

# **Five Years to Register 400,000 voters is Surely Sufficient Time!**

by Janet Jagan

Is it right for persons directly involved in electoral fraud, or the political progeny of those who carried out of the most vicious forms of electoral rigging for some 24 years, to have strong influence in the conduct of elections in Guyana? I say no!

It's nonsense and much more sinister than many may wish to admit. Delaying the holding of free and fair elections is an affront to democracy. Every nation's constitution states the frequency of general elections - generally each four or five years. To delay elections, deliberately as some are trying to do is seeking to destroy not only the constitution but democracy itself.

In Guyana we have elections every five years. The Elections Commission is set up in a particular way to bring balance and the democratic process to the objective of free and fair elections. We are unique in that we had blatantly fraudulent elections in 1968, 1973, 1980, 1985 and in a referendum. Therefore the objective after all that ended was to see that it never ever happened again.

According to the agreed arrangements for the establishment of an Elections Commission whose task is to conduct registration and elections, the Chairman is chosen in a unique way, structured to satisfy a constant-complaining Opposition that failed to win at free and fair elections (but did quite well once they were rigged!). The Opposition Leader submits some names for the post of Chairman, out of which, the Party in office chooses one name. Apparently this system was created to bring closer harmony in the Elections Commission made up also of 3 members of the governing party and 3 members of the Opposition.

Surely any sane person would expect that with five- years to prepare for the next elections, time would not be a problem - especially in a country with only some 400,000 voters. Apparently registration of such a small number of voters over a five year period is no problem anywhere, except in Guyana where the Opposition is unsure of its possibilities of winning and will do anything to postpone the fatal day of elections.

The whole scenario is filled with nonsense - 5 years to prepare 400,000 voters for elections! And yet it cannot be done to satisfy an Opposition that has only enjoyed office in rigged elections? Come, now - let's be more realistic!

I quote the following from Stabroek News of Sunday last: "Attorney-at-law CML John, a former Minister of Home Affairs under the PNC, disagrees with the conclusions by the donor countries on the state of readiness for the August 2006 poll.

"The diplomatic representatives from the United States, Britain, Canada and the European Union stationed in Georgetown said in a joint statement last week that elections could be held by August 4, 2006.

John, who is also President of the Guyana Association of Local Authorities, a city councilor and a one-time political leader, argues on the One on One TV interview programme tonight that the current arrangement for the registration of voters is flawed, thus paving the way for electoral fraud. "We do not have a pure list of voters," he said."

For those who may not know, Mr John was the minister in the PNC government responsible for the 1968 elections - the first rigged elections in Guyana. I was a member of the Elections Commission along with the hand-picked Chairman, Sir Donald Jackson and Mr D. Hoyte representing the PNC, plus a representative of the United Force. From my early experience in the Commission, I had unearthed the insidious methods being used to rig the elections. Not one member of the Commission paid the slightest attention to my exposures of the rigging, since they were all intent on fulfilling their obligations to their No. 1 Boss to see that the PNC came out with a lot more votes than it had in the 1964 elections.

I insisted that we visit the Minister of Home Affairs so I could point out the irregularities. This was finally done - but what a disaster it was! The fine gentleman, who is now talking about a "pure list of voters" and "electoral fraud" for the 2006 elections, was totally, completely unconcerned about the rigging techniques of the 1968 elections. In fact, he was so rude and hostile to me that I can honestly say, in my whole career in politics, I never met anyone of his calibre or determination to create an evil system of voting.

Well, what's done is done - but are honest, democratic loving people to be subjected to the ideas and directives of those who put us through the agony of their 28 years of monstrous rule via rigged elections? Those demanding the postponement of elections this year are the hereditary proponents of the series of rigged elections in the 60s, 70s and 80s and want to create greater headaches and problems for Guyanese. They seem to think that the postponement of elections will create the necessity for an Interim Government, which will give them back the phony power they had through the rigging process.

All Guyanese must demand that the elections take place in accordance with our Constitution and that every effort be made to maintain the high standards of the 1992, 1997 and 2001 elections!

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