

Continuation

TOWARD INDEPENDENCE



by
**CHEDDI
JAGAN**

The speech by Dr. Cheddi Jagan, Leader of the People's Progressive Party and Minister of Trade and Industry, delivered in the Legislative Council on June 5, 1958, during debate on a self-government motion.

Price 10 cents

FOREWORD

BY MILES FITZPATRICK

With the formation of a Committee comprising the members of the Legislative Council to consider yet again the constitutional future of British Guiana, the time is ripe to publish the outlook of the People's Progressive Party as expressed by its Leader, Dr. Cheddi Jagan, in a speech delivered to the Council on the 5th June 1958. The occasion was the consideration by the Chamber of the following resolution, moved by Mr. J. N. Singh and afterwards amended by PPP Leader, Cheddi Jagan:

"Be it resolved that this Honourable Council request Her Majesty's Secretary of State for the Colonies to receive a delegation to discuss constitutional reform for British Guiana."

The resolution as amended was unanimously adopted by the Council. The legislative unity thus displayed is yet another example of the overwhelming desire of all sections of the Guianese people for self-government. The few that seek covertly to hinder its realisation are forced by fear of public disdain to pay lip service to the conception however much they may try to qualify it.

Since 1953 British Guiana and the PPP have gone through a difficult period—a period of "marking time" which for the progressive movement in B.G. means restraint and restriction in the present and preparation for the next step forward. We are still a long way from the goal of Self Government. Between 1953 and 1958, Trinidad, Jamaica, and Barbados have all attained, to a lesser or greater degree, control over their internal affairs, with the key Ministry of Finance in locally elected hands. Singapore has taken considerable steps towards independence, the Colony of the Gold Coast has become the independent Dominion of Ghana, and Nigeria has extracted the promise of independence in 1960.

British Guiana still suffers from a constitution that would not be out of place in an 18th century Colony. The PPP has bent over backwards in co-operating with the powers that be in this transitional period and the time has arrived for all Guianese to once more agitate for a better constitution.

The Minister of Trade and Industry (Dr. Jagan):
I would like to add my commendations to the Hon. Member for bringing this motion before the Council. There is no doubt that this is a very exciting period, not only in the history of British Guiana but indeed in the history of the whole world. We have read of the great upheavals which are taking place in different sectors of the world today, and it is well that the people of this country should follow the trend of events and should take note of what is happening in other countries, so that we can learn from their mistakes and their achievements. Our country has had a rather exciting political history. We were high up on the constitutional ladder up to 1928 when our Constitution was also taken away.

Since then we have had our ups and downs, and indeed some countries which were behind us have now gone forward; some countries which were behind us are now completely free, and we find ourselves today, as the Hon. Nominated Member who spoke last said, in the position where there is grave dissatisfaction in the country.

THE DESIRE FOR FREEDOM

What do we want? What do the people of this country want at this phase of its history? I think that we as a people want no more and no less than the people in other countries. And if it is the birthright of peoples to be free then it seems to me it is also the right of this Colony's people to be entirely free. Freedom is not merely parochial, or a matter pertaining only to British Guiana. We have seen in the turbulent years of the war, when there were many subject peoples who were held under the dominance of the metropolitan countries, that in order to solicit their support for the war effort concessions had to be made. Pronouncements were made that soon after the war recognition would be given to the inherent right of people to form Governments of their own choosing. We have all heard of the Atlantic Charter, when the late President Roosevelt and Mr. Churchill met and enunciated this principle.

In those very grave and serious days when the world

was faced with Fascist tyranny they got together in order to mobilize the support of people all over the world, people who were also suffering under the heels of tyranny of a different type, and said "The time will come when you shall also be free, but in the meantime let us sink our differences and fight to win the war."

THE UNITED NATIONS

Soon after Fascism was defeated we had, as a result of the war-time co operation of all the major nations of the world, the United Nations which was created primarily with the view of preventing conflagrations like the First and Second World Wars. The United Nations accepted as a fact that political and economic subjection were sources of irritations which led to a breach of peace, and as a consequence they not only sought in their Declarations and in their Charter to preserve world peace but also to go into details in order that world peace would not be disturbed in the future. We are all aware of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights. We see there laid down the basic rights of peoples everywhere, not only in economic matters and in spheres such as liberties pertaining to religion, freedom to organize and the right to free speech, but also the fundamental right of peoples to have governments of their own choosing — political rights.

