

Increase the Retiring Age

by Janet Jagan – August 11, 2007

It was a good decision of Education Minister Shaik Baksh to employ retired teachers for the nation's schools. They are definitely needed and their many years of experience will go a long way in the teaching field as well as guiding young teachers in the profession.

I have before, expressed the view that the retiring age for teachers, nurses and public servants is cemented in the past. Things have changed drastically since the last two centuries when the age of retirement was 55 years. Medical science have moved ahead by leaps and bounds and today's 55 year's old is not like yesteryear's 55 year old. Men and women in their fifties are like their counterparts in their late 30's and 40's of the past. Science, improved living standards and all the fantastic advances of humankind, have changed the lives of most people on this earth.

When I was a child, one had to be very rich to own a refrigerator, one of the major advances in food preservation and the lessening of burdens on housewives. We had an "ice box" and depended on the delivery of ice to keep our food from spoiling. That is just one of the changes that have taken place, and today, there are not many in Guyana without a refrigerator. Improved medicines have lengthened our lives and in most societies, except the poorest, people live much longer than before.

In most jobs, the longer the person works in the particular field he/she was trained for, generally the greater the knowledge and expertise. This applies to most jobs, particularly the professions like nursing, teaching, engineering, medicine and so on. A teacher of, say, 35 years in the profession, is generally much better than a beginning teacher, no matter the level of the teacher's education. The experience a teacher gains throughout the years is an almost incalculable asset – the understanding of children, knowing how to deal with difficult children, putting over the subject so that the student understands, being a role model to children and so on.

These same considerations apply to the other professions. A doctor in private practice does not retire at 55 years. In fact, patients usually prefer a doctor of long experience, not one just out of medical school. Even in the government medical services, the 55-year-old doctor is not retired, the reason being, he/she cannot be replaced and better judgment rules.

We are losing many of our professionals, particularly nurses and teachers, to the migration syndrome, and moreso, these particular professionals because of the needs of the First World countries where women in particular, are moving on to jobs of higher pay and greater status. Women have moved up the economic ladder so swiftly in the last few decades that in countries that offer higher status jobs for women, they are moving into these and, leaving behind the traditional women's job like teaching and nursing. This is a phenomenon of the late 20th and early 21st centuries where women's struggles for equality in all aspects of life, including jobs is now paying off, particularly in the First World countries. That is not to say that it is not happening in developing countries like ours, where women have climbed upwards into many fields hitherto held only by men.

Since these realities exist, it is time, now to officially change the age of retirement. My suggestion is from 55 years to 65 years, and I hope it is done sooner than later!