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WHAT GUYANA NEEDS TO KNOW

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Paramountcy: Then and now

Jul 19, 2012 Features / Columnists, Freddie Kissoon

In philosophy there is the concept of "substance and form." The two are inseparable. Substance is the inherent totality of elements in an object. Form is structure of the elements. The contents of an object can go through a myriad of variations but the substance remains the fundamental essence of its existence. Whether we are talking about hard science or sociology, substance and form are fundamental categories.

In the social world, form can be very deceptive to the observer and one can easily separate it from substance. It takes the application of a studious mind to recognize that the form is changing but not the substance. It is beyond a newspaper column to elaborate on the relationship between form and substance in social life. For the purpose of this essay we will look at the process of the paramountcy of the party in Guyanese politics. We will skip any discussion on the historical origins of party paramountcy in the work of the Russian communist, Vladimir Lenin

From 1976 onwards, the organizations in Guyana opposed to the Government of the PNC accused it of practising paramountcy of the party. The accusation against the ruling party was that it elevated in importance the role of the PNC in Guyana over State institutions. In that year, the Working People's Alliance was born, and together with the established main opposition party the PPP, the PNC Government came under intense and relentless pressure for its practise of party paramountcy. If one should go back to the PPP publications of the seventies, including the Mirror and Thunder, one would find tons and tons of criticism of the paramountcy of the party. In the seventies, party paramountcy was particularly resented because right inside a national institution like the Ministry of National Development one would find an office of the PNC. That indeed was party paramountcy at work.

Do we have a Ministry in 2012 where one can find an office of the PPP? The answer is no. Here is where substance and form comes in. We don't have a Ministry where the ruling party has an office but in a dangerous and deprived paradox, party paramountcy is more pronounced in the 21st century under the PPP than under President Burnham.

This is where one has to understand the priceless guide of the concept of substance and form. Let's begin with a personal experience. In 1999 Minister of Information, Moses Nagamootoo asked me to come and work as his media consultant with a view to doing some programmes on GTV (now known as NCN). The object was to open up television to the average person so each can call in and bring the problems to the policy-makers. Every Wednesday morning, Moses met with all seniors of the state media entities. I was asked to sit in.

After my first session, I asked Moses what was the Mirror reporter, Robert Persaud, doing at a meeting for government officials. I was angry. I told Moses that paramountcy of the party was supposed to be over.

Moses intoned; "Freddie, right now, I am in so much trouble with Janet Jagan that I don't have time for this." At that meeting, I learnt that someone working at a high level at the Mirror was being paid by the Ministry of Information. This was in 1999. The situation has remained unchanged since then.

Christopher Ram asked me to write that during the election campaign last year two very senior NCN officials were seconded to Freedom House to do party campaigning. Ram said he has the proof. Never under Presidents Burnham and Hoyte, did eight persons with party membership card sit on the Council of the University of Guyana. This is the case in 2012.

If party paramountcy was practised by the PNC Government under Mr. Burnham then under Mr. Jagdeo and at the moment, it is more than being practiced. It takes the FORM (remember substance and form) of party ownership of Guyana.

Under both Burnham and Hoyte, the NIS board was headed by a professional public servant. Since 1992, one of the PPP leaders, Dr Roger Luncheon, has held that post. Every major international consultancy in the Ministries that carries a foreign salary is coveted by PPP members. Every major PPP fund-raising activity in Georgetown is done on the lawns of the President's residence which is state property. The State property of the Cheddi Jagan Research Centre is now a party playground. Twice there were wedding receptions at the International Convention Centre, held by married

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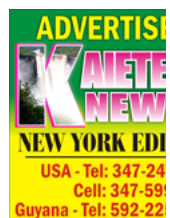
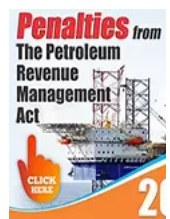
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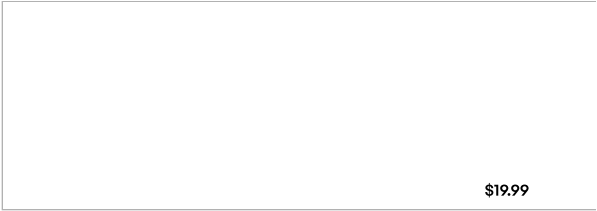
The Blunt of the Day



Sports



councils who were party members. Every REO holds a party card. The PNC once administered (X) the PPP now owns it.



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Weekend Cartoon



Bridge Watch

Demerara Harbour Bridge

Today Tuesday, March 7

Tuesday, March 7

5:00am 05:00

Wednesday, March 8

04:45 04:45

Events shown in time zone: Guyana Time

> Berbice Bridge [...]

- 24 Saffron Street, Charlestown,
Guyana
- chief Kaieteur News:
- Tel: +592-225-8482.
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