

Why I did it!

by Janet Jagan

In one of the Wednesday Stabroek News columns called "Ramblings," the anonymous writer made a small remark about the video on my life done by my second cousin Suzie Wasserman. He asked why she did not include the episode of my throwing the papers served on me at my inauguration as President, over my shoulder.

The reason it was not included, I believe, is because she and her cameraman could not get to State House due to the violence in the streets engineered by the PNC at their humiliating loss at the polls. Because, my party received the highest number of votes in the 1997 elections than any other Party has ever received in any legitimate elections in Guyana.

Because we did so well, and obviously crossed lines into all areas, including so-called bastions of the PNC, that Party was again venting its rage as it has done so many times in our contemporary history.

But why did I throw the papers that were intended to prevent me from taking the Oath of Office as President over my shoulder? The reason, as I explained twice while I was President, was not disrespect of the legal system, but disgust at the many times my Party has been denied its legal rights to office over and over again. It was an act of protest against the multiple injustices my Party has faced.

It began when the British suspended the Constitution in 1953 and denied the PPP its legitimate right to office. In 1957, when the British revived elections, the constituencies were rigged to defeat us - but we won anyhow. Dr. Jagan received more votes in his one constituency than did 5 other seats combined! These were the seats won by the PNC and other opposition groups. In 1961, when we again had elections, the British had a special commission determine new constituency boundaries, all manipulated diabolically to defeat the PPP. We won, despite all that.

Then in the period 1961 - 64, the British, aided by the USA and local puppets, denied us independence because they did not want Jagan to lead an independent nation. They then changed the whole electoral process to defeat the PPP, and even then, when the PPP got the largest number of votes of any Party, manipulated a coalition between the PNC and the United Force to keep us out of office.

From then on, it was one rigged election after the other. For the doubters and those who foisted rigged elections and later claimed the PPP was doing the same, let me quote from a declassified American document of June 12, 1968, "a memorandum for the Hon. Walt W. Rostow, Special Assistant to the President, Subject - Plans of Guyana Prime Minister Forbes Burnham, Leader of the People's National Congress (PNC) to Rig the Elections Scheduled for Late 1968 or Early 1969."

The memo states that at a high level meeting of the PNC, Forbes Burnham "gave instructions to rig the elections scheduled for late 1968 or early 1969 in order to permit the PNC to win a clear majority. Burnham said that the registration of East Indians, who traditionally vote for the PPP, should be strictly limited in order to keep their number of eligible voters as low as possible. He also gave instructions to his Party leaders to increase the size of the PNC electorate by registering some PNC adherents who are between the ages of 17 and 20 years, although the minimum age for voting is 21 years of age. He said he plans to have written into the electoral law a provision for increasing the use of proxy votes." The

declassified document also noted: "In April 1968 Burnham stated that he will not form a government if he has to depend on his coalition partner Peter D'Aguiar ..."

This document, signed by Thomas H. Karamessines was copied to the Deputy Secretary for Defence, the Assistant Secretary of State for Inter American Affairs and the Director of Intelligence and Research.

It would be a mistake not to recognise Mr. Desmond Hoyte's place in all that took place in the devastating years of PNC rule. Hoyte was the PNC's man in the Election Commission for the 1968 elections. I was also a member, representing my Party, and I was witness to his compliance with all the methods used to rig the first of a series of fraudulent elections during the Burnham/Hoyte regimes.

The irony, or maybe it's just a joke, is that the PNC cannot stop hollering, marching in the streets, using violence and instituting election petitions against the PPP in all the elections since rigging was defeated!

Yes! I threw away the papers that would have prevented me from taking the Oath of Office as President, because I had already taken the Oath of Office, not at a secret ceremony as alleged, (can over 35 people be secret?) but done legally in order that my Party would not again be denied justice!

