

"THE POLICY OF THE GOVERNMENT TOWARDS THE
ROLE OF THE TRADE UNION MOVEMENT IN THE
SOCIAL, POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOP-
MENT OF BRITISH GUIANA."

Address by Dr. C.B. Jagan to T.U.C. Congress,
Sunday, June 28, 1964.

I have been asked to speak on "The Policy of Government towards the role of the Trade Union Movement in the Social, Political and Economic Development of British Guiana." For me to discuss this question fully and adequately, it would have been better perhaps if I had been given a statement by the Trades Union Council on "The Policy of the Trade Union Movement towards the Government in the Social, Political and Economic Development of British Guiana." I say this in all seriousness, because one can speak of the role of the Government or the role of the Trade Union Movement, in vacuo, completely divorced from reality, especially since unfortunately at the moment there is almost a cold war, a barrier in public relations, between the Government and the Trade Union Movement as represented by the Trades Union Council. What is necessary for us at the moment is not merely to speak in generalised terms and to enunciate theoretical principles. What is necessary is to have both sides state attitudes clearly and to lay down a set of principles by which these attitudes can be fulfilled.

2. Let me first of all say that my Government's attitude to trade unionism is one of active sympathy and support; and when I speak of trade unionism, I use the phrase in its generally accepted sense of a movement free from employers' control and dedicated to the improvement of the working and living conditions of its members. This attitude springs naturally from the philosophy of the Party from which the Government is constituted, since that Party has as its primary aim the promotion of the interests of the working-class.

3. This assertion of dedication to working-class upliftment is adequately borne out by the legislative record of my Government. Any unbiased observer will readily admit that more legislation to protect the workers' interests has been enacted in the life-time of the two P.P.P. Governments than during the remainder of British Guiana's long history.

4. My Government and Party recognise the working-class along with its ally, the peasantry, as the creators of wealth and real value and with the intellectuals as the main motive force in society. As such, the working-class must play a leading dynamic role in all phases of life in the country.

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5. Having said this, I wish now to comment briefly on the role of the Trade Union Movement in British Guiana. I know that you will want me to speak frankly. It is necessary to do so if there is to be a meeting of minds. Firstly I wish to point out that if the Trade Union Movement is to play a role there must be some consistency in its attitude and behaviour. Unfortunately there has been no consistent attitude evinced by the Trade Union Movement, and no specific purpose or direction which might permit the part played by the Trade Union Movement in the social economic life of our country to be characterised by the word 'role'. Permit me to illustrate.

6. It is commonplace that taxation not only brings revenue to the Government, but affects the distribution of wealth. The Government sought in 1962 to impose additional taxation, which aimed at providing money for economic and social development, and this was itself a social reform, in that it fell more heavily on the wealthier classes which were being taxed for the benefit of the working classes. Yet the Trade Union Movement joined with the wealthier classes in opposing the measures.

7. Again the history of our Trade Union Movement has been plagued by inter-union rivalry. At various times the Trades Union Council has considered this question. In the middle and late 1940's certain principles were enunciated as a means of bringing about an end to inter-union rivalry which did not help the cause of the working-class. As I recall, two principles were enunciated; firstly, amalgamation; and secondly, demarcation. But these were never resolutely pursued and implemented. In the early 1950's the Trade Union Movement decided finally to resolve this question. It urged the enactment of a Labour Relations Bill. This was based on the experience and practice in North America and Jamaica, where a poll was used as the device to force employers to recognise unions and to settle inter-union jurisdictional disputes. Unfortunately by the forceful removal of the P.P.P. Government in 1953 this objective was not realised. We have seen that a decade later it became impossible to enact a similar measure and the failure to do so had led to a prolonged strike which is continuing and which is having serious consequences on the social fabric and economy of the country. This problem will have to be resolved. It can only be resolved on the basis of sound principles; expediency and inconsistency will neither solve such problems nor bring credit to the Trade Union Movement.

8. I enumerate these facts, not from anger, but from deep disappointment at the attitude of the Trade Union Movement to a Government of the working-class. Permit me to say, however, that while my Government has expressed strong sentiments and criticisms about the role of the Trade Union Council, it nevertheless recognises that some trade unions have genuinely and consistently/.....

consistently fought to advance the interests of their members. I can state unhesitatingly that trade unions which genuinely support the cause of the working people will always find sympathy and ready support from any Government which it is my privilege to head. The Government will give every protection to the trade union movement which genuinely strives to further the interests of the workers. The Government will ensure not only that the legal rights of unions are protected, but that workers get proper wages and conditions of work, and adequate accident, disability, unemployment and old age benefits.

9. But trade unions are not merely friendly societies, as they were at one time. Nor are they only concerned with improved wages and working conditions. Trade Unions can and should play an important role in the social and economic development of the State. In such aspects of social development as social security and housing, well-organised and well-managed trade unions can play a very useful role, working in close co-operation with the Government.

10. In the economic sphere, it is necessary for the Trade Union Movement to dissect our economy and recognise the root causes of economic backwardness. Today we hear a great deal about developed and underdeveloped countries, about advanced and backward countries, as if these two categories were completely isolated, each operating within a vacuum. The fact is that developed and underdeveloped, the two phases of monopoly capitalism, are inextricably linked up like the two faces of a coin, like the "front" and "back" of many of our "yards". One hears increasingly today that the gap in living standards between the developed and so-called underdeveloped countries is widening. This is very true. What we want to know is not only that it is widening but why it is widening. We must find out the root causes of economic backwardness. An analysis of recent trends in the poorer countries will show a slowing down of the rate of economic growth, balance of payment difficulties, fall in prices of exports, rise in prices of imports, loss of traditional markets caused by the introduction of substitutes and synthetics, and so on. An examination of our area - Central and South America and the Caribbean - shows the same trend everywhere.