REQUISITES FOR SELF GOVT.

Since then we have seen that as a result of the enunciation of those rights many countries have become free — India, Burma, Ceylon, Ghana, to name just a few. Others are on the threshold of freedom. Our position is somewhat different in that at one time we were more advanced than some of those territories but today we find ourselves in a more backward position. What are some of the arguments adduced for the granting of self government to a particular territory? Sometimes we hear talk of size, sometimes we hear talk of population. At other times we are told of financial resources and the ability to have a stable economy. Those are all yardsticks which are used to determine whether a country is ready or not to exercise its right to rule and govern itself. But those standards vary in different countries and from time to time even in the same country.

Let us take, for instance, the question of literacy. We are told that the people must be ready — they must have a certain degree of maturity, educational standards and so forth. What is the position with respect to certain countries which have recently become free, or which have been free for some years, as compared with British Guiana? The illiteracy rate in British Guiana is 21.36 per cent (the latest figures available when the last Census was taken in 1946-50), as compared with about 85 per cent in India, 42.2 per cent in Ceylon, 47 per cent in Indonesia, 25.6 per cent in Cuba, 45 per cent in Mexico, 28 per cent in Puerto Rico, 84 per cent in Turkey, and 57 per cent in Venezuela. Figures are not available for Ghana, Nigeria and some of the other territories which have become free recently, but when I was in Ghana I learnt that the illiteracy rate there was between 70 and 73 per cent. So that on that qualification British Guiana is certainly ready for the exercise of full self-government.

Let us take another point — the question of size. The Hon. Mover referred to Surinam next door. Surinam, and indeed the Netherlands Antilles, are relatively much smaller in size than British Guiana. Surinam has an area of 54,000 square miles with a population of 232,000.

The Netherlands Antilles comprise of six small islands with an area of 4,361 square miles and a population of 183,781, while British Guiana has a population of about half a million with an area of approximately 83,000 square miles.

Surinam has a status which to all intents and purposes is equivalent to dominion status under the British Constitutional setup. Surinam and the Netherlands Antilles are coequal partners with the Dutch Government. Each of these three territories is completely autonomous in internal affairs, and so far as external affairs are concerned they have a consultative assembly to deal with defence and other matters.

We see, therefore, that size is certainly no obstruction to the exercise of full sovereignty. There are other territories which I can cite. Iceland and Luxembourg are smaller than British Guiana. Iceland is 64,300 square miles and has a population of 159,480. That country practically decides all of its own affairs. Lux-

emburg with an area of 2,586 square miles is a population of 290,000, and it is a completely sovereign and self governing territory. There are other countries such as Belgium, the Netherlands, Finland, Greece, Israel, Jordan, Liberia, Ceylon, Honduras, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Salvador and Guatemala which are smaller than British Guiana. Seven of these have a population less than two million. These countries are standing on their political feet exercising full sovereignty, while British Guiana is denied these same opportunities.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd in a recent statement on self-government declared as follows:

"The prerequisites of self-government are that the country should be able to stand on its own feet economically and financially, conduct its own affairs, and be able to prepare to assume responsibility for its defence and international relations."

Let us examine those prerequisites as Mr. Lennox-Boyd puts them. With regard to the question of a country standing on its own feet economically, I remember that the Dutch constitution which was a liberal one was taken away from us and replaced by a Crown Colony constitution. The argument then adduced was that the colony was not in a good financial position. That was not true because the colony was not in a state of near bankruptcy at the time. Today no such thing can be said of British Guiana, because not only is the colony balancing its own budget, but it is contributing to future development by setting aside the sum of nearly \$2 million per annum.

It is true that British Guiana has to seek outside loans for the acceleration and implementation of the five-year development programme, but we are not different in this respect from many metropolitan countries, India, Pakistan and others have to depend on loans, grants and assistance from other countries.

