By Janet Jagan

I remember during the 1997 elections, when the returns from the polling stations indicated clearly that the PPP had won an overwhelming majority, the highest of any party in any free and fair elections in the history of Guyana. It turned out to be 55.7%. (The PPP won 8 out of 24 seats in the 953 elections, but I do not know the percentage).

Overseas journalists were already interviewing me, but the recalcitrant PNC could not handle it. So accusations were levelled to the results of rigged elections from 1968 to 1985, that they had not accepted defeat. They rushed to the courts to try to prevent me from assuming office and it was my turn to maneuver their dirty tricks. I was sworn in legitimately, and not as the PNC says, secretly. I don't think a ceremony is secret if more than 35 are present, and that's how it was.

Much was made of my refusal to restrain me from being sworn in as President, over my shoulder, at the public ceremony welcoming my ascendency to the post of President. When I look back at the incident and analyze it thoroughly, I find it was done instinctively, without any premeditation. Why did I have this reflex to rid myself of this document which would have prevented me, for how long I don't know, from being sworn in as President if I had not already been sworn in?

The following from Guyana's history will help with an understanding. All through the years of its existence (and even now) the People's Progressive Party has been plagued and harassed by elements bent on denying the Party its just rewards. Starting with 1953, the PPP had fought for and won from the British an advanced Constitution that introduced for the first time universal adult suffrage and a ministerial system - the first step on the road to independence. After 133 days in office, the Colonial Office suspended the Constitution and threw the legally elected government of the PPP out of office.

An interim, non-elected government (maybe like the one the opposition parties tried to get in place before the March elections) was established from 1954 to 1957. Then, after the Colonial Office believed that the split in the PPP engineered by Mr. Burnham would have wrecked the PPP under Dr. Jagan's leadership, new elections were held. But the British wanted to be certain that the PPP (J) would lose so it manipulated the constituencies against the Party. For example, Dr. Jagan in his Corentyne constituency received 23,443 votes, more votes than the total of all the five elected members of the three parties that fought the PPP. In spite of the rigging of the constituencies, the PPP won. That was for the period 1957-61.

For the 1961 elections, the British again rigged the constituencies, maneuvered as "gerrymandering." The British used a boundary commission to re-arrange the constituencies to prevent the PPP from winning again. Again, the PPP upset the Colonial Office calculations and won 20 of the 35 constituency seats.

The period 1961-1964 was tumultuous with killings and bombings and burnings by the PNC, backed by the puppet TUC and the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). These were the foundations of the PPP Government and this was encouraged by the Government and the British Commissioner of Police. An effort was made to depose the PPP government culminated in the change in the electoral system from first past-the-post to Proportional Representation (PR). One year was cut from the PPP's term of office and elections were held in 1964.

It is ironic that the PR system which the PNC supported and under which it held office for 28 years no longer serves its purpose. It has made many efforts to change the system, as it no longer brings the PNC, the victories it had hoped for). In the 1964 elections, the PPP won the largest percentage of votes of any single party, but under 50%.

When Cheddi Jagan and the PPP won the first free and fair elections in 1992, again the PNC tried to prevent his taking office.

So, this history of outrageous conspiracies to prevent the PPP from taking office in the face of overwhelming people's support at the polls is the background for my rejection of yet another attempt to deny the PNC its legitimate right to office.