

The PPP/C: What Went Wrong?

The PPP/C separated itself from the people, according to one staunch supporter. The People's Progressive Party was always known as a grassroots party but after 23 years in power it got too comfortable. It failed to do the legwork needed to win power and even its most ardent followers were demanding change. The Party will cite rigged elections as a cause, and there were irregularities, but the PPP/C knows that it should have done better in spite of them.

Dr. Steve Surujbally is the Chairman of the Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM). The Peoples Progressive Party/Civic said after the May 11, 2015 elections that it did not have confidence in Dr. Surujbally and that he should resign. But Dr. Surujbally wasn't buying it. He said, 'I will not resign. I will resign when it pleases me. Why didn't they call for Gocool Bodhoo, former Chairman of GECOM to resign when he gave them 33 seats instead of 32?'

This question speaks volumes about the state of the PPP/C and its inability to gain a majority in the recent elections. The Party can blame every Tom and Harry about its dismal performance but the blame should lie squarely at the door of the hierarchy of the PPP/C. Many feel that it has let down its supporters and with all the resources at its disposal it should not have been confined to the opposition benches.

When did the PPP/C realize that GECOM was going to be a problem? According to some analysts the Party knew since the 2011 elections that GECOM had to be reformed but did little to address it. The current leadership of the PPP/C is so shell-shocked that it has allowed the statement of Dr. Surujbally to pass without comment. For example, did Gocool 'give them 33 seats' in 2011 or was it the voters that turned up at the polls? If Gocool gave 33 seats then Dr. Surujbally is saying clearly that something was improper. Is he implying that he gave the Coalition 33 seats this time and so two wrongs can make a right?

Apart from incorrect Statement of Polls there are other fundamental problems with the PPP/C and it would do well to examine them if it wants to do better next time. Last October, a group of offi-

cials met in Georgetown, Guyana. They were from the ruling PPP/C. During the meeting the question of the elections came up. How prepared was the PPP/C for the elections?

The Party was not prepared, some said. It had not done enough grassroots work. The PPP/C at

There was capitalism, socialism, Marxism and of course humanism and if you were not sure which to pick at least you left thinking that Cheddi thought about you.

The PPP was in the opposition for 28 years but this did not stop Jagan from listening and con-

sultation parties visited their villages several times and held meetings with them. Their complaints centered on a number of bread and butter issues that ranged from poor water quality to education and the price of food. 'Each time they visited we were promised a better deal if they won. Now that they have won we expect them to deliver,' one resident of Vergenoeg said recently.

Why would the PPP/C allow stalwarts such as Moses Nagamootoo, Khemraj Ramjattan and Ralph Ramkarran to leave? This is a question that only the hierarchy can answer but these former members

gations of rigging at the PNC elections. But when it came time for the national elections in May 2015 the factions came together for a common purpose and that was to get the PPP/C out of office. This closing of ranks by the PNC party showed political common-sense, a quality that was lacking in the PPP/C.

The lack of shrewdness and savvy was demonstrated in the behavior of two top ministers in the PPP/C government. At the eve of the elections when best behavior was at a premium the former Attorney General Anil Nandlall was caught in 'rice bed talk' that did little to enhance his reputation. He was lucky not to be fired and while the Party was still smarting from the fall-out the Health Minister Dr. Bheri Ramsarran was recorded disrespecting women. He was fired as a result of public pressure but which political party wants this sort of embarrassment just days before a national election?

These behaviors were interpreted as inappropriate and arrogant but there were the 'massive rallies' to give comfort as they were in 2011. On the day of the election, however, a good number of supporters stayed at home. One report stated that around 800 persons in Port Mourant, Berbice, did not show up at the polls. This number can hurt a party and it did in the final PPP/C tally.

In politics, as in other areas of public service, the message and the messenger are of immense importance. Dr. Leslie Ramsammy stated that 'the opposition controlled the media' and therefore the PPP could not get its message across. What an admission from the ruling party! If a party allows itself to be outwitted and outsmarted by the opposition media than that party deserves to lose. This is elementary Kautilya!

These are the days of the internet and all the technology that comes with it. The PPP/C had a number of newspapers, television and radio stations in Guyana that were sympathetic to its cause but we are told that it failed to mobilize them effectively to get its message out. How then will it be able to do this



Dr. Dhanpaul Narine

in 2020? The 'Chronicle' and government-owned media may no longer be accessible to the PPP/C in opposition. As far as the messengers are concerned this too lacked luster. One top functionary in the PPP/C complained that he alone had to do most of the reaching out and most of the organizing and that it was backbreaking. Where were the others?

During its 23 years in power could the PPP/C rely on the loyalty of the public service? These are the men and women that carry out policy. Although it would be difficult to quantify its performance perhaps the behavior of the public servants in one Ministry could provide a guide. When they heard that the Coalition was heading towards victory the public servants of that Ministry, it is alleged, chased out the PPP/C Minister thereby preventing him from entering his office.

This brings us to corruption. You were likely to hear in Guyana, and abroad, that the 'PPP/C government is too corrupt.' President Donald Ramotar admitted that there was corruption and that all political parties were on committees to fight it. But this did go far enough because if corruption took place persons should have been prosecuted for it. The PPP/C needs to get back to the drawing board and to bring in fresh faces with the talent to connect with ordinary people. It won't be easy.

The Coalition has tasted power. President David Granger and his Cabinet have begun to address some of the immediate problems of the nation. In the near future the proposals of the PPP/C, including the Money Laundering Act and the Amalia Falls Project will be refashioned and passed.

Can the PPP/C become an effective opposition? It is a role that will test their might and mettle.



Moses Nagamootoo and David Granger in New York in April 2015. The APNU/AFC Coalition have formed the new government in Guyana.

that time had failed to connect with the people where it mattered most: in the villages, that collection of hardy souls that exemplify the dreams and reality where the struggles for a better life are enacted daily. The present lot needs to learn from Cheddi Jagan, the founder of the Party.

One of the strengths of Cheddi Jagan was the fact that he knew how to connect. He would hold public meetings in the countryside and tell the people about their condition, including poverty and the state of the world. His speeches were colored with numerous 'isms' too.

necting even though they said he had no hope of winning. Cheddi won and handed the reins to his successors and they made a mess of it. After 23 years in power the current PPP/C was unwilling or unable to make those grassroots connections that would lead to confidence and to victory. It took the people for granted.

The other parties had no such problem. They were in the villages doing the groundwork necessary to convince the people to vote for them. According to a number of persons on the West Demerara and in Berbice the oppo-

constricted the PPP/C and squeezed much of its credibility away from it. There was no closing of the ranks of disaffected PPP/C members before the election. In fact Mr. Ramkarran became one of the harshest critics of the PPP/C.

When this is contrasted with the conduct of the PNC members one finds that despite public spats the members came together and united to oust the PPP/C. For example, there were disagreements with the members in Linden with the Bynoe faction mounting a challenge to Granger for the leadership and there were even alle-