11. Central and South American Countries are generally in a state of permanent crisis. A 2.6% post-war net per caput rate of economic growth has now dwindled to about zero. This state of affairs has been due generally to lack of real workers' participation in business and government imbalance in economic development, lack of planning and above all to the fantastic drain of wealth abroad. In the post-war decade 1946-1956, according to U.N. Statistics, foreign investors took out a net amount of \$5½ billion (U.S.); for every \$1 invested, \$3.17 was taken out. Latin America, the "sick man" of/.....

of the Western Hemisphere was in the calamitous position of having to borrow to repay debts due.

12. In Jamaica, balance of payment statistics have shown recently that outflow of capital from high profits and interest would have caused serious ^{economic} difficulties had it not been for income earned from tourism and savings remitted by Jamaicans who had emigrated abroad. No country can depend for sound economic growth on these two tenuous factors. The picture is almost the same in other Caribbean territories.

13. At home, we see a steady rise in our annual debt charges from \$1.7 million in 1954 to \$10. million in 1963 and to about \$16 $\frac{1}{4}$ million by 1968. This means that our debt burden increased from 5% of revenue in 1954 to 14% in 1963 and will go up to about 17% in 1968. If our Development Programme (1960-1964) was \$200 million, instead of \$110 million, our debt burden annually according to the Cambridge Economist, Kenneth Berrill, would be 31% of our revenue in the early 1970's. Besides we cannot fail to note, the relationship between unemployment on the one hand and mechanization, automation, concentration and monopolization on the other. For instance, over the decade, 1950-1960, because of rationalisation, and mechanization the labour force in the Sugar Industry has dropped by over a quarter even though sugar production has nearly doubled. May I say here en passant to the critics of the Government's agricultural policy, that had not more land, and consequently more jobs, been made available, a surplus army of unemployment would have made life more difficult for the workers and the trade unions which represent them.

14. I would be remiss in my duty if I did not say that in addition to these trends our difficulties are compounded by political and cold war considerations. These have prevented a break-through on the economic front; they have prevented a solution to our unemployment problem; they have weakened the bargaining power of trade unions.

15. All of this indicates the need for a planned economy, and the trade union movement can play a part in the formulation of the Government economic policy. Indeed, the Government proposes that the Trade Union Movement should be represented on the National Economic Council, the body that would advise the Government on economic development. The Trade Union Movement will do well to establish a research department which can work in close liaison with the Government Statistical and Economic Planning Division. This can study not only the position in industry locally in relation to the workers' interest, but also economic trends both at home and abroad, the better to be able to help in the formulation of Government economic policy .

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I am of the view also that once harmonious relationships exist, trade unions must play an increasing role in management of enterprises, both private and public.

16. While examining what future role it should play, the Trade Union Movement must recognise the reality of these political factors. While its industrial objectives must be to seek the unity and advancement of the working-class, in the political sphere it must work for a Guyana free from foreign, military and economic entanglements. The Trade Union Movement must free itself from internal and external controls - controls which are likely to be of a political nature for economic reasons. Some foreign countries have used their Trade Union Movement as a vehicle for imposing their neo-colonialist objectives on independent and newly independent countries. This is the reason why leaders like Dr. Nkrumah and others in Africa have sought to free the Trade Union Movement from external controls, both East and West. They have seen in the post-independence period how attempts have been made to perpetuate colonialism through the influence of Trade Unionists from abroad.

17. Incidentally, my efforts in the past have been to guide the Trade Union Movement in the Caribbean in the same direction as in Africa. You will recall that in 1952 when the Caribbean Labour Congress was to be disbanded because of difficulties arising from its trade union affiliations both to the I.C.F.T.U., and the W.F.T.U., a group of West Indians and myself tried to persuade Sir Grantley Adams and Frank Walcott to create a Caribbean Federation of Labour free from East-West entanglements. Unfortunately for cold-war reasons this advice was not accepted. I have no doubt that had the Caribbean leaders not succumbed to cold war pressures, the history of the Caribbean would have been different today.

18. Internally, on the political front, the Trade Union Movement has to guard against political commitment. I have remarked already about the unfortunate division of the working-class into two main political parties. We have seen that this division on the political level has led to divisions at the industrial level. While, therefore, the Trade Union Movement must perforce have a political perspective, it should guard against aligning itself with one group or another on emotional grounds. It should also fight for political independence without which there can be no real economic progress.

19. To sum up: Government's policy should be; firstly, the recognition of the dynamic role which the Trade Union Movement can and should play; and secondly, the establishment of the necessary consultative machinery in the State apparatus at various levels for the formulation of policy. On a reciprocal basis, the Trade Union Movement must work for the formulation and

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acceptance of clear principles for the settlement of inter-union rivalry and disputes, for the evaluation and support of a development programme based on objectivity, and in the immediate future, as a matter of urgency and vital importance, for the weeding out of racial influences and for bringing about the unity of the working-class.

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