." They fail to point out any successful attempt of that anywhere in the world. So far, it has been a failure in Ireland where it was once touted as the way forward. Yes, all countries have their problems – their divisions – India has had its religious and language difficulties, the same for Indonesia and Malaysia; USA has a problem with its minorities and so do Ecuador and Bolivia and on and on we can go. But sharing government is no solution.

One real solution is to accept the norms of democracy and governance which means that periodic and fair elections is the way to having the people of any nation choose its government. It works everywhere, why not in Guyana? A party that once ruled by rigged elections seem incapable of playing by the rules – and wants the goalpost changed every election to make it easier for them to win. They've been playing this

game too long and it's time now for society to stop encouraging their childish antics and to tell them the facts of life as people all over the world know. Perhaps the 28 years when the PNC suppressed democracy has been responsible for their lack of belief in democratic practices.

We have much to be proud of as we celebrate October 5th and we must not allow the negative elements in our society to suggest, as they do all the time, that we have not made positive gains. All we have to do is open our eyes and see that Guyanese today are better off in many, many ways than before, that democracy is in full bloom, that poverty is shrinking and that, most of all, people are free!

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