We have heard of the Colombo Plan for the South East Asia countries, and we have heard of other plans. There is talk now of a Colombo Plan for Latin America. Every one knows that several countries have to depend on assistance from outside.

When it comes to the question of defence and the country being able to assume responsibility for its own international relations, this is a matter which must be looked at realistically. It is true that in the past countries have had to depend solely on their own resources for defence. We know that today many countries are getting substantial aid in arranging for their defence. We know that Jordan, for instance, which is a completely self-governing and independent territory, depends almost wholly for support from outside for its own defence arrangements.

Take Pakistan which gets tremendous support from outside for its own defence facilities and see what is happening. We have to think along new lines because defence strategy is changing very rapidly before our eyes. Several years ago it was necessary to keep in your own backyard a number of aeroplanes and a make-believe navy like some Latin American countries do. Egypt has shown us that even a small country does not have to depend on its own defence and on its own resources today. We saw in Egypt that an attempt was made by a big power to wipe it off the face of the map, but because of international pressure Egypt was able to defend its sovereignty and retain its sovereignty.

Some time ago Prime Minister Nehru referred to the large number of billions of dollars expended on armaments for defence during the cold war and so on. We must get out of any antediluvian thinking he pleaded. Even Britain has to depend on the U.S.A. for a great deal of assistance when it comes to defence. Britain has joined with other nations to pool resources for the joint defence of certain areas and, similarly, all independent countries have to do the same. It does not follow that, because you have not been able to meet certain financial requirements *ipso facto* you will be wiped off the face of the map. Judging by these standards, we are ready for the exercise of independence.

Not so long ago Queen Wilhelmina expressed something similar to what was contained in the Atlantic Charter in 1942. She said:

"I know that no political unity or national cohesion can continue to exist which is not supported by the voluntary acceptance and the faith of the great majority of the people."

I submit that the great majority of the people of this country want a free and independent British Guiana. I submit that this is not the desire only today, but for a number of years now. When we see that smaller territories, both in population and resources, have been able to move ahead of us, obviously there will be reasons for great dissatisfaction in this country.

If we go back to the time of the Dutch, this territory and Surinam were realms of the Dutch Government. By treaty of capitulation this territory was passed over to the British Government. Had we still been under Dutch rule we would have been exercising today the same rights as our neighbours in Surinam and the Netherlands Antilles. If those people are exercising the full right of sovereignty and the right to conduct their own affairs, why should not we have the same status? I see no reason why we should not have a say in the determination of our affairs in the British Commonwealth.

A NEW COMMONWEALTH

There is no doubt that there is new thinking in the United Kingdom among progressive forces today. One of the members of the Parliamentary delegation which visited us quite recently was the Right Honourable Mr. Patrick Maitland, who is a great champion of a new movement for the casting of the Commonwealth in a new mould.

We must accept the fact that there will be no commonwealth as long as there are sovereign peoples in some places and subject peoples in other places all moving in different directions. We saw the disaster encountered in dealing with the question which arose in Egypt. Had the Commonwealth been consulted, the fiasco which resulted in the resignation of Sir Anthony Eden would not have taken place — I refer to the invasion of Egypt.

We saw afterwards where Ceylon, India, Australia and New Zealand came out and spoke very strongly against it, and we saw also that even the U.S.A. was very critical of the action taken. But had there been a full consultation by all the members of the Commonwealth this tragic fiasco might have been avoided and possibly we would not have been in many of the difficulties which some of us are experiencing today. I feel, Sir, that the U.K. can take a leaf out of the Netherlands Kingdom. The Dutch Kingdom has successfully evolved out of the struggles with the Co-

lonial peoples of the Dutch territories of Surinam and the Netherlands West Indies. This did not come about as a gift from heaven. It came about as the result of a struggle. But that is immaterial for the moment. The point is that those people came together and accomplished a new unity based on equality.

There is no point in talking about the Commonwealth when the people in England on the dole can receive a higher amount than the people working in the Colonies. A new relationship has to be established. As I said before, there must be consultation. There has to be planning on a different basis, planning of the resources both in the metropolitan territory and the colonial territories; planning in such a way that there can be full development and not to the exclusive benefits of one territory against another. If we are to have this type of planning, then I say we have to consider it as quickly as we can and our voices must be heard, because without that there can be no agreement and there will always be discord and friction.

