

Approving suspension

BRITISH GUIANA

HC Deb 22 October 1953 vol 518 cc2159-283 [2159](#)

§ 3.55 p.m.

§ [The Secretary of State for the Colonies \(Mr. Oliver Lyttelton\)](#)

I beg to move, That this House approves the action of Her Majesty's Government in British Guiana. The opportunity for a review of the events in British Guiana offered by this debate will, I think, be generally welcomed. It is certainly welcomed by Her Majesty's Government and by me. The proposal to suspend the Constitution which Her Majesty's Government are putting forward is indeed a grave step. Viewed in any light, it is a setback to the principle upon which all political parties in this House are agreed, namely, that our colonial policy should be directed towards giving the peoples in the Colonial Territories an increasing responsibility for the management of their own affairs. But if it be true—and it is true—that in all parts of the House we are firmly and finally committed to this policy, we must be prepared to take risks in carrying it out.

We have readily done so in many territories. To look no further than the West Indies, the Constitutions based on universal adult suffrage in Trinidad, Barbados and Jamaica, to quote three examples, show that the risks taken were justified. That sense of responsibility upon which alone these arrangements can take root and grow is becoming evident. The right hon. Gentleman and the party opposite certainly took risks when they set up the Waddington Commission, which in effect promised the present Constitution to British Guiana. It fell to my lot to put these recommendations into effect.

I was aware of the risks, I accepted them, and I do not go back on any of the reasons which impelled me to do so. It is true that one of them was that I felt that we were morally bound. Risks are necessary in these matters unless the pace of constitutional advance is to be altogether too pedestrian or is to be too much out of harmony with the aspirations of these people. But if we accept these risks we must also accept the corollary, which is that when events have proved that the risks were unjustified, when events, as often happens in human affairs, [2160](#) have falsified our predictions and dashed our hopes, we must be prepared to retrace our steps and try something else, always keeping in mind the ultimate goal to which our thoughts and policy should be directed.

I have had much proof that the opinions which I have just expressed are widely held in the West Indies by political leaders of parties of different political complexions. I first quote Mr. Grantley Adams, labour leader in Barbados, who said to the Governor, and who gave permission for me to quote in this House what he said: Our experience of Jagan and his sympathisers leads us to feel certain that social and economic progress in the British West Indies is much more likely to be harmed by that sort of person than by the most reactionary. However much we must regret

suspension of any constitution, we should deplore far more the continuance of a Government that put Communist ideology before the good of the people. Mr. Bustamente, the Chief Minister in Jamaica, said: If British Guiana were fighting for complete self-government within the democratic nations I would have stood beside British Guiana, but British Guiana today can get no sympathy from me—can get no sympathy from the free thinking world. I am sorry for the people there. I am not sorry for the leaders. They are not leaders at all. They do not know what they are doing. Mr. Manley's party, the P.N.P. in Jamaica, have issued a statement deploring the conduct of the leaders of the P.P.P. in British Guiana. They said that Ministers neglected their opportunities and engaged in "political exhibitionism." [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] These are not my words I am merely quoting words; and to continue: It was a betrayal of the cause of colonial peoples the world over, and a reckless and stupid betrayal of those who voted for them. I think it very significant to notice that the P.P.P. leaders have not appealed to public opinion in the West Indies where they are known only too well. Their appeal has been elsewhere.

At this point let me lay out two broad propositions which I hope will have the consent of the House; that among the duties that fall to the Government in this country and to the Secretary of State for the Colonies there are two which are outstanding in the political field. The first I have already touched upon. It is to pursue a policy which gives an increasing [2161](#) share of responsibility for their own affairs to the people of these Colonial Territories. But the second one is no less important. It is that Her Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom and the Secretary of State for the Colonies have responsibility laid upon them by this House, which they cannot set aside without the leave of this House, to see that peace and order, good government and conditions of social and economic advance are promoted.

It is unfortunately no defence for a Secretary of State to say this sort of thing, "We have given a large measure of self-government to this or that Colonial Territory. It is not our fault that the result of this is disorder, economic collapse and social retrogression." The fact is that Parliament has laid responsibility on our shoulders, and I sometimes think that this is so noticeable at Question time. It is sometimes over-recognised, as it seems to me, from the fact that those who are most eager to press forward in the cause of self-government are the very ones who urge the Secretary of State to intervene in a thousand and one administrative details where the local government have already sufficient powers to deal with the matter.

