

Caribbean

Office of the Premier,
Public Building,
Georgetown,
British Guiana,
28th November, 1963.

Dear Prime Minister,

I have the honour to refer to the copy of my letter dated 7th November, 1963, addressed to the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom regarding the decision of the Secretary of State for the Colonies, the Rt. Hon. Duncan Sandys, M.P., on the question of the Independence of British Guiana, and to enclose a copy of a White Paper issued by my Government on this subject.

2. The White Paper shows that at the 1960 British Guiana Constitution Conference, after prolonged debate and the most careful consideration, the course to British Guiana's independence was meticulously charted, and it was firmly agreed that the constitution that had been hammered out was, with the appropriate consequential changes, to be the constitution for an independent Guiana, and that the only "question of substance" that had to be decided on at the next conference was the fixing of a date for independence.

3. The decisions presented by the Secretary of State for the Colonies to the U.K. Parliament in Cmd. Paper 2203 of November 1963 on the British Guiana Conference 1963 are therefore a flagrant violation of the decisions arrived at and solemn undertakings given at the 1960 Constitutional Conference as set out in Command Paper 998 presented to the U.K. Parliament in April 1960 by the then Secretary of State for the Colonies, the Rt. Hon. Iain Macleod, M.P.

4. In view of this and other points discussed in the White Paper, my Government having considered the decisions of Her Majesty's Government on the question of Independence for British Guiana, has categorically rejected them as a breach of faith to the Government and people of this country.

5. The White Paper was presented to the Legislative Assembly on Thursday, 21st November, 1963.

6. The British Guiana (Constitution) Order in Council 1961, made on the 26th June, 1961, at the Court at Buckingham Palace, conferred on British Guiana full internal self-government. Under this constitution the internal affairs of the country are administered by a Council of Ministers presided over by the Premier. The Governor is required to

exercise all his powers in accordance with the advice of the Council of Ministers, except in respect of External Affairs and Defence and one or two other related matters. The conduct of elections is a responsibility of the Council of Ministers and has been entrusted to the Minister of Home Affairs.

7. The Constitutional position of British Guiana is thus similar to that of Southern Rhodesia. It is to be noted, however, that in the case of Southern Rhodesia, the British Government has consistently maintained before the United Nations, especially on the matter of the franchise to Africans, that it cannot intervene in the internal affairs of Southern Rhodesia because that territory is self-governing. You will be aware, for instance, that when the Sub-committee of the Special Committee on Colonialism headed by Mr. Sori Coulibaly of Mali visited London in April this year, the following questions were put to Mr. Butler, then Minister for Central African Affairs:

- (1) Would Britain agree to suspend the Southern Rhodesian Constitution and to draft a new one giving full civil liberties, including the franchise, to Africans?
- (2) If not, had Britain any alternative plan for dealing with this "matter of urgency"?

In reply Mr. Butler reiterated the British position that as Southern Rhodesia had been self-governing for 40 years, Britain could not intervene in her internal affairs. Mr. Duncan Sandys was present at these talks.

8. We therefore hold the view that the British Government's decision to legislate on matters including a change of the electoral system, which have already been entrusted to the British Guiana Government, would be inconsistent with the position held in the case of Southern Rhodesia.

9. I have repeatedly proposed that a Commonwealth "Good Offices" Team should visit British Guiana to assist with the working out of a solution to our constitutional problems. It did not however find favour with Mr. Sandys. I have noted, however, that in the case of Southern Rhodesia, the Secretary of State has recently announced that the U.K. Government has decided to consult with all countries of the Commonwealth on the question of Independence for Southern Rhodesia. You will recall that in announcing this decision during a foreign affairs debate in the House of Commons, Mr. Sandys added "*I am wondering whether we might go further than that. Might it not be possible for the other members of the Commonwealth to help in a positive way in the task of finding a generally acceptable solution.*" Mr. Sandys continued: "*This is not just a matter of satisfying Britain. The question is one in which the whole Commonwealth is acutely interested. Great principles and deep emotions are involved. If we give Independence on terms not acceptable to our fellow members of the Commonwealth we might*

cause grievous injury to the unity of the Commonwealth and the image it presents in the world. If we succeed in finding a solution which is fair to all we should have removed one of the most depressing and potentially explosive issues in the field of Commonwealth relations and far outside".

10. I venture to suggest that in the case of British Guiana, important principles and deep emotions are also involved, and the constitutional future of my country might likewise and appropriately be the subject of Commonwealth consultation. I should therefore be grateful for your sympathetic consideration of the points made herein and for steps to be taken at the earliest possible moment at a Commonwealth level to assist in resolving the present constitutional impasse in British Guiana.

Yours sincerely,

Cheddi Jagan,
Premier, British Guiana.

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