

SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON THE SITUATION WITH REGARD TO THE IMPLEMENTATION  
OF THE DECLARATION ON THE GRANTING OF INDEPENDENCE TO COLONIAL  
COUNTRIES AND PEOPLES

VERBATIM RECORD OF THE EIGHTY-SECOND MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York  
on Monday, 23 July 1962, at 3 p.m.

Chairman:

Mr. RIFAI  
(Vice-Chairman)

(Syria)

At the invitation of the Chairman, Dr. Jagan, Premier of British  
took a place at the Committee table.

The CHAIRMAN: I wish to welcome Dr. Jagan to our Committee, and I  
now call on him to speak.

Dr. Jagan (Premier, British Guiana): I have not come here  
to argue the case for the independence of my country. In our day and  
age this is no longer the issue and, in any case, if I were to do so,  
it would be, I am sure, a case of preaching to the converted. This  
Committee and its work has become the main focus of the aspirations  
of all peoples, and not least my own people, who are still struggling  
to be free. I have come here at your invitation to explain the  
efforts now being made to subvert the national movement and to divide  
the people of my country against themselves.

It is an old story and a long one and it is not only in  
British Guiana that it has been unfolded. For many of the members of  
this Committee it is an all too familiar story which has the sharp  
truth of bitter and unforgettable personal experiences. The main  
features of this story can be found in the history of nearly every  
country which is searching for freedom.

The experience of people like myself who try to lead a  
national movement has been duplicated over and over again. I do not  
claim to be of the same company, but one can find pages in the lives  
of such men as Lincoln, Nehru, Nkrumah and Bolivar, whose anniversary  
we celebrate tomorrow, which throw more than a little light on the  
events which have recently taken place in British Guiana.

Very briefly, the position in my country is that the social  
and economic conditions are such that unless immediate steps are

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taken to improve them an unscrupulous minority may take advantage of them to provoke more unrest and violence.

Since 1957, my Government has made strenuous efforts to raise funds and to obtain assistance from abroad to implement its development programme, which is a programme aimed at creating opportunities for employment and raising the standard of living of the people. Our efforts to raise funds have not, however, met with much success.

It was against this background that the Government proposed an austerity budget which was intended to mobilize internal savings /development. The budget, however, was met with opposition & violence, and to use such savings for /and spearheaded by a small group whose sparkled privileged position was affected by the fiscal measures proposed. This privileged group used the budget as an excuse for whipping up feeling, and with assistance from outside it attempted to overthrow my Government. That, very briefly, is the pattern of events in my country.

Several times in the history of the country periods of intense economic distress have led to tensions and disturbances. Thus, in 1856, there were riots which were caused principally by the abolition of the United Kingdom sugar duties in that year. The abolition of the duties resulted in a fall of prices and, consequently, in a drop in the wages of workers and in unemployment. Six years later, in 1862, there were again riots which had as their background the loss of crops and widespread unemployment. In the rural areas, in the last years of the nineteenth century, when European bounty-fed beet sugar competed with colonial sugar in the British market, there was further economic distress, with a fall in wages and with unemployment locally. Again, serious rioting took place. The period between the two World Wars, also one of economic depression, likewise led to general unrest and rioting.

In nearly every case, these riots took the form of inter-racial strife or had racial overtones, but it is to be noted that such disturbances were always closely linked with periods of economic stress. Except for such periods, the history of my country has been singularly free of racial tension, with the people living in considerable harmony.

The territory now called British Guiana was ceded to the  
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British Government in 1814. We have had nearly 150 years of British rule. The conditions of poverty based on the colonial system, in which wealth was shared among a few local residents and, in greater part, sent out of the country, are conditions of long standing. The reports of commissions, committees and individuals over the last twenty years, to take only the recent past, fully document the conditions of backwardness and poverty.

In 1942, a cost-of-living survey was carried out by a Government-appointed committee in part of the capital city, Georgetown. It disclosed that the cost of living in 1942 was about 60 per cent more than in 1938. The committee stated in its report that:

"There is no doubt that the standards of living have undergone considerable deterioration since the outbreak of the war, and that the percentage increase in the cost of living would have been greater had the statistics been based on the cost of maintaining the 1938 standard of living."

This survey also disclosed that in Georgetown tenement rooms "overcrowding is prevalent and returns disclosed that in most instances as many as twelve persons live in a single tenement room".

Six years later, in 1948, another Committee appointed by the Government to investigate nutrition wrote in its report as follows:

"As a result of sampling surveys in widely-scattered areas, we can affirm that at least 25 per cent of school children are necessitous".

