

BROADCAST BY DR. THE HON. C.B. JAGAN

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There was once a man named Rip Van Winkle who fell asleep for twenty years. He fell asleep in colonial days - this was in America - and he woke up after the Revolution. King George was out; George Washington was in. And so many other changes had taken place that Rip didn't know where he was.

A Guianese Rip Van Winkle waking up today after a sleep of twenty years would also see enormous changes - changes which are very obvious. And yet there are politicians who claim they cannot see anything. You know why? These fellows, unlike Rip Van Winkle, are still asleep. They are living in the past and so they are incapable of seeing what changes have taken place and what changes must yet come. In their blindness, they dare to ask where are the changes.

Let me remind you of these changes which they ask about. Let me take you back to 1943, the year I returned to British Guiana after spending seven years in the United States of America. I found I had returned to a country in which hardly anything had changed for the better. The old wrongs, the terrible injustices - if they can forget them so easily - I knew them all too well. I saw daily the abuses and misery of the people. I felt these and took them as my own and I will never forget them. I am mindful of what great changes have taken place just as I am mindful of the changes that are still absolute necessities for the people of Guyana and I am aware of these things because I look at them with the eyes of the people and not with the prejudiced eyes of the privileged few who have always had things easy and so did not want a change.

In 1943 British Guiana was still a backward outpost of colonialism just as it had been for centuries. A powerful group of sugar planters and expatriate Civil Servants dominated and /controlled...

controlled the Legislature, the economy and everything else. It was, said with justification, that laws were not made in the Legislative Council but over rum swizzles at the Georgetown Club which the planters and Colonial Office officials frequented. Our people had little means of redress for their grievances and so there was a pattern of rebellion and riot on the plantations, in the villages and in Georgetown. But although so many lives had been lost things remained as they were - unchanged.

The vast hinterland remained bottled up to ensure an abundant supply of cheap coastal labour. Drainage and irrigation except for the sugar estates, were non-existent. Development of new industries was discouraged. Nearly one-fifth of our population lived in dilapidated barrack-type logies from the days of slavery. Malaria was a scourge and few really enjoyed good health. Hospitals and qualified doctors were few and far between. Treatment available depended upon ability to pay. How well I remember the standard treatment at the Port Mourant Hospital for any ailment - quinine, cough mixture, epsom salts or castor oil. Drinking water came from trenches often stagnant and polluted. Poor health and nutritional standards resulted in high infant and general mortality rates.

Let us look at education. Primary schools were almost all under-staffed, under-equipped and over-crowded. Secondary education was limited and tailored to suit the colonial strait-jacket. And in the face of such horrible conditions our people were denied the only weapons which might have been used to improve their lot - the right to vote and the right to organise. The right to be registered as a voter was then limited to a very few with education and money. Everything was done to discourage trade unionism and victimisation was widely practised. In Water Street and in the Civil Service, unionism was virtually non-existent and

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you could only get even the lowest paid job if you had a god-father. And remember too, that except for the lowest paid jobs, no person of colour could find a job in Water Street or the Civil Service. Those were the conditions our people had known for decades and which I found when I came back from America in 1943.

Today, twenty-one years later, the picture is profoundly changed. The sugar kings have been partially dethroned; no longer do they make the laws. Universal adult suffrage, the cornerstone of progress, has been won and the Legislature is in the hands of elected Guyanese members. Though it has been tampered with, internal self-government has been won and though there have been obstacles placed in our way by forces from without and within, we are on the threshold of complete independence. The expatriates, as a colony, have departed forever. Discrimination, whether because of colour or creed, has almost disappeared and any qualified Guyanese can now enter the Civil Service, the commercial houses, and now to an increasing degree, even that last stronghold -the commercial banks.

The health of our people has improved enormously. Nowadays, we expect our babies to live. You can be sure that your children will grow up in health around you. Motherhood is no longer the risk it used to be. Mothers and babies now have ready attention at the network of health centres and cottage hospitals throughout the country. And the old scourges of malaria and typhoid and other diseases are things of the past.

The aged now have better pensions. In most villages, a supply of pure water is available and in some villages the supply is piped into homes.

Today, free secondary education is within the reach of everyone. And soon thousands will get university education at very little cost to themselves.

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Our standards of living have improved enormously although we still have a long way to go. But gone are the days when the best jobs and the best schools and the best medical treatment were reserved for a few because of their colour or position, while the rest of us struggled in the dreadful stranglehold of poverty.

And in spite of opposition, both from within and without, we have made a good start in freeing our economy. No longer are farmers dependent on the whims of the sugar planters for their land. They have their own well-drained land and drainage is now provided by the Government and not left to the planters. Our agricultural policy has resulted in an abundance of locally produced foods which has helped to hold down the cost-of-living for the working class and will provide the raw materials for our industries. We have begun to replace imports by products of our own industries. And the stage has been set for large-scale industrialisation.