[Continued on page 10]

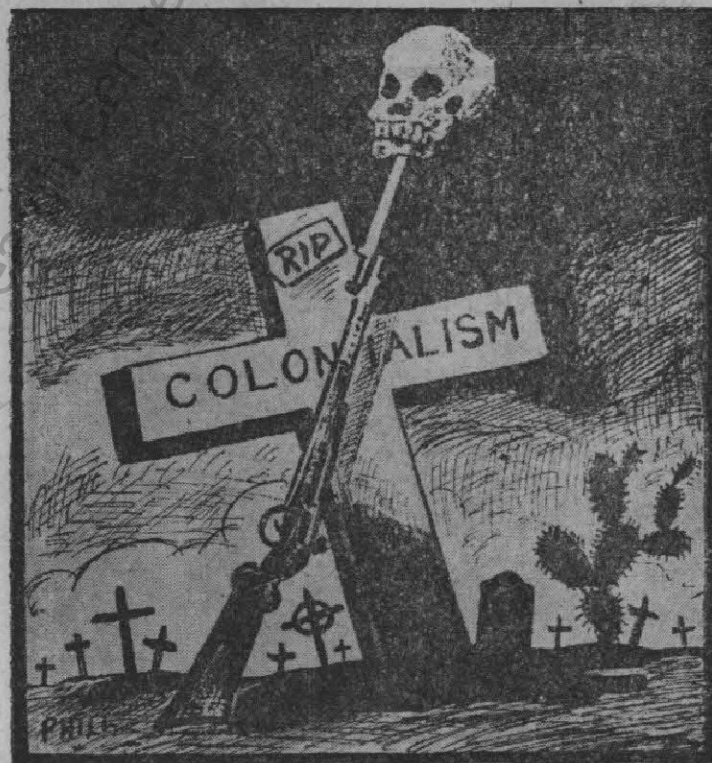


Independence the Goal



Since its formation the People's Progressive Party has led the campaign for freedom and national dignity for British Guiana. The years of struggle have laid the foundation for the final drive to the top. The goal—National Independence.

Down With Colonialism



It is well at this time to remember that the real issue in B.G. is ending of colonialism. Until the above epitaph can be affixed to colonialism in this country, Guiana will be held back from making rapid strides to progress.

Freedom to Negotiate



Freedom to negotiate foreign loans is an attribute of Independence.

On this question I do not think there is any disagreement, because the British Government has accepted as a cardinal principle of their policy that the Colonial peoples will be free. The question is, when shall they be free? How long should this be dragged on? There had been a great debate in the United Nations when strong views were expressed that the United Nations should go into Colonial territories and examine political and economic conditions at first hand and not only have reports of metropolitan governments read around the table. Periodical checks can be made and a target set that on such a date this or that territory will be made free. That is the more sane approach to the whole situation. There is, as I said, agreement on this question of the principle that the Colonial peoples be free, but where fundamental disagreement arises is when this freedom should come about, and that is the cause of the great friction today in all parts of the Colonial Empire.

DENIAL OF BASIC RIGHTS

I read a statement in one of the newspapers a few days ago that Mr. Lennox-Boyd, Secretary of State for the Colonies, said that the prerequisites for self-government are that a country can stand on its own feet economically and financially, conduct its own affairs and be able to prepare to assume responsibility for its own defence and its international relations.

If we examine some of the places we would see the reason for the trouble. Rights which should be conceded to the people are not being conceded. A few years ago in Kenya we were told that Jomo Kenyatta incited the Kikuyus to rebellion and the British stowed him away for seven years. That was the cause of all the trouble. But now we see a lot of trouble with Mboya, a nice little fellow. In fact he had the blessings of the British Trades Union Council and more or less the blessings of the whole set up in England. He is now on trial, and we saw Mr. Pritt — God bless him — defending him.

We had at one time in Singapore Mr. Marshall who was the darling boy of the Colonial Office, and when the trouble came we saw Mr. Marshall resigning because he was fed up.

