

# Anti-Independence Gang Given Independence

*- Janet Jagan*

May 26 was the 25th Anniversary of Guyana's Independence. Historically, it is necessary to clear up some points on this matter. While it is true that the actual stage of independence came about during the reign of the People's National Congress, it is an historical reality that the People's Progressive Party initiated and carried through the struggle up to the actual date of independence on May 26, 1966.

The Party's first constitution adopted at its first Congress in 1951 said clearly: "In the firm belief that the people of British Guiana, like peoples everywhere, are entitled to the full enjoyment of all those human rights and fundamental freedoms often proclaimed as the common standard of achievement for all peoples and nations, we, the members of the organisation hereinafter named, have resolved to combine our efforts to achieve the national independence of British Guiana, and to secure for all Guianese social progress and increasingly better standards of life."

But even before the first Congress, the PPP in April 1950, just four months after its formation, issued the first "Aims and Programme of the People's Progressive Party", setting out in the clearest terms its objective of "**pledging itself to the task of winning a free and independent Guiana**". Historically, this was the first time the concept of independence from the colonial power, Great Britain, was declared as an objective of a political party.

To the end of attaining independence, the PPP began immediately campaigning for the first stage - self government - using nationwide petitions, public meetings, demands on the Colonial Office, and other means until the British recognised the strength of these demands and sent the **Waddington Commission** to British Guiana to see about constitutional changes. The PPP gave evidence before the Commission and stepped up the pressure (as it has done over the past 23 years for free and fair elections) until the response was the Waddington Constitution, the most advanced constitution in the Caribbean. This

was set into operation for the 1953 elections.

At no point in the PPP's history from 1950 to 1966, was there any let up in its striving for independence. When the PPP was the majority party following the 1957 elections (when the PNC won only 3 out of 14 seats), it moved in the Legislative Council for a Constitutional Committee of that body for independence. When the principle of independence was discussed in the Committee in 1958, those voting against were LFS Burnham, Rudy Kendall, A Jackson, R Tello and Stephen Campbell - all the non PPP members. The Constitutional Conference was eventually held in London in 1960. At this Conference, Burnham hedged on independence, as he was to do so many times, saying that Guiana should attain independence only as a unit within an independent West Indies Federation. The PPP, however, felt that an independent Guiana would not be precluded from joining the Federation should it decide to do so. It is also interesting to note that Burnham opposed the vote at 18 years at that Conference.

Later after the 1961 elections, when the PNC again made a poor showing at the contest and the PPP won a majority, the PPP moved in Parliament for the appointment of a Constitutional Committee to consider a draft constitution. It was composed of 16 members - 8 PPP, 6 PNC and 2 UF with the Speaker as Chairman. In protest at this, the PNC and UF walked out of the House of Assembly!

All of the PNC's negative actions, succeeded in postponing the decision on independence by the UK Government. Moreso, the CIA-instigated violence of the 1960s, in which the PNC, the UF and the TUC were used as pawns of British and US intelligence units, was aimed at delaying independence.

Burnham and his PNC used the slogan in the 1960s and particularly at the 1964 elections "No Independence Under Jagan", which in essence was always the position of the Burnham-led PNC.

Not only was there this open opposition at the Parliamentary and constitutional conference level, but all the mass demonstrations by the PPP for independence were violently opposed by the PNC and its thugs. An infamous event took place at Government House when the PPP carried picket lines calling for independence. The then PPP General Secretary, Janet Jagan, on the picket line, was assaulted by

a leading PNC member, Mrs Willems who furiously screamed that the PNC did not want independence.

This was not an isolated incident and die-hard PNC members and the notorious PNC thugs, did their best to harass and break up pro-independence picket lines and rallies, so incensed were they on their anti-independence stance.

However, the PPP continued its strong advocacy of independence, introducing its two famous and exceptionally popular and successful Freedom March in the sixties, when thousands marched from village to village with whistle stop meetings. One group travelled from Crabwood Creek to Georgetown and the other, from Charity to Georgetown. Well known personalities in these marches included "Fireball" Philomena Sahoye, Michel Forde, E M G Wilson and Cedric Nunes. Participants included thousands of grass roots workers, farmers, housewives, students and others. Prominent among the pro-independence pickets was Burnham's sister Jessie, who had left his party in disgust and re-joined the PPP.

Therefore, it becomes something of a farce, when the PNC tries to claim responsibility for attaining Guyana's independence. At any assessment of history, it is clear that the PNC went out of its way to oppose independence and became the recipients of this favour granted by Great Britain as a pay-off for its complicity in removing the PPP from office through subversion, manipulation and destabilisation.

It will forever be to the discredit of the PNC and the British, the manner and methods used to defer independence when it was due, and to hand it over on a silver platter to the anti-independence movement - the PNC.

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