On the sugar estates at that time dilapidated barrack-type ranges, built during the days of slavery, still dominated the scene. The United Kingdom Government-appointed Venn Commission Report of 1948 stated:

"In quite a number, the corrugated iron roofs were leaking and the fabric of the buildings was in a general state of decay. In numerous instances temporary sheets of awnings have been fixed over the beds to keep off the rain. They had mud floors and consequently, with the rain dripping from the roofs, these were made slippery and dangerous; in many instances we found bags laid over the floor to prevent slipping. They are

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built without any plan on low-lying, uneven ground. There are few, if any, proper footpaths and in rainy weather, communication is difficult. The common latrines, often built over drainage trenches, are frequently in a bad state of repair, with little privacy".

This was, as I said, the Venn Commission Report of 1948 which came to British Guiana after workers were shot during a strike on a sugar plantation.

The conditions in the educational field were equally bad. A Government report on primary education in 1951-1952 reported:

"Classes of sixty rapidly swell in number to eighty and ninety; and classes over ninety are not uncommon. Under these impossible conditions, education tends to become a mere mockery...."

Now, what about the economy of my country? As we saw it at the time I entered the political scene around 1945-46 and a little later, the economy was in total imbalance. This was, incidentally, pinpointed by Mr. Daniel Newmark, Agricultural Economist of the Food and Agriculture Organization, who, on behalf of the Caribbean Commission, visited British Guiana and the West Indies.

In his paper, submitted to the Caribbean Commission for its conference in 1950 in Curacao, Mr. Newmark wrote:

"One of the main characteristics of the territorial export is its dependence on a small number of products, dependence typical of economically under-developed areas, while the imports requirements of each territory are characterised by a very wide range of foodstuffs, raw material and manufactured goods".

With the exception of the extractive bauxite industry, there was no attempt at industrialization in my country. Even agriculture, in a predominantly agricultural country, was badly served. Dr. Courbois, who at that time worked for the Food and Agriculture Organization, visited my country in the early 1950's and he said that credit agencies, the banks and insurance companies were hardly giving any credit even to the agricultural sector in a country which was predominantly

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agricultural. According to the post-war Royal Commission appointed by the United Kingdom Government, this is what we find:

"...practically all well-drained land is in sugar ... The areas devoted to rice and pasture are badly drained and abound in large, swampy areas where almost amphibious cattle, sheep and pigs eke out an unusual existence".

The lives of the people of my country suffered as a result of all this exploitation, backwardness and poverty. In 1946, Dr. Giglioli, a world-famous malariologist whose work has earned international recognition by WHO and other bodies, wrote as follows:

"Approximately 60% of school children, between 1938 and 1945, showed evidence of chronic malaria; the birth rate was low and the death rate high; in most years the number of deaths exceeded the number of births. Infant mortality in malarial years ranged from 235 to 255 per thousand live births (1934-44)".

It is against this background of exploitation, backwardness and poverty that my party won the election of 1953. We immediately embarked on a programme of social and economic reforms which threatened the positions of the privileged few and sought to bring an end to colonial rule. After only four-and-a-half months in office, the Constitution was suspended and my government was removed from office. Since then, there has been one long campaign to destroy my party and to delay independence.

After the suspension of the Constitution in October of 1953, an interim puppet Government was put into office. In 1955 they instigated and fostered a split in my party in order to divide and weaken it, the better to maintain control. Out of this split developed the racial tension which bedevils us today.

In 1957, and 1961 my party won the elections, in spite of the split and the gerrymandering of the constituencies. In February of 1962, when the reactionary elements tried to bring down the Government by force, they delayed bringing in the military in order to aid the civil power until violence, looting and incendiarism had started. These attempts to destroy the People's Progressive Party

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all failed but they still hope that they will succeed in the future. Today every devious means is being used to this end.

If I may, I should now like to refer briefly to the economic situation. The Interim Government, which was installed by the British Government after my Government was overthrown in 1950, was overwhelmed with economic help. But this was not to be our lot. After my party won the elections in August of 1957, I immediately set about looking for funds for development. I felt that if the social and economic problems affecting the people of my country were not solved, an explosion would eventually occur. At a conference at the Colonial Office in August 1958, I suggested that the \$91 million development programme which had been started and which was to continue from 1956 to 1960, should be dissolved, revised and expanded to \$200 million, but this proposal was rejected. Instead, it was decided that the plan should be reviewed in the summer of the following year, 1959.