I see now that Mr. Marshall is moving about between Singapore, Ceylon and China. These troubles are coming about in the Colonial territories because of friction and headaches and not because of the bad influence of some organization or belief of Colonial leaders. It is because of the inherent denial of basic rights.

The quicker the British people and the British Government recognise this, the better it would be for the benefit of all concerned. The Labour Party of England, to their credit it must be said, is now taking a saner approach to the whole question of Colonial territories and Colonial freedom. Time was when some of the Labour Leaders were as Tory as the staunchest Tory. I am glad to see in their new policy statement they have taken certain fundamental decisions which are based on principles and not expediency. With Your Honour's permission, I would like to read for the benefit of Hon. Members a summary of Labour's Colonial Policy with respect to smaller territories. It reads:—

"(1) Labour reasserts that every Colony including the smallest should have the right to self-determination. It is, however, Labour's hope that a full and timely recognition of the right of self-determination will encourage the peoples of the Colonies to achieve their full democratic rights within the Commonwealth. Yet the right of secession is inherent in the Commonwealth. This must apply to the peoples of small territories as well as large.

"(2) Labour's aim is the steady establishment of democratic institutions for internal self government in all the small territories as in the larger ones.

"(3) Territories for which sovereign independence is not physically practicable may achieve membership of a sovereign parliament either by becoming members of a federation or by integration into a sovereign state

"(4) For those small territories which do not achieve representation in a sovereign parliament either by integration with the United Kingdom or another Commonwealth state, or by federation or by secession, the Labour Party proposes the new constitutional status of Dominion. Such territories will be free to sign treaties or make other arrangements with a member of the Commonwealth, regulating such issues as bases and conceding to a Commonwealth state-control of foreign policy and defence."

As I said, that would really be attained and achieved only if in this interim period there is goodwill on both sides. It is a recognition of the sovereign rights of the people in a territory. With Your Honour's permission I would like to quote from pages 22 and 23 what they refer to as Dominion status.

"What Dominion status means is that they and they alone would decide how and with whom arrangements should be made for the conduct of their internal affairs.

"The recognition of Dominion status means that any arrangements about bases, defence and foreign policy will be freely arrived at after the recognition by the United Kingdom of autonomy. It is a contradiction in terms to make the grant of sovereignty dependent upon a prior agreement made whilst the territory is still dependent."

In other words, there must be at first a recognition of the sovereignty of the territory by the metropolitan government, then the territory of its own accord must decide whether it wants to hand over to the metropolitan territory its external affairs. It is very important that we should keep all these facts in mind, because the Labour Party is now in the Opposition but one knows from the trend of events in the United Kingdom, taking note of the results of the by-elections, the County elections, and Municipal Borough elections, that it is almost a certainty that Labour will win the next General Election.

It is also accepted that this obviously cannot be very long delayed. The life of the present Parliament ends some time in 1959, but we know that in most cases British Governments do not carry on for the full term of their life. So it is expected, in view of the great economic crises which are now facing the United Kingdom and the British Government, that before long there may be Elections in the United Kingdom, and that at those Elections the Labour Party will be returned.

In view of these considerations I feel that it is incumbent on this Legislature to support not only the Motion as tabled in the words of the Hon. Mover, but a more specific and definite Motion as suggested by the Hon. Nominated Member who seconded the Motion. I therefore propose to introduce an Amendment at this stage copies of which will be circulated to Hon. Members.

The Motion, as amended by Dr. Jagan then read as follows:

"Be it Resolved:

That this Honourable Council, affirming its belief in the principle of the basic right of peoples to Governments of their own choice, as enunciated in the Atlantic Charter, the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, and the Washington Declaration signed on February 1st, 1956 by the Rt. Hon. Anthony Eden, then Prime Minister of the United Kingdom Government, and President Eisenhower, President of the United States of America, requests Her Majesty's Secretary of State for the Colonies to receive a representative delegation to discuss:

(i) constitutional reform with a view to the granting to British Guiana of the status of a fully selfgoverning territory within the Commonwealth; and

(ii) the working out of an agreement between the British Guiana Government and the United Kingdom Government for a transitional period whereby the United Kingdom Government would exercise control over defence and give guidance in foreign relations other than trade and commerce.