The whole pattern of our trade has been changed to the advantage of consumers. Products can now be imported from any source resulting in cheaper goods. We have developed new markets for our exports. The rice producers now control their own marketing. Our airways, once foreign-owned, is now owned by you, the people. The electricity supply, on which so much economic development depends, is no longer foreign-owned but is owned by you, the people. Rural electrification is now becoming a reality. And the anticipated \$60 million net profits in twenty years will remain right here for future development.

We have made a start in reforming our monetary system so as to ensure that the flow of money for credit and investment is easier than it is now. All this we have done and yet our opponents say that our policies were aimed at helping only one section of our community.

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Even more important, is the dignity which we now have. No longer must anyone tremble or kow-tow to the few. We have won the priceless possession of the vote and now have in large measure the right to organise in unions without much fear of victimisation. No longer is colour or origin a bar to merited positions in the Civil Service and even in Water Street, the position has changed a great deal. This is the record. Only the prejudiced can be blind to these changes.

I know that there is still a great deal more to be done. You have been told that our international credit is low. This is not wholly true. Where it is so, it is because of the smear campaign which the opposition has waged overseas. This has prevented us from getting money for development. A campaign of disruption was mounted to get the United Kingdom and the United States Governments to remove us from office so that the opposition could rule and it is you who have been harmed. It is you who have suffered because there was less money than we needed. You, who are unemployed, can thank the opposition that we did not have more money to create more jobs. Today, we would have had \$25 to \$30 million more had the 1962 budget been passed as originally presented. The United States Kennedy Government offer of aid was wrecked by the antics of an irresponsible opposition. And the denial of independence, engineered by foreigners and supported by the opposition, prevented us from accepting attractive offers of factories from the East. Ask yourself this question: Do these men have your interest at heart or their own?

And remember too, that the changes for the better did not come about by accident or because the privileged and vested interests had twinges of conscience. They came about because changes were wrested from them, because of the activities and existence of the People's Progressive Party. Of course, they will

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not tell you this. They will speak of the new look in big business or of that latest slogan "people's capitalism" and how their only anxiety is to hand over to the people of this country the management of their own affairs as soon as possible. But do not believe them. As you have seen for yourself, our present divisions and differences have given them a chance to bring back some of the old ways, including Government by edict. Once again you are being pushed around.

In 1953, we stood together for the first time and the old brigade shivered in their shoes. Can you not remember how you held your heads high in those days? The winds of change blew strongly then and even though we were removed from office after only 133 days, the rulers were forced into concessions and changes which would have been undreamt of before the shock of 1953. If we had stayed together, what might not have been achieved? Instead, we have had growing divisions. And mark you - only one set of people stand to benefit from such divisions and it is not you.

There is only one Party which has consistently fought for changes and for independence and it is the People's Progressive Party. I and a handful of others began the long struggle for independence long before there was any chance of holding office or of forming a government. We who fought them, and fight now, have not changed. If we had changed (yes, ask yourself this question), would the old privileged groups go on attacking us as they do? All that has happened is that the old groups now have new allies from among some of those who once claimed to fight for you. Today, there are many who speak of what they will do when in office but when I began my long struggle, the prospect in view was not of holding office but of going to jail. Where were these people then?

Today they come not in one opposition party as in 1953, but in several fronts so that they can come to you with their separate racial and religious appeals and the more easily try to fool you.

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What saddens me is that the working class should be divided and more so because it is cleft by the terrible sword of racial prejudice. I have done everything to bring about unity in 1957, in 1961 and again recently. But very overture on my part for re-uniting the Guyanese liberation movement has been rejected, even a coalition government based on parity which, at one time, the opposition leader advocated. He has betrayed the working class by dividing it. He is allowing ambition and the desire for personal power to cloud his vision and keep our liberation movement divided. It is time to turn decisively away from leaders who divide us for their personal gain and who refuse to work for unity. Maybe then they will wake up. Maybe then they will see again the need for a re-united national movement. So far as I am concerned, I do not cherish or harbour any ideas of racial superiority or inferiority. My Party will continue to work for racial harmony and national unity.

For me personally, election on Monday is only another stage in my struggle to help win freedom and progress for our country. Although the election is being held under a system designed to throw me out this cannot happen unless you, the people, desert me and I do not for a moment believe this will happen. We have been through terrible times together and we have never, even in the worst crises, deserted each other or deserted the cause of the masses of people in Guiana. I know that many of you have been subjected to threats but you must vote because if attacks on you are possible now because of what you stand for, even while I am in office, what would happen if I were not?

When you go to vote on Monday the question will be - will you give me and the People's Progressive Party support to

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continue the struggle that I and the small group of pioneers began so long ago, or will you turn to those who now walk with the old brigade? Of this you can be sure - whether in office or out, come what may, whether in jail or detention or worse, I will never give up so long as our country remains poor and our nation in bondage. It may be that the way ahead is difficult, but if we stand together now, the future will be for all of us, a future in which we can reshape our country so as to make it truly our own Guyana, a country in which all of our children, irrespective of race or creed, can grow up together in freedom and dignity and lift their heads high in the certainty of the good life ahead which they deserve.

We are struggling today to construct tomorrow. To this task, I re-dedicate myself - not for power but for progress; not for politics but for the people; not for the domination of Guyana, but for her free and brighter future.