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Norton as PNC leader

Jun 30, 2024 Letters

Dear Editor,

Since Aubrey Norton was the last candidate for leader left standing, he will be the Leader of the PNC to take the party in the 2025 general elections. I would like to offer my congratulations to him. It has been a long and winding road him but finally he will have the opportunity to vie for leadership of the country, which then would give him the power that he candidly accepts is the goal of all politicians. Without power, at best, a political may have influence that he can exert on the power holders but that is a far cry from having the authority to implement one's vision for the country.

Norton graduated from the YSM – the youth arm of the PNC – to become one of the latter's youngest General Secretary in 1997, at the age of forty, under Desmond Hoyte. He played a key role in the PNC protests following the General Elections of that year but was removed from his position after only one year. I once asked Mr. Hoyte the reason and he replied that he "saw Norton drinking at a street corner with his shirt out of his pants." He was not joking and on reflection, I surmised that the incident was simply a trope for what Hoyte concluded was Norton's refusal to inculcate the "habitus" – the socialised norms or tendencies that guide behaviour and thinking – of the middle-class, coloured elite that set the tone for the PNC's leadership. Hoyte had told me his father was a joiner but I concluded that in his orientation, demeanour and actions he had inculcated middle-class "respectability", while Norton stubbornly refused to do so.

But it was precisely Norton's street reputation that earned him the overwhelming votes at the December 2021 PNC Congress to make him leader over Joseph Harmon (David Granger's protégé) and Van West Charles (Burnham's son-in-law). The middle-class elite who dominate the PNC upper ranked wanted someone who would "manners" the PPP, which had stared down Granger in the Mingo-Lowenfield rigging attempt and regained office. This was the phrase used by Sheila Holder, who sat next to me for five years in the Opposition benches between 2001-2006, about why Robert Corbin was made leader of the PNC after the passing of Hoyte in 2002.

Corbin also had a street image, which he just could not shake even though he tried to inculcate the middle-class habitus by becoming a lawyer in his fifties and dressing in a “suit and tie”. But he disappointed many of the PNC Mandarins when he refused to go into the streets in his later years. As the Opposition leader, I attended many Opposition meetings where he insisted that only coalition politics was appropriate for Guyana and the PPP had to be a member of such a coalition. He was accused of being “bought” by the PPP.

Aubrey Norton is also presently being accused for “going soft”, as he studiously refuses to be baited by some fringe opposition extremists to adopt street protests against the PPP government. He clearly understands that with Guyana now being a nation of minorities, he cannot alienate Indian Guyanese by holding street protests, which invariably descend into violence against Indian Guyanese as occurred at Mon Repos Market in 2022. It is not surprising then that we witness the same middle-class rejection of Norton in his campaign for the PNC leadership as had Robert Corbin, and their touting of more “suitable” alternatives. Corbin himself eventually gave in to this bias and he voluntarily stepped aside in favour of David Granger, who better fit the “middle class” bill.

Norton, however, had firmly refused to do the same and declared when prodded by the extremist opposition figure on whether he would step aside for a “consensus candidate”: “I don’t believe that we should just take the hard work we do and give it to anybody who just fly off of a tree top, land on the ground and say you must be the presidential candidate.” It will be a test on whether the PNC has outgrown its historic West Indian fixation on the habitus Lloyd Best called “doctor politics” by sticking with Aubrey Norton, who ironically is quite educated formally – but retains the street habitus that typifies most PNC supporters.

Hits Yesterday: 40,393

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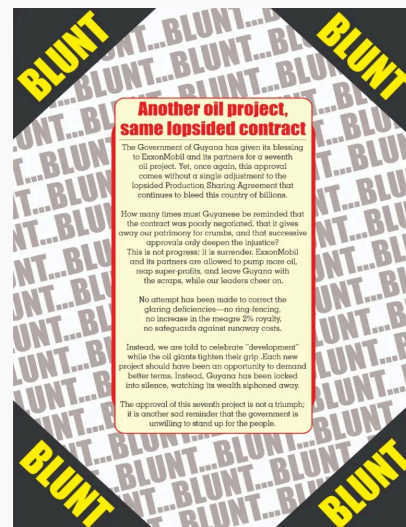
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THE BLUNT OF THE DAY



Sports

I have written before of the scorn expressed at the latter's "low-class behaviour", according to some of his opposition types, in my hearing at Mr. Hoyte's funeral outside Parliament Buildings.

Sincerely,

Ravi Dev

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Sir. Ronald Sanders



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The GHK Lall Column



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Weekend Cartoon



Bridge Watch

Demerara Harbour Bridge

< > Sep 2025 – S... ▾ 📅 📋

29 SEP, MON

● 9:30pm 21:30

30 SEP, TUE

> Berbice Bridge [...]

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June 2024

M	T	W	T	F	S	S
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30
« May Jul »						

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