Let me be quite clear. So long as Her Majesty's Government have a responsibility to this House for the affairs of Colonial Territories, that is to say, before those territories gain complete independence—and some may never be in the position to do so—[Interruption.]—some of them may never be in a position to do so—[HON. MEMBERS: "Why?"]—hon. Members who follow these affairs know that I am referring there to Colonies likely to be permanently grant-aided—there are no means by which they can lay aside their responsibilities for peace and order.

Self-government up to that point is, to some extent, a delegation by Her Majesty's Government of their responsibilities, but delegation does not enable them to escape or to avoid the ultimate responsibility. Having given the rider the reins, we are not absolved from responsibility for the horse.

Today we must face the sad fact that constitutional advance in British Guiana has failed, for the moment. The evidence of that failure is set before the House in the White Paper. What emerges, I suggest, [2162](#) is a coherent picture of Ministers, no doubt largely dominated by Communist ideas, who gradually reduce government to a farce, who are threatening the order of the Colony, threatening the livelihood of its inhabitants, and undermining not only its present economic stability but also all chances of building it up.

Many of the statements that have been made, and indeed the measures that have been concerted, will appear to us literally incredible, but they are unfortunately all part of the deadly design to turn British Guiana into a totalitarian state dominated by Communist ideas, whose whole political, industrial and social life would be concentrated in the hands and in the power of one party.

Dr. Rita Hinden, a member of the Commission, I would mention to hon. Members opposite, which originally propounded this Constitution, in a thoughtful article no longer ago than 17th October, used these words: But one very disturbing thing emerged when our Commission took its public evidence. The People's Progressive Party representatives and also the trade unions connected with them who gave evidence had quite a different conception of democracy from what we had. They interpreted democracy as what I can only describe as 'one-party rule.' She went on: They have acted consistently with the theory they propounded to us. They could now do what they wanted; they could override every obstacle that impeded them; they could use their majority to alter the processes of law to their convenience and thus eliminate all trace of opposition. In other words, democratic institutions were to be given by Britain as the stepping-stone to the totalitarian state. These words are not drawn from any Conservative source. They are the words of Dr. Rita Hinden——

[§ Mrs. Barbara Castle \(Blackburn, East\)](#)

Seeing that the right hon. Gentleman is making a quotation from Dr. Rita Hinden, is it not fair to continue and to inform the House that she made it perfectly clear as a member of the Commission that the reserve powers were included in the Constitution for the express purpose of dealing with that situation?

[§ Mr. Lyttelton](#)

The hon. Lady will perhaps be satisfied when I say that I am going to devote part of my remarks to the study of that proposition, which [2163](#) will not be found to be tenable when examined. I will come to that later on. Dr. Hinden has expressed herself in this sense in many other quarters and I should have thought the hon. Lady would have given some attention to the views of a lady who is strongly, I believe, of her political way of thinking.

I suggest that any impartial reader, after studying the White Paper, would draw six main conclusions. First, that Ministers were attempting to gain control of the machinery of government for the sole furtherance of party and not of national interests — [HON. MEMBERS: "The same as you."] Secondly— [Interruption.]—what I am going to say may be very distasteful to hon. Members opposite——

[§ Mr. James Carmichael \(Glasgow, Bridgeton\)](#)

One-party rule!

[§ Mr. Lyttelton](#)

Secondly, that Ministers, while holding their portfolios—I hope this will also be greeted by jeers and cheers from hon. Members opposite —first succeeded in inciting strikes for political purposes in the sugar industry and then attempted, though without success—[Interruption.]—to widen the strike into a general strike. Thirdly, that Ministers endeavoured to oust the existing trade unions and substitute unions under their own control——

[§ Mr. Julian Snow \(Lichfield and Tamworth\)](#)

The Tory working man.

[§ Mr. Lyttelton](#)

I hope to expand some of these points. Fourthly, that Ministers incited the population to violence. Fifthly, that they neglected in a most irresponsible manner their duties for administering their Departments, and sixthly, that they were inspired by Communist ideas and were using standard Communist methods which would turn British Guiana into a Communist state with single-party government.

