

# Time to Reverse the Decision

by Janet Jagan – Feb. 10, 2007

There are fairly good arguments and some not so good at all the various levels. Stabroek News claims that the government has shut out all advertisements and is thus infringing freedom of the press. That charge seems a bit preposterous as it has not had to shut down, stop printing anything at all, like some of its nasty and unfair attacks on the PPP/C government, there is no censorship, it hasn't had to reduce staff or reduce its pages. It may have lost some profits, but I can guarantee it won't go out of business.

Besides, Stabroek News still gets a lot of government ads. Look at the last Sunday issue. It contained two Bank of Guyana ads, two Guyana Revenue Authority ads, one Guyana Energy Agency, one from the University of Guyana, one from the Guyana Lands and Survey Commission, one from Queen's College and some other ads that could be termed related to the government – two from the Ethnic Relations Committee and two from the Lottery – but if there are objections to these being included, it doesn't matter because Stabroek News had eight government ads – or to use the Stabroek News daily banner, from “taxpayers' funds.” So what are they speaking about? On occasional checks I do on the daily S/N, government ads average about five a day.

The government claims that S/N is losing its circulation and thus the decision to close down advertisements to S/N is purely a commercial decision. On that, I don't agree. Government advertisements should be spread through the media on a fair basis, despite circulation and content.

Kaieteur News has come up with some interesting points, the strongest being that in its first 10 years of existence it did not get any government ads and now it has the highest circulation in the print media. Good argument except for the fact that, and this is my personal opinion, it's a lousy newspaper, filled with nonsense I don't wish to read. In fact, I stopped reading Kaieteur News long ago because of its sensationalism.

Although I personally do not agree with the alleged stopping of advertisements to Stabroek News, and would urge a reversal of that decision, in no way does it mean that my views of the paper have changed. In this column, I have several times had to refer to the perverse and mean-thinking that is expressed in the notorious letter pages, the sometimes nasty and unreasonable editorials and the misuse of the news columns to attack the party in government. In fact, Stabroek News seems dedicated to the demise of the PPP/C. Fortunately for the PPP, that newspaper's 2006 campaign didn't bring the desired outcome at the general elections.

The basic question Stabroek News must answer is: how has freedom of the press been attacked? There is no such thing as censorship in Guyana, forced or self inflicted. They know perfectly well that the PPP restored freedom, press freedom and all civil rights and has never, ever, endangered these rights. Is Stabroek News trying to be more “sensational” than Kaieteur News?