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Published Monday to Saturday
By Guyana Publications Inc.
46/47 Robb Street, Lacytown, Georgetown
Tel: 225-3376, 226-7206, 227-4076 & 77, 227-8571, 227-4080

Editorial

Tossing the court order

In her column in the *Weekend Mirror* of May 12, 2004 Mrs Janet Jagan, former President, dealt with what has since become the famous incident, captured on television, of her throwing over her shoulder a court order that had been served on her by a marshal on that day in 1997 when she became president. Mrs Jagan wrote: "Do you wonder why I tossed the Court Order over my shoulder on the day I became President? The Court Order was useless as it prevented me from being sworn into office, but I had already been sworn in. It was another attempt, as in 1953, 1957, 1961, 1964 and all the rigged elections by the PNC to prevent the PPP from taking and/or holding office. I had no disrespect for the courts, but anger at yet another effort to prevent us from our right to office."

It is hard not to sympathise with her. The courts had proved singularly impotent to deal with the blatantly rigged elections in 1968, 1973, 1980 and 1985 that kept the PPP out of power. It was hard, given all that had happened over the years, for the PPP not to view the courts with jaundiced eyes.

In the same article, citing Dr Jagan's book *The West on Trial* she notes that the slogan 'Apan Jhaat' originated and was used by Daniel Debidin's United Farmers and Workers' Party in the 1953 elections. This has also unjustly been laid at the door of the PPP. She also denies that the PPP flaunted its victory after the 1961 elections in the motorcade from Berbice by abusing Afro-Guyanese. "This just never happened! It was a peaceful, joyful demonstration of goodwill, following what was a contentious elections. The British colonials had tried their best to prevent the PPP from winning by gerrymandering the boundaries of the constituencies against a PPP win. This was carried out by Sir Hugh Hallet, sent by the British colonial government as the sole boundary Commissioner and he introduced 35 constituencies for the 1961 elections. Dr Jagan cites an example of how the PPP suffered losses in the new boundaries. "Of the 9 constituencies in the county of Berbice, for example, the average number of persons in the 6 seats which we won was 17,639 as compared with the average figures of 12,109 for the three seats of New Amsterdam, Abary and Berbice river which were won by the opposition. Had the average been constant, we would have won perhaps one or possibly two more seats."

The PPP has undoubtedly been much maligned over the years. Because of its ideology, every effort was made to get it out and keep it out of power, by fair means and foul. Mrs Jagan and the party she helped to form have always had a moral case. The PPP won power democratically but the external powers and their internal allies were not prepared to accept a communist government.

Mrs Jagan has herself been vilified and demonised over the years. She was portrayed as the Machiavellian schemer who converted Dr Jagan to Marxism-Leninism while he was a student in Chicago. Inevitably those who felt that the radical left policies of the party would spell ruin for the country had no time for her and indeed have never forgiven her for what they see as the damage done. She has had to bear the harshest criticisms over the years, never more so than when she ill-advisedly ran for the presidency in 1997 after the death of Dr Jagan.

Did the Jagans as Marxist-Leninists pose a threat

to democracy in Guyana? The evidence suggests that that is not the case. They were able to win fair elections in 1957 and 1961. What Mrs Jagan, her late husband and other senior party ideologues have never been able to face up to, however, is that at least since the 1961 elections there has been a profound ambivalence at the heart of the party. While its radical ideology remains, at least in its constitution, it has been elected overwhelmingly by an ethnic Indian vote and though Dr and Mrs Jagan have never been racist, the party has in fact had to accommodate to and pander to its ethnic supporters. Thus the strange paradox that has perplexed many for so long of a Marxist party, now in reform mode, supported faithfully by an Indian vote, a large part of which has no sympathy at all for socialist principles. This is the contradiction at the heart of the PPP's politics which the leadership steadfastly refuses to recognise or accept.

Though now lacking her former energy and organisational skills, displayed in keeping the party together during the long years in the wilderness, Mrs Jagan retains her fighting spirit as is clear from her columns. One must hope that even her most unforgiving opponents can find the magnanimity to respect her lifelong commitment to Guyana, however misguided they may consider her policies to have been.