

Reminiscences of Cheddi Jagan -1964-1966

After the 1964 elections and their aftermath, we moved out of Red House, our home since 1961. It was a beautiful old building from the 19th Century and was occupied until Dr. Jagan became Premier by high-ranking British Civil servants, the last being the Colonial Secretary Mr. Jakeway. It was always called Red House because of the colour of the shingled building.

Although the PPP won the most votes of any single party - 47% - under the newly introduced electoral system of proportional representative (PR), we did not win over 50% which would guarantee us the government. Two small parties - one Muslim and one other were urged to contest in order to split the PPP votes. The other Party was headed by the disgruntled Bairam Singh Rai, a former Minister of the PPP government who left under highly controversial circumstances.

The complete changing of the electoral system from constituency to PR was introduced to prevent the PPP from again winning elections, as it had done in 1953, 1957 and 1961. This was all a reflection of the Cold War atmosphere.

According to normal parliamentary procedure, the Party with the greatest numbers of votes should have been called in to form the government. If it failed, other parties could be approached. However, in this instance, the British, behind the scenes, brought together the People's National Congress headed by Forbes Burnham and the United Force led by big businessman Peter D' Aguir to form the government, which they did.

With these changes, we immediately moved out of Red House to a hastily rented house on Camp Street, a very noisy area of the City.

What I found amazing was how Dr. Jagan reacted to all these changes - from living in Red House to living in the new quarters- from Premier to Opposition Leader. He sat down quietly at a table and started assembling papers; then sat down for long hours in the day and night to write "The West on Trial." His powers of concentration were indeed impressive.

Of course, his daytime writings were frequently broken by internal party meetings, fulfilling his duties as General Secretary and going around the country side talking to Party members and supporters, helping them understand what had taken place and keeping their spirits high.

I cannot now remember how long it took him to complete the book, but I believe it was over a year, since he had so many other duties to perform, including his role of Leader of the Opposition in the National Assembly.

On top of all of all of that, he started making plans for his family to have a permanent place of abode, as we had been renting our living quarters since 1943. A simple house was constructed on a house lot in Bel Air that we had purchased in 1957 and we moved there in 1966, by this time with very little furniture, and with our two children, Cheddi Jr. and Nadira and our dog and monkey.

by Janet Jagan