I will not elaborate all these six headings for very long, but I must elaborate some of them. First of all, the attempt to get control of the machinery of government. Let me turn to some salient points. I ask the House for one moment at this part of my argument to examine a statement made by Dr. Jagan, the leader of the Elected Members and [2164](#) the Minister of Agriculture, which was made on 26th July of this year. He used these words at a public meeting: We do not have control of the police, which means that if we were to start a strike, the Government would call in the police and shoot us down. I do not want to make too much of this statement, but I suggest that these words give us some insight into the twisted mentality of this Minister. In the first place, the statement says: If we call a strike ... But it is a Minister speaking. For a Minister to attempt to call a strike himself is sufficiently serious, but having said that, he then deplored that the police, instead of supporting the party, might support the Government in which he himself is a Minister, and that shows that the Ministers do not regard themselves as in any way responsible for government or indeed as any part of it.

I need not discuss further the methods which were being used, and which are described in the White Paper, to undermine the loyalty of the police—I turn to another section of the machinery of government—and the proposals to form a so-called "People's Police" which are some of the most serious features of these deplorable events. Ministers had already put forward a proposal for the formation of a volunteer police force in rural districts. It is evident that this volunteer police force was intended to be drawn from party adherents, was to be used as an instrument for enforcing the party's will and was to form the nucleus or cadre for the so-called "People's Police."

I must also say something about the control of the public services under this heading. To make a small digression, I might mention that during the Nigerian conference all the parties and all the three territories subscribed to the British theory and practice that, as far as possible, the public service should be divorced from direct control by Ministers, and that their appointment and promotion should not depend upon the fluctuating fortunes of any single party.

We are very proud in this country of the impartiality of the Civil Service. I was even prouder to find not only in Nigeria but in other places that this principle is endorsed by the colonial peoples in their march towards responsible self-government. But in British [2165](#) Guiana things were very different. As paragraph 12 of the White Paper sets out, Ministers made it clear that they intended to abolish the Public Service Commission and to refuse to vote provision for it. Moreover, the beginning of a soviet system was manifest when the Minister of Works instructed the Director of Public Works to set up committees—not trade unions or Whitley Councils, but committees—to advise upon the actual execution of works projects, not to negotiate, for example, on wages or working conditions.

Next I refer to strikes. Of course, severe constitutional strains are likely to be set upon a new Constitution when Ministers retain their positions as presidents or senior officials in the trade unions. Does anybody dissent from that? That situation can easily lead to a conflict between sectional and party interests on the one hand, and the national interest on the other.

Dr. Jagan, Minister for Agriculture and leader of the Elected Members, was president of the Sawmill Workers' Union. Dr. Lachhmansingh, Minister of Health, was president of the Guiana Industrial Workers' Union, and Mr. Burnham, Minister of Education, was president of the British Guiana Labour Union. As an aside, I might mention that our advice upon these matters has not always been followed. We think that that is a system which is likely to set up severe constitutional strain. Perhaps it will be in the memory of the House that Mr. Bustamente retained the presidency of his union in Jamaica. That is contrary to the policy which we think right, but Mr. Bustamente has not used his position as a trade union leader in the way in which P.P.P. Ministers have done. [Interruption.] The right hon. Gentleman the Member for Ebbw Vale (Mr. Bevan) comes very new into these colonial affairs.

In the event, it was these Ministers of the Crown who engineered the sugar strike affecting the whole economy of the Colony. We witnessed the sorry spectacle—I do not think that is an exaggeration—of two Ministers of the Crown and the Deputy-Speaker touring the sugar plantation on behalf of a pirate union and trying to promote strife on the plantations for party reasons. Why do I say "for party reasons"? I say it because it was [2166](#) not until four or five days after the strike had been started that any demands for wage increases or improved working conditions were formulated. The strike was for recognition so that this important section of the industrial life of the Colony should come under the domination of P.P.P.

The action of Ministers in fomenting this strike and their unsuccessful attempt to widen it into a general strike must be unorthodoxly carried to the point of outrage. I must again draw hon. Members' attention to that section of the White Paper which deals with trade unions. I must explain, as most hon. Members know, that the trade union movement in British Guiana is in an early state, although it is well established and growing. There was a live union, the Manpower

Citizens' Association, which had been recognised for negotiations with the employers since 1945. Dr. Jagan was treasurer of the union in 1945, but when he failed to get control of it he organised a splinter union, the G.I.W.U.

