

What about shared Government

by Janet Jagan

The arguments for “shared government” as the People’s National Congress and those, mainly in the media backing it, centre around the factor that one party, the one that wins a majority in the elections every five years, runs the show and the losers are out in the cold.

They claim that this impairs democracy, divides the nation and puts decision-making in the hands of only one group - the winners at elections. Their complaint is that the concept of “winner takes all” is wrong and leads to bad and unrepresentative government. Their argument then is that if Executive Power is shared, it will be more fair and democratic.

After all they say, the PNC gets a large percentage of the votes, usually in the vicinity of 41% now that elections are no longer rigged. The PNC used to argue that the constituency system was no good because the PPP would win with more seats, but not necessarily a large percentage of the votes. Thus, they argued in the 1960’s, the system was unfair as the PPP got disproportionately more seats than it earned percentage wise and therefore they opted for proportional representation, which they said, was much more fair.

And so the USA and the UK, neither of which embraced proportional representation at any level, backed the PNC’s claim and thus proportional representation was introduced.

However, since 1992 and the next two elections, the PPP won over 50% of the votes under PR and this now, is unfair and so they insisted at the time of constitutional reform that a modified system including the essence of the constituency system be introduced. And it was, for the 2001 elections. Despite these changes, the PPP won again, so there has to be something wrong with the system which allows the PPP to win consistently.

Now it’s something else - shared government. Both the PNC and the local media accept that the USA is the greatest democracy on earth and the PNC leaders frequently rush to Washington to influence lawmakers about the injustices of the local method of governance. So let’s take a look at what goes on there.

I read with interest an article by the well known Washington journalist Elizabeth Drew in her piece entitled “Hung Up in Washington” in the February 12, 2004 issue of the New York Review. She writes about the polarization in the House of Representatives of the two parties along party lines which has resulted in major legislation from airline safety to expansion of Medicine being held up and the difficulty in reaching compromises.

She writes: “The increasing unwillingness to compromise is not only blocking legislation but, it is not overdramatic to say, is subverting fundamental concepts of democracy. The people’s business is not getting done.” She then quotes from the Chicago Tribune that the very idea of democracy is being threatened “by acting to create districts in which a single party has an overwhelming majority Members of Congress protect their jobs and make voting in general elections an empty exercise.” The

increasing number of safe seats, she writes, makes fewer and fewer members interested in compromise. She also notes that extreme partisanship has strongly affected major legislation in the 2003 session of Congress. The Medicare bill adopted by Congress, she writes, and signed into law by Bush was put across by the drugs and insurance industries both of which have contributed a great deal of money to elected politicians, in particular to Republicans and have strong influences in Washington, and so on.

Looks to me like they have more problems than we have and don't forget, the two parties, the Republicans and Democrats ran neck and neck at the 2000 election with the Democrats getting the largest percentage of votes and the Republicans gaining office in what is still challenged as unfair. The same this year seem to be likely, as so far the two major parties are running close, and not the 41% - 53% here.

The \$64 question is -- is there a move in the USA for shared government because of all the problems and even the possible subversion of democracy? No way!

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