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DRAFT SPEECH BY PREMIER FOR
UNVEILING OF CRITCHLOW MEMORIAL

We keep today and in this hour ^a tryst with history. Exactly fifty nine years ago on Friday, December 1, 1905, Hubert Nathaniel Critchlow first came to notice when he was arrested. He had organised a strike of dock workers on that day protesting against certain abuses - the "all power" sugar bag, the quarter day and the 10½ hours working day. The shooting of some cane cutters at Ruimveldt heightened tension in Georgetown and the strike developed into a riot. There were clashes between the strikers and the Police in the course of which 6 people were killed and 17 wounded. The most serious clash took place around this Public Building and Mr. Critchlow was arrested but later discharged.

The young man who had thus suddenly jumped on to the stage of history had been born, as Ashton Chase who sat at his feet has told us in December 1884, eighty years ago.

1884 was a fateful year for British Guiana. We of this generation would say that it was a fateful year because it marked the birth of a great son of the soil who was to have an enormous impact on events. But the birth of Hubert Nathaniel Critchlow naturally passed unnoticed in 1884. In 1884 Sugar was King: the history of our country was written in terms of sugar. And for 1884 the historians record that British Guiana (and other British Caribbean territories) ~~was~~ ^{got} a rude shock when Germany and France began in earnest to dump their much subsidised beet sugar in the U.K. market. The immediate effect of this was B.G. sugar had an unprecedented fall from \$93 to \$62 per ton. A number of companies in British Guiana and the West Indies collapsed and disappeared. But many showed resilience and survived. ~~As the price of sugar fell, many proprietors and managers made improvements in sugar mills to improve their efficiency.~~

You will ask what is the relevance of all this to the occasion? I will tell you. If you look across to the St. George's Square you will see another work of sculpture - the bronze
/of Willia

of William Russell, an adopted son of Guiana. William Russell was in the van of those planters who carried out improvements in their sugar mills. He likewise played a great part in bringing about the construction of the Lamaha Canal for supplying water to the East Coast and Georgetown and he was also the promoter of the Boerasirie Water Supply Scheme. The bust across the way in Stabroek Square is eloquent tribute to this native of Scotland, for 41 years service to the country of his adoption.

The lives of William Russell and Hubert Nathaniel Critchlow were poles apart. William Russell was a great planter: he was, indeed, called the "Sugar King". Hubert Critchlow was of humble birth. ^{Some} Historians divide medieval society into three - the nobility, the clergy and the serf; that is to say, those who fought those who prayed, those who worked. Guyanese society of late 19th century may be divided into two main elements - the plantocracy with its allies and the workers. Russell was of the plantocracy; Critchlow was a worker. But though they moved in different spheres they have in common a record of unstinting service to their country, each according to his rights. A planter-controlled government paid tribute in bronze to a great captain of industry; a people's government today seeks to preserve the memory of a man of the people in a work fittingly fashioned by another son of the soil. The wheel has come full circle!

And it is fitting that the statue of this remarkable Guyanese should be placed in the grounds of the Public Building. As I have said, as one of the leaders of the dock workers in the strike of 1905, he took part in the events of that Black Friday which culminated in the clashes near to the Public Buildings. It was these events that marked his rise into notice. In his later life, as you have heard, Critchlow was to transfer his activities from the streets and open places into the Legislature. Here, too, we see the association of this man with these grounds where his statue has ^{now} been erected. But above all, it seems to me most fitting that this son of the soil whose name is now a part of our history should be erected in this the oldest and most historic section of the City.

/Mr. Chase

Mr. Chase has already given you some of the main points in his long career. Now I only wish to touch briefly on one or two other aspects.

Critchlow, was a man of wide human sympathies and was open to ideas from any source. He always wanted to see things for himself and this was why at one stage in his career, in 1932, he went to Soviet Russia. On his return he was immediately branded a "Red" and a "Communist" and described as an undesirable. One of the newspapers of that time wrote an editorial which might well have occurred - so similar are the sentiments - in the opposition ^{Section of the} press of our day.

"We are very interested," they wrote, "in the account Mr. Critchlow had brought back to the West Indies of his activities in the Soviet Union. We believe all he said of his experiences and wish to assure him that if and when it suits him we will accommodate him in a cell".

So speak the forces of reaction whether yesterday, or today.

The other thing I wish to touch on is the efforts of my Government to carry on from where Critchlow left off. Critchlow's period in the Legislature gave him a chance to put on the law books an impressive body of labour legislation. This included a Bakeries' Ordinance, a new rent restriction ordinance, also an ordinance to provide that rented houses be kept in a habitable state of repair; ordinances for shorter working week for watchmen, for the early closing of provision shops and for an 8-hour day for nurses of the Public Hospital. More important still were the introduction of Old-Age Pensions and Employment Exchanges and regulations for fair wages and better conditions for domestic servants. ~~But~~ [#] But with Critchlow's departure from the Legislature and the untimely removal of a ^{liberal} Governor who had supported his efforts there was a gap until 1953. ^{very} very little was done for labour. Then in 1957 we took up the torch which had fallen from the old fighter's hands and since then more legislation for the welfare of workers has been put on the books and other measures taken than during any similar period in the history of this country. There have been, to mention only the most important, numerous amendments to the Workmen's Compensation Ordinance all designed to make that law more effective including one which

one which gave financial protection to 6,000 domestic workers, the establishment of several Wages Councils, the Shops Consolidation Ordinance, the Amendment of the Labour Ordinance to ensure that workers benefit from the protection of certain ILO Conventions, the prescription of minimum wages for a wide range of workers, numerous Orders under the Holidays with Pay Ordinance, ^{and} the appointment of Advisory Committees to investigate wages and working conditions of many other groups of workers. Those are only a few of the things we have done in fulfilment of the ideas of Critchlow. Such legislation is also a memorial to him.

However, today we are here to unveil a more visible memorial - this great statue. The National History and Culture Council when ~~it~~ ^{they} decided just over a year ago to erect ~~it~~ ^{a statue} was fortunate to secure the services of Mr. E.R. Burrowes. I say ~~it~~ ^{they were} fortunate, because in his own field the achievement of Mr. Burrowes is comparable to that of Critchlow. Where Critchlow awoke a sense of dignity and an awareness of their power among workers, Mr. Burrowes has revealed through his art the spirit of our people. The one through the Labour Movement and the other through his Art have been great builders of our nation.

Mr. Burrowes, I am told, began work on the statue earlier this year when the materials arrived and he was assisted in his task by Walter Milling, Eddie Skeete and Andrew Lyght, all students in the craft. For Mr. Burrowes it was a labour of love to which he brought characteristic zeal and dedication. As you are aware he has been recently gravely ill and so we are all the more grateful that he is with us today.

It is a great pity that ~~many~~ ^{some} few have tried to start a controversy over the erection of this statue because Hubert Nathaniel Critchlow is one of those figures - perhaps the only one in our history ^{who} rises above all ~~disputes~~ petty issues. His statue as it stands here will be an inspiration to our youth. It will be a fitting reminder that the final judgment of history is more important than the attacks in the morning newspapers.

It is now my humble duty to unveil this statue to a great Guyanese who single-handedly did so much to improve the lot of his fellow workers and who gave to his country far more than he got it in return.