Dr. Jagan's efforts to set up the rival union—this was before the P.P.P. became a political power—were attended with very small success. According to the Registrar of Trade Unions in British Guiana, in December, 1952—that is last December—the G.I.W.U. numbered 800 members compared with over 7,000 in the Manpower Citizens' Association, of whom 4,000 in the latter union were workers on the sugar estates. After P.P.P. had come into power, political pressure, the machinery of government, and intimidation were used to suborn support for the G.I.W.U. The attempt to gain control is clearly set out in the White Paper.

I turn to the danger of violence. In the White Paper two speeches were quoted. Yesterday hon. Members seemed to wish for rather more. They seemed to be resentful that I had not quoted more speeches. I think I must set some limit, but I will give two more specimens in reply to their wishes. Both statements were made before there was any question or suggestion of a transfer of troops. The Minister of Education, on 11th September, in the House of Assembly, declared: As far as we are concerned, we shall continue to wear proudly the description 'seditious,' or the appellation 'terrorists'. [2167](#) The Minister's supporters used even more intemperate language. Mr. Fred Bowman, at a public meeting, said: The white people think that we are asses and they can use us. We are going to sacrifice some warm blood so that these damn white bitches see that we mean something ... "— elegant language— If we have to resort to violence we will get what we want. I am asking you again to unite as you did during the strike as the time is coming when we shall have to fight the oppressors. In paragraph 30 of the White Paper, we used these words: It was established from reliable sources that, at meetings attended by Dr. Jagan, the Minister for Education, the Minister for Works, and Mrs. Jagan, a plan was made to set fire to business property and residences of prominent Europeans and Government officials.

[§ Mr. A. C. Manuel \(Central Ayrshire\)](#)

What is the source of that?

[§ Mr. Lyttelton](#)

If the hon. Gentleman will allow me to make my speech, I am coming to that point. I feel that the House would like a few words from me about the reliability of our sources. The information came from police agents. These reports from police agents were again confirmed by conversations overheard by police agents between the thugs who were actually to carry out the arson, and they were expressing at that time their impatience that the operative order had not been given. Another piece of corroboration of the evidence of the police agents appears in the White Paper, and is that a sinister increase in the sales of petrol and kerosene in small quantities to people without motor cars was being widely reported.

[§ Mr. A. Fenner Brockway \(Eton and Slough\)](#)

Would the Minister state the date of this occurrence when this police report was made?

§ Mr. Lyttelton

I have not got it here, but I think it was about 7th October. I must check that up to be quite certain, because I do not want to mislead the House.

I have myself no doubt whatever of the reliability of these reports. The Governor's telegrams to me during this recent period of crisis have shown that he was convinced that organised incendiarism [2168](#) was one of the grave and serious dangers to which the Colony was exposed. The Attorney-General of British Guiana is at this moment considering whether it is possible to prefer criminal charges against any of the persons concerned in the formulation of these plans, and the decision, of course, rests with him and not with the Executive.

I should make it quite clear—because I do not want to shirk any point at all— that, even if he decides that the evidence against such persons is not sufficient to support charges in a court of law, that does not remove the seriousness of these reports, nor make it any less essential that the Government should take them into account. Hon. Members opposite will know that reliable information is frequently received from secret sources on which it is perhaps impossible to bring a charge in a court of law, yet no responsible Government dare ignore such information or fail to take it into account in considering any action which must be taken to avert a public danger.

There is one final piece of information which I must tell the House, and which I received only this morning. It is a telegram from the Governor informing me—and I think the House must be told—that great difficulty at the moment is being experienced in obtaining sufficient evidence to prefer charges, as the agents are unwilling, from fear or intimidation, to make written statements or give evidence in court. I will now read an extract from a letter which the Archbishop of the West Indies addressed to the right hon. Gentleman the Leader of the Opposition, a copy of which he sent to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. The Archbishop says: At this time, specific requests for the intervention of Her Majesty's Government began to be made by letters in the Press and by other means; and I myself will never forget how, as I travelled back in the train from Berbice a week ago, groups of people came to me at almost every station urging me to make representations on their behalf for something to be done to put an end to the tyranny in which, as one man put it, 'it was no longer safe to express an opinion even at home.' I can dismiss fairly shortly the fifth of my six points, which refers to the failure of Ministers to carry out their duties. They used their time, not to promote the welfare of the Colony, but to further their own party ends, and, after their portfolios were removed, the office of the Minister of [2169](#) Works was found to contain files and papers which had not been touched in the whole five months he had been in office.

