

TIME TO REJOICE

By Janet Jagan

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Fifteen years ago, on October 5th, 1992, the People's Progressive Party won an outstanding victory at the polls and finally, after 28 years of repression by the PNC government, opened up a new era of democracy in Guyana.

Those of us who lived through the decadent, harsh and troubled years from 1964 to 1992 know of the suffering of the people, the hardships and discrimination they faced, the corrupt rigged elections that heralded its own series of corruption.

The return to democracy was not easy. For many years, only the People's Progressive Party fought back, while many were engulfed in fear. The PPP gave courage to those who wanted an end to the dictatorship which maintained itself in power through electoral rigging.

Gradually, others joined forces, and by the time the PNC held its referendum to endorse a new constitution that gave more powers to the PNC, a successful boycott was held. Later, many groups opposed to the wrong doings of the PNC formed an alliance to rid Guyana of this menace that was destroying the country. The Patriotic Coalition for Democracy (PCD) brought a number of progressive groups and parties into a strong coalition fighting for the restoration of democracy.

Former US President Jimmy Carter was also drawn into the struggle and helped to restore free and fair elections, focusing on the counting of ballot papers at the place of poll and in front of representatives of the various parties contesting. Although the PNC had concocted many malpractices in the rigging process, this was a major factor, as previously observers were prevented from watching the counting of ballots.

The restoration of democracy at the first fair elections in 28 years brought a wave of fresh air and confidence in the future, particularly as the winning presidential candidate was

Cheddi Jagan, a man of uncontested integrity, a leader beloved by the people, particularly for his long and ardent struggle against colonialism and for the rights of all working people.

From October 5, 1992 to the present, there has been a determined effort to restore all aspects of democracy denied during the 28 year old reign of the PNC. From that day on there has been a steady, organized and principled pattern of development of the social needs of the Guyanese masses – from a highly successful housing programme that has provided housing to the poorest, greatly extended and improved health care and education, wide scale expansion of pure water supplies, consistent and practical help for agriculture and industrial development as well as repairing and rebuilding the neglected infrastructure of the nation. The country's massive foreign debt which prevented adequate funds being used for development, has been substantially reduced.

It is time, now on the 15th anniversary of October 5, 1992 for the whole nation to rejoice and to look back with pride on the great achievements made on behalf of all Guyanese.