

BROADCAST BY THE PREMIER, DR. THE HON'BLE C.B. JAGAN

ON 30TH MAY, 1964

Fellow Guianese,

Last week when I spoke to you, I said that I was speaking with a heavy heart. This week you can imagine the deep intensity of my feeling. I know that all of you share my grief for the events this week at Wismar which will not easily be forgotten by decent minded people. The fire in 1962 was child's play compared with the inferno at Wismar. 1962 was a great disaster but 1964 is a national catastrophe. One would have thought that our experiences in 1962 and 1963, which brought so much personal suffering, would not lightly have been repeated, but instead of things improving they are definitely getting worse. The events of the last few weeks in West and East Demerara have been grim enough, but at Wismar, human relations have sunk to an all-time low. Fifteen hundred people have been uprooted from a place which they had made their home; their life savings have been lost; they have had to run for their lives, hide in bushes and in canals. They see a bleak future in terms of economic security - they will not easily forget the nightmare which they have gone through.

What can we hope to achieve by all this? Where is this leading us - we who have always prided ourselves with being six ethnic groups living peacefully together? Surely this must come to an end! We cannot go on like this from one disaster to another. In recrimination and retaliation lies the downhill path to chaos. Our country can get nowhere if we live in fear, if we spend our nights watching when we should be sleeping, and sleeping when we should be working. Nor should we think that the use of foreign troops is the answer to our problems. Foreign troops can certainly help but they are not a cure. And don't forget that to police adequately vast areas of British Guiana will take thousands of troops which are obviously not available.

It seems to me, and I know you must feel this way, that we must call a halt to every form of violence, intimidation and threat. There are many now who go around spreading wild rumours. I have seen little slips of paper handed to peaceful, innocent people advising them to dismantle their homes and leave within twenty-four hours. The recipients are warned not to report to the police and that if they did not leave they would be burnt down. Our job now is not only to end violence but to fight fear itself.

I know you will agree with me when I say that we must all try to repair the damaged human relations. The various ethnic groups in British Guiana have all a role to play in our country. We are interdependent like the various parts of the body. If we are to progress and make Guiana the place which will offer adequate living standards and security for all, we have to make a fresh beginning. We have to put aside hate, put aside violence and put aside fear. We can certainly take a lesson from the big nations which armed with their nuclear bombs and other means of mass destruction are today moving to settle their problems around the conference table by negotiation and discussion. If they cannot afford to blow up each other then surely we can't. I know how some of you who have suffered feel. Your first reaction is to hit back. But where would this lead us? This is the question we must all ask now. It is obviously a time to be led not only by the heart but by the head. We have to get around the conference table to talk not only in Georgetown, but all over the country.

The political leaders have unfortunately not been able so far to reach agreement, but political leaders are not the ones who are suffering today; it is you the poor people who have lost property who have lost sleep, and who live in fear. Individually and collectively you must act now. It is clear now if leaders are not willing to reconcile differences in the interest of the country on the basis of what is right and just, then you must either individually or through your organisations come out and put pressure on your leaders.

As I see it there are three major grounds for dispute at the moment on the industrial front, the political front and the security front.

My Government is doing everything possible to bring a settlement to the strike in the sugar industry. Over the past week I have talked to several individuals and organisations exploring avenues for a possible settlement on the political front which will lead to peace in our country. I hope that out of all these discussions which are continuing something fruitful will materialise. I shall be most pleased to hear any views which you may have which may help to bring solutions on the various fronts so that we can ease tension and have lasting peace.

And now may I say a word about the registration of voters, which is now in progress. I wish to urge all of you to register. There is now only one week left. You know my views about proportional representation. The Government of British Guiana is opposed to it. It is a crooked, rigged system which has been imposed with the object of removing my Government from office, even before the expiry of its normal term. But I have no doubt that in the end justice will prevail. All of you decent minded people, I know, abhor the crude methods being used in the name of democracy. However, we must take one step at a time. Register now. If you do not register, you will not be able to vote.

In conclusion I wish to appeal once again to one and all to put an end to violence and intimidation in all their forms and to cooperate as fully as possible with the Security Forces. A solution to our problems must be found. The alternative is national extinction. We cannot go on year after year from disaster to disaster with the situation each year growing worse in geometric progression. You have in your hands the power to reverse this process. It is still not too late to turn back the wheels on the road to independence and progress for all.