Efforts to obtain development finance from other sources were made and the Swiss Bank in London indicated that they would be prepared to lend the Government of British Guiana, under a United Kingdom guarantee, a sum amounting to £6,000,000. The United Kingdom Government, however, stated that it was not in keeping with its policy to guarantee such loans. Following upon this refusal, I sought permission of the British Government to make a direct approach for a loan to the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development. This request was approved and a preliminary application was prepared at the Colonial Office and forwarded to the World Bank.

Discussions with United States Government agencies in the same year were also held, these agencies being the Development Loan Fund, Import-Export Bank, the International Co-operation Administration.

In early 1959, following my visit to Washington, United States Government officials from the State Department visited British Guiana. Discussions on my Government's application for economic assistance were then held, but unfortunately no definite commitment was made.

In the summer of 1959, the present five-year 1960-1964

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\$110 million development programme was approved in London. By "dollars", I mean not United States dollars, but British West Indian dollars. The programme was limited to \$110 million on the advice of Mr. Berrill, a United Kingdom economist, who had come to British Guiana as an adviser to the Government in early 1959. Mr. Berrill argued that, at the then prevailing rate of interest, which was then 6%, British Guiana could not afford a bigger programme; and were it to embark on a larger programme it would run into serious financial difficulties, as too large a proportion of its recurring budget would have to be devoted to the payment of debt charges.

I did not share Mr. Berrill's assumptions about the rate of economic growth for the future, and projections of revenues and debt burden, in the long-term fifteen to twenty-year period.

The Colonial Office admitted that the British Guiana Government needed a larger development programme, but expressed the view that neither was the British Government in a position to loan more than the sum of £8 million, of which £4 million was approved, and £4 million was to be considered later, nor, the British Government said, was British Guiana in a position to finance a bigger development programme.

I argued then on the basis of a lower rate of interest for a bigger development programme. I was told that the British Government could not reduce this rate because of an act of Parliament which determined the rate of interest on treasury loans.

I again visited Washington in the summer of 1959 and held talks with officials of the World Bank and United States Government agencies; but again with little result.

Later the same year, I visited the Federal Republic of Germany, and Italy, and held discussions there on economic assistance. It was some two years later in 1961, that the first tangible result came from these many attempts to secure aid, in the form of a small World Bank loan of about \$ B.W.I. 2.25 million. This loan, however, was given on the condition that it be used only for credit to private individuals or co-operative societies for the purchase of equipment

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and the implements for the agricultural, forestry and fishery development sectors.

Now, immediately after the election last year, I led a mission to Canada and the United States in search of economic aid. As a result of my talks in Washington, the United States Government decided to send an economic team to investigate the feasibility of certain development projects. The visit of this economic mission was postponed after the recent disturbances. The Mission, however, visited in May, and its report is now awaited.

It will be seen, therefore, that with the exception of technical assistance, my efforts to secure economic assistance have so far yielded little material aid. It was under the pressure of these circumstances that the 1962 budget was introduced.

I may say here that when for the second time I took office in 1957, the Government was faced with a situation of 18 percent unemployed, and 9 percent under-employed, as disclosed by a survey conducted by an individual who was lent to the British Guiana Government through ILO.

Keeping these figures in mind, and the possibility of a further deterioration in the unemployment situation resulting from a rapid increase in the population, I immediately took steps to see what could be done to mobilize savings internally.

When at the end of 1961 it became clear that the expenditure in 1962 would be much higher than the 1961 figure, I sought the advice of Mr. Nicholas Kaldor a world-famous tax expert, who had previously served on a United Kingdom tax commission, and who visited the Governments of India, Ceylon, Ghana, Mexico, and, indeed more recently, Turkey; and requested his assistance through the United Nations Organization.

Most of Mr. Kaldor's recommendations were included in the Government's budget proposals which were introduced early this year. But certain business interests, on whom the burden of taxation was likely to fall most heavily, and who saw a threat to their privileged social and economic positions, led an organized attack against the budget and used it as an excuse for a concerted attempt to overthrow the Government. These business interests were politically hostile to the Government, as was clearly demonstrated during the 1961 election campaign. Sections of the

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working classes who, themselves, would have benefitted indirectly from the fiscal measures which were proposed, were used by the organizers of the disturbances. While these people claimed that they were opposing the budget, events proved that the attack on the budget was made a front for a more serious attempt to overthrow the Government by force and violence. This was clearly demonstrated after the Government announced on 14 February -- that is, two days before the serious disturbances of Black Friday, 16 February -- that some of the budget proposals were to be withdrawn or modified. For the attack was then shifted from the budget, itself, to the government. The slogan then was not only "Down with the Budget", but "Down with the Government". The overthrow of the Government was to be achieved, in part, by the creation of chaos and disorder. Electricity and water-works, shops, stores and markets were to be closed down. The Government transport system -- railways and ferries was to come to a halt. Those who planned all of this had hoped that, with the creation of chaos and disorder, they would have succeeded in causing the suspension of the constitution, as in 1953, and the removal of the Government from office.

