

PRESS RELEASE BY THE PREMIER

Maudling's Statement on Independence

I have read Mr. Maudling's remarks on Independence as reported in the Guiana Graphic of the 1st January.

In view of the fact that this statement came immediately after my interview with him in London and the discussion of the matter before the Fourth Committee of the United Nations, it seems reasonable to interpret this statement as specifically directed to British Guiana.

I have read the statement several times and with great care. It seems to me that this is a classic case of double talk. On the one hand Mr. Maudling claims that Britain's policy is to grant self rule to its colonies; yet immediately thereafter says that "many hurdles must be crossed before Independence can be granted". What the hurdles are he does not say. But what is apparent is that there has been a return to a position that was abandoned a long time ago by Her Majesty's Government. When British Guiana's present constitution was being discussed at the Constitutional Conference in London in 1960, I personally asked the then Colonial Secretary how it was that Cyprus and other territories could be granted Independence and not British Guiana and what was the yardstick by which the country's suitability for Independence was measured. I was told then categorically that there was no yardstick and that Her Majesty's government no longer intended to impose conditions for independence. It is disturbing to find that we are once more back where we were five years ago having to meet unspecified conditions and surmount undisclosed hurdles.

Even more disturbing is Mr. Maudling's statement "timing is very significant and is not in our hands alone". Since both the Government of British Guiana and the Opposition had agreed to the demand for Independence now this statement can only mean that Great Britain has to seek permission from some other foreign power before she can set a date for Guiana's independence. The only possible interpretation of this strange statement is that the United States has been conceded the right to have a say on when our country shall be granted Independence. Implicit in the words is the suggestion that the other

power to be consulted on timing is in opposition to an early date.

Yet just a few days ago the United States representative in the Fourth Committee of the United Nations supported my request for immediate independence and spoke strongly in favour of our demand. Further, the United States representative in this country has today assured me that the official position is still that the Government of the United States wishes to see an immediate end to Colonial rule anywhere in the Americas. Did not President Kennedy in his recent interview with the *Isvestia* Editor indicate support for my Government's objectives on the ground that we had been chosen by the people at fair elections?

Mr. Maudling goes on to talk about territories which are "small, very poor or remote and vulnerable", and says that "conditions for true independence seem likely to be beyond these countries' capacity for a long time to come" and "the answer for them may lie in association with other territories". If by these cryptic sentences Mr. Maudling means that he is not prepared to grant British Guiana its Independence unless it joins the West Indies Federation then he has a lot of trouble coming to him.

British Guiana is not prepared to pull Great Britain's chestnuts out of the fire in the West Indies. British Guiana is ready for Independence now by any standards. We are entitled to independence by virtue of the Charter of the United Nations and by virtue of the pronouncements of the Organisation of American States. We intend to have it this year and without joining the Federation.