In moving this Amendment I have borrowed very heavily from a Resolution which was passed by the Legislative Council of Singapore in 1956. I have done so deliberately, because I feel that what is good enough for Singapore is good enough for British Guiana, and we know that since that Resolution was passed in Singapore in 1956 three delegations have had interviews with the United Kingdom Government — one led by the former Chief Minister, Mr. David Marshall; and two by his successor, Mr. Lim Hew Hock — the latest only a matter of a few weeks ago. Since that Resolution was passed in 1956 we have seen Ghana become free and independent; we have seen that Nigeria is on the threshold of independence; we have seen that subject territories in the Caribbean — Jamaica, Trinidad and Barbados — have now become self governing. So it would seem to me that the time is ripe for us also to receive a status not inferior to that which has been achieved by those territories.

Before I close I should like to stress one other point — that my Amendment is in keeping with the basic principle set out in the British Labour Party's Policy Statement. In other words, first of all there should be a recognition that the country must be independent, must be fully self-governing. Having recognized that, there could be an agreement, for a period to be decided upon, between the Metropolitan Government and the Government of British Guiana as to the conduct of foreign affairs and defence.

I feel that British Guiana is ready for the status which we are asking for in the Amendment I have proposed. It has long been ready for that status. As I have said, in 1928 our Constitution was then far in advance of many Constitutions all over the globe. The Governor had no reserve or veto powers, and had to act on the advice of the majority of the Elected Members of the Combined Court. We know the great battles which took place at the turn of the century, when the Combined Court, because of its desire for certain things which the British Government did not want to support — one being the question of immigration into this country — refused to pass the Estimates until the Governor and the British Government compromised. That is the history of the Constitution which we had up to 1928, the powers which were reposed in the representatives of the people. It is true that those representatives were elected on a very limited franchise. As Hon. Members know, in the old days of the Dutch the basis of representation was the number of slaves one had, but we have certainly gone a far way from those days.

But the point to be noted is that up to 1928 we were far ahead of many territories. We were put back, and as a result of the people's movement in 1953 we were again ahead of many colonial territories, but, sad to state we are behind today. There are some who will argue and say "Don't worry with the political question; let us concentrate on the economic, and as we develop economically, political advance will come." There are some who hold that view quite sincerely though in my opinion, not having a correct view of the entire situation. But that view obviously is challenged, because backward countries are not backward merely because they are backward, but because of certain economic relationships. We were told about that many years ago. We know what the East India Company did for the British, and what the Dutch East India Company did for the Dutch Kingdom in helping the Metropolitan countries in furthering industrial revolution. We have it on great authority from Dr. Eric Williams what slavery and West Indian colonies contributed to the industrial revolution. I am not referring only to Britain but to other countries too.

This is an economic relationship. It is true that the connections are not as severe as they were a few years ago, but nevertheless they are there. I would like to say that as long as those connections continue and a country is not politically free this backwardness will continue. It is no argument to say that there are certain countries which are politically free but backward also. There are many reasons for backwardness; there may be political corruption and a whole host of other reasons. But political considerations certainly are among the most important considerations in determining the state of backwardness of a country.

Before I take my seat I would like to read one last quotation on this point from an author who has written a book entitled "Self-Government for the Colonies." It is written by Mr. W.R. Crocker who, incidentally, is not a Marxist or a radical. He has had a long history, I believe, in the Colonial Service, as he writes in his book of "when I first went to Africa nearly twenty years ago to join the Colonial Service in Nigeria." So he should know what he is talking about.
I quote:

"Too many of the men responsible for, or concerned with colonial policies, whether in the Colonies or in the Metropolitan State, whether French or English, Dutch or Belgian, still profess to believe that the real problem in the colonial areas is economic, not political. Give the colonial peoples more goods and services, they argue, so that their poverty, disease and ignorance can be eased; all will then be well."

"Let us not deceive ourselves: the essence of the colonial grievance is not economic. It is political." At the very end of his book he makes a very brilliant statement. He says:

"It was a great Englishman who hit the nail on the head. Good government is no substitute for self government." I hope that Hon. Members will support this Amedment unanimously.



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