I must say here that, only recently, we had an election -- in August of last year -- and many of the people who were opposed to the Government and who had lost the elections -- indeed, who had lost three successive elections -- were naturally using the occasion of the budget to seek to overthrow the Government. This factor must be kept in mind by the Committee.

There is also, incidentally, some indication that there were groups outside the country which might have encouraged or influenced those who started the recent disturbances. There are some, including the British Government, who say that the independence talks should await the report of the Commission of Enquiry into the February 1962 disturbances. I humbly submit that the disturbances cannot be used as an argument against independence of my Government. Otherwise, any disgruntled opposition can at any time, engineer disorders in order to arrest indefinitely a country's march to freedom. Indeed, my Attorney-General, at a meeting of the Council of Ministers of my Government with Mr. Hugh Fraser, the then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the colonies, indicated shortly

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after the disturbances that to postpone the May independence talks which were fixed by the British Government was to place a premium on looting, arson and murder.

It should be noted that the terms of reference of the Commission of Inquiry did not include the question of Guyana's independence. The Commission was merely to determine the causes which led to the disturbances and to report thereon.

Now, because of their recent success in getting the independence conference postponed, these hostile groups, both within and without the country, are convinced that independence can be postponed indefinitely by the perpetration of further disorders. Only a clear and categorical statement fixing a date for independence will now deter these groups from their continuing efforts to subvert the Government and to spread disaffection.

But even setting aside this aspect of the matter, independence is even more urgently necessary because, confronted by the harsh economic realities of our contemporary world, only an independent country will be able to raise the funds so urgently required for development. This has been made to me clear, abundantly clear, in negotiations with many Governments and aid agencies. There is thus a strong case for independence now, looked at from any angle.

The forces of reaction are nevertheless trying to enlist international opinion by a propaganda campaign which misrepresents the objectives of my Government. The attacks against me and my Government are based not on what we are doing today but on what they allege we will do in the future when independence is achieved. I challenge the opposition, or anyone else, to stand up and say what we are doing that is wrong. They can never do this, and so long as independence is delayed they will always work on the fears of the people of my country -- a minority of the people -- and thus attempt to create disorder with the hope of delaying independence.

Because of this campaign, I crave your indulgence and patience now to put before you without reserve my plans for my country. You are entitled to know them.

I am fighting for the political liberation of my country. But

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political freedom is not my only goal. I want also social justice and economic emancipation without which (This part was left out when typed)

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political freedom can be meaningless. We aim to create a society in which there is a fair distribution of the wealth of the country for all. We cannot go on having big gaps between those at the top and those at the bottom. My aim is to raise living standards and to give to the many the things now reserved for the privileged few. I propose to do this by adopting an economy in which both state and private enterprise will play a part, working together within the framework of a national development plan. Guyana is a big country, undeveloped and challenging. There is plenty of room for state and private enterprise to exist side by side. But private enterprise cannot retain its old dominance. We cannot perpetuate a society dominated by the urge for private profit and by individual greed, by colonialism and imperialism. In Guyana, as in most under-developed countries, the State must play a dynamic role in development. This is what I said a decade ago when I spoke on behalf of the people of my country when I first entered the political arena. Then I spoke of economic planning, of the need for industrialization, of the need for land reform. But in those days these things were regarded by those who exploited us as heretical doctrines. I am glad to see that today some of these same views which I enunciated more than a decade ago are being accepted in many under-developed countries of the world.

On the political side, let me say that I believe in parliamentary government and free elections, and the achievement of my objective by persuasion and through peaceful means. This is in keeping with our objective of achieving independence and of transforming the economy into a socialist one within the framework of parliamentary democracy. It was this same position which was explicitly accepted by President Kennedy in his interview last year with the editor of Izvestia. Dealing with the political situation in British Guiana, President Kennedy was quoted, in a United States information release, as follows:

"Dr. Jagan, on the other hand, who was recently elected Prime Minister in British Guiana, is a Marxist, but the United States does not object because that choice was made by an honest election, which he won".

