

COMMENTARY *By* DR. DHANPAUL NARINE

# Lennox Shuman

## And the 2020 Guyana Elections



Dr. Dhanpaul Narine

A Guyanese is a politician in disguise. He or she could tell you about the days of Jagan and Burnham, of how they were together, and how they ‘split up’ and Guyana has not been the same since. The younger Guyanese will have in their memories over fifty years of two-party rule and will argue that little progress has been made during those years. According to one observer, ‘the PNC and the PPP have strangled Guyana. After fifty years with them in power, Guyana is racially divided. None of them is talking about what they will do to bring the peoples together. All they want is power, and at all costs.’

The 2020 elections in Guyana will be a watershed moment in the country’s history. The new government will oversee policies for the oil and gas industries and will get the opportunity to lead the country for the next five years. The Guyana Constitution allows for a coalition of parties prior to the elections and there are talks between the parties to examine the extent to which is feasible.

The Alliance for Change (AFC) stated that talks have broken down with its major partner, APNU, over the choice of the candidate for Prime Minister. President David Granger is reserving his options to choose that candidate while the AFC insists that the Prime Minister has to be selected from among its ranks.

It doesn’t matter how much you turn it and twist it, the AFC is a spent force in Guyana. It will struggle to win a single seat. It brings little to the table. It was not the ‘third force’ that one expected; it wagged its tail to Mr. Granger’s commands and lost its independence. But don’t be surprised if the AFC and the PPP coalesce. Politics in Guyana is unpredictable. There will be a scramble by the PPP and PNC to win over the smaller parties.

The current PPP is not the party of Cheddi Ja-

gan. The current outfit has forgotten Jagan’s vision. They were in the opposition for 28 years. Cheddi Jagan, with the help of many, fought the good fight to have democracy restored in Guyana. But after Jagan’s departure, the PPP threw it away by taking their supporters for granted and behaving arrogantly. Once they get into office, they forget the comrades that were in the trenches and making the sacrifices. They should learn from the PNC who

PPP. A number of PPP supporters turned against the party and campaigned for the AFC.

They worked in the Indian strongholds in Berbice and in Essequibo with promises of a better life. Moses Nagamootoo promised increased prices in rice while Khemraj Ramjattan stated repeatedly that sugar ‘was too big to fail.’ As it turned out, both promises failed to materialize. In fact, a number of sugar estates were closed leaving thousands out of jobs. Farmers are struggling to find a steady market for rice.

The reasons as to why the Coalition garnered support in the last elections must take into account the role of the diaspora. Candidates David Granger, and Moses Nagamootoo, were greeted by an enthusiastic crowd when they visited Queens, in New York. Mr. Granger made two statements that captured the attention of the audience. The first was that ‘happy people do not kill themselves.’ The implication here was that the PPP government had made things so bad that people were forced to

audience and said that he knew how to fix the crime situation. He would use his military experience and set up the apparatus to stamp out crimes. It made sense and the audience cheered in approval. But the reality has been different. As the Granger

ic profile of the country. East Indians comprise around 40 per cent of the population while Afro-Guyanese number around 30 per cent. The mixed population is about 20 per cent while Amerindians comprise about 10 per cent. Amerindians



Lennox Shuman, leader of the Liberty and Justice Party in Guyana.



A section of the audience at the Queens meeting.

put party workers and supporters on a pedestal because there is always a next time. The arrival of the AFC was seen as a welcome change in Guyanese politics as it delivered a multi-ethnic message. The party made significant inroads into the Indo-Guyanese vote, to the detriment of the

commit suicide.

The second comment was just as powerful. Mr. Granger said that Guyanese from the diaspora needed to feel secure and safe when they visit Guyana. The Minister of Home Affairs was not pushing the Commissioner of Police to act to solve crimes. Mr. Granger turned to the

administration nears its five-year term, suicides continue to plague Guyana. Crimes show no signs of ebbing; it is argued that the crime situation is as high as it had ever been.

Where does Lennox Shuman fit into the mix? The answer to this question has to be seen in the context of the demograph-

are least likely to migrate which explains why their voting population is on the increase. The two major parties cannot win a majority on their own; hence a coalition is necessary. If not, there could be a hung Parliament.

The PPP has not issued invitations to the other parties for coalition talks. But President Granger and Mr. Shuman have been in talks. This occurred after Mr. Shuman’s visit to New York. He brought the diaspora up to date with the situation in Guyana, compliments of the Queens Book Fair. Mr. Shuman was articulate in his presentation. He had a good grasp of the situation in Guyana and the role that his party could play in the development of the country.

He said that the indigenous peoples still reside in

their communities and this has led to the growth in their numbers. Indigenous peoples have been promised many things by politicians and have been neglected after the elections. There have been human rights abuses in Amerindian communities such as the lack of drinking water and the non-availability of good lands for agriculture. ‘What we have is that Amerindians have to import food from the coast when they should be producing it in their own communities. In Kamarang, a liter and a half of water is \$900. Water is more expensive than food; yet Amerindians in that area live near two of the largest rivers in Guyana,’ Mr. Shuman said.

The reason for this is because of a political decision to mine the rivers. The mercury poisons the rivers and food must now be imported. Mr. Shuman said that Amerindians are peaceful. The opportunity exists now for Amerindians to deny a majority government in Guyana. He wants to see policies and laws to be made in the people’s interest.

‘There is only one way to do that,’ he said. ‘We have tried advocacy but it has not worked. We want to force change. We stand the best chance to bring change. Education is the ultimate balance in society. That is why I am privileged to stand with the Queens Book Fair in New York. We need a better education system in Amerindian communities. We want a level playing field so we too can compete.’

How did his talk with Mr. Granger go? Mr. Shuman said, ‘Our meeting was good. There is progress on some fronts. We will continue to dialogue and hopefully we can make progress for the country.’

The views expressed in this article are those of the writer and do not necessarily represent the position or policy of the THE WEST INDIAN.