Let me say that at the last election socialism was clearly put on the agenda to the electorate, and by both the major parties which

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polled nearly 85 percent of the vote at the elections. But unfortunately, there are some in the world today who want to continue with the old order, who want to turn the clock of progress back in my country, who want to maintain the colonialist and imperialist chains which have kept my people in poverty all these years.

Let me repeat, too, what I have said a thousand times, that is, that my Government will not confiscate private property, seize savings, suppress the freedoms and the right to oppose -- things of which we have been persistently accused. We, whose freedoms have been taken away, we who have been attacked, we who have been persecuted, we who have won democratic elections on three successive occasions -- we give these undertakings, that we will honour what we say and what we have written into our Constitution. Indeed, our present Constitution, at my insistence contains -- and the Constitution for an independent Guyana will contain -- a Bill of Rights to protect these freedoms. I can do no better than to quote at this stage the Preamble to the Constitution prepared by my Government for a free Guyana:

"We, the people of Guyana -

Believing that all men are entitled to certain fundamental and inalienable

RIGHTS, among which are,

JUSTICE, social, economic and political;

LIBERTY of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship;

EQUALITY of status and of opportunity and before the law; and

Recognising the

DUTY of all men to uphold and maintain these RIGHTS, to strive to promote the

COMMON WEAL, to support and sustain the

NATION, and to preserve its

UNITY, INTEGRITY, and INDEPENDENCE;

and

Desiring to affirm that

SOVEREIGN POWER resides with the PEOPLE - do DECLARE ourselves a NATION, and Accept and Adopt this CONSTITUTION.

In our external relations, let me say that we will pursue a policy of non-alignment. We will support dependent and exploited peoples everywhere in their struggle for freedom, political and economic; we will oppose racial discrimination wherever it occurs; we will work for peace and international co-operation; and we will support the United Nations, in which we believe lies the surest hope of small nations and, indeed, the future of the world.

Those are the facts, gentlemen, which I leave it to you to judge. My people look to you to strengthen their hands in this struggle for freedom against the powerful forces now arrayed against them both within the country and outside, forces that operate not only at the political level, but at the financial, the economic and every other level.

That we now fight for freedom does not mean that we cherish any ill-will against anyone, least of all the British. I may say that my hope has always been that when the old colonial relationship between my country and the British comes to an end, we will enter into a new relationship as equal partners in the Commonwealth of nations in peace and friendship, and not in enmity -- to which, unfortunately, we are perilously near at this very moment.

That you, the representatives of seventeen nations, have paused in your deliberations to listen to me is evidence that the world will not permit nor endure the continued oppression of some of its peoples. And equally important is the fact that the people of Guiana demand their freedom now and this should no longer be resisted. The flame of freedom has been kindled in my country and it cannot be put out.

In 1953, my country had what could be regarded, and what was so stated by the British Government at the time, as the most advanced Constitution in the British Caribbean; indeed in the British Empire. Since then many African States have become free. Trinidad and Jamaica will be free in August of this year; there is absolutely no reason why my country too should not be free this year. I wish therefore, on behalf of my Government and the people of Guiana, formally to invite this Committee to use all the powers of the United Nations: one, to request the British Government to hold the deferred constitutional talks

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immediately; two, to fix a date for independence this year. Should the Committee desire to do so, I wish to invite it to visit my country immediately. . Copyright © Nadira Jagan-Brancier 2000

The CHAIRMAN: On behalf of the Committee, I wish to express our thanks to the Prime Minister of British Guiana for his illuminating statement and for the valuable information he has brought to the Committee.

Are there any questions to be put to the petitioner?

Mr. BHADKAMKAR (India): My delegation would like to take this opportunity of thanking the Prime Minister of British Guiana for being with us here today and for having presented a very important and very comprehensive statement, which raise some extremely important issues, if I may say so, and which are also complicated, no doubt. My delegation for one -- and I believe there are one or two other delegations -- would like to have some time, at least a day, to study the statement in full. If the Prime Minister has no objection and if he will be with us for a day or two, we would like to ask him some questions on his statement, or in connexion with the substance of the statement, tomorrow, if possible. That is not to say that should there be any other representatives who would like to ask him questions today, and should the Prime Minister be prepared to answer them, that they should not do so. But in the event that we have no delegation wishing to put any questions at this time, I would like to propose that the meeting be adjourned for today and that we meet at any convenient time tomorrow.

The Chairman: The members of the Committee have heard the suggestion of the representative of India. Since no other member wishes to put any questions today, I take it that it is agreeable to the Committee to defer the questioning period until tomorrow.

It was so decided.