§ Mr. Leslie Hale (Oldham, West)

I do not want to raise a party issue, but the right hon. Gentleman will remember that, when the present Government were elected in 1951, after 200 years' experience, they adjourned the House until the end of January so that they might consider what to do. This is a new and infant Government which has Communists in it, and it is the first one in the world to be elected, which is something significant. It has received a new Constitution, which it has only had for four

months before it has been suspended, and it was suspended 48 hours after these police reports were received.

§ Mr. Lyttelton

The hon. Gentleman does not take the point at all. It has nothing to do with the great tangle in which the Labour Government left the affairs of this country. The right hon. Gentlemen now sitting so gloomily on that Front Bench were not attacked for not using their powers, but for using them far too often. That was the trouble.

I now turn to the subject of Communism. I do not want to recite again the reasons set out in the White Paper upon which we base our statement that the leaders of P.P.P. were dominated by Communist ideas and were using all the standardised methods of Communist penetration into the machinery of Government, the public services, the police, the youth movements and the trade unions. I suggest with great earnestness that any impartial reader of the paragraph and appendix will see that these leaders looked for their inspiration to the network of Communist organisations which revolve round the W.F.T.U. and in the W.F.T.U. itself. I say to the House that we are here faced with part of the international Communist conspiracy——

§ Mr. Archer Baldwin (Leominster)

On a point of order. Is it in order for notes to be taken in the Public Gallery?

§ Mr. Speaker

Mr. Lyttelton.

§ Mr. Lyttelton

I repeat that we are here faced by part of the international Communist conspiracy to set up totalitarian states and to plant their ideas wherever they think the soil will prove [2170](#) fertile. Hon. Members must really make up their minds—and pretty soon—upon which side they are going to take up their position. Her Majesty's Government are not prepared to tolerate the setting up of Communist states in the British Commonwealth, and I have no doubt that, in taking up that position, we have the support of the overwhelming majority of the people of this country behind us.

In discussing this matter, perhaps hon. Members might care to hear a very succinct and clear exposition of this case. I will read it: The sugar workers' strike was quickly forgotten and the People's Progressive Party began a vigorous agitation in best Communist style for a removal of all checks on its power. A petition calling for constitutional amendments is being circulated for signatures. 'Amendments,' however, is merely a word to cover a series of demands which the leaders of the P.P.P. know are completely unacceptable. Either way they hope to win. If the Colonial Office refuses point-blank and suspends the Constitution, Dr. Jagan and his followers can pose as injured democrats, and if any concessions are granted more will be demanded. Here is a colonial crisis which could become as serious as Mau Mau terror in Kenya. But, unlike the

leaders of Mau Mau, the men and women round Dr. Jagan are cool, sophisticated politicians operating with full knowledge of all the weapons in the Communist armoury. That is the menace in British Guiana. That report appeared in the "Daily Herald" of 5th October, and I hope it has sunk well in on the opposite side of the House.

The right hon. Member for Ebbw Vale was reported to have said in a speech during the week-end: He"— that is, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister— made a decision about British Guiana and laid down new principles for the British Commonwealth. You are free to have whatever Government you like as long as it is the kind of Government we like. Very much in the right hon. Gentleman's most attractive style.

I cannot make it too clear that there is no semblance of reason for suspending a Constitution if a party, however Left wing or Right wing, is in power which is genuinely trying to fulfil the responsibility of democratic government, and in doing so is following a democratic pattern. At a public meeting the other [2171](#) day, I remember a young man asking whether the policy of Her Majesty's Government was to suspend the Constitution in British Guiana each time a Left-wing Government came into power until a Conservative Government was elected. I replied, of course, that the touchstone in these matters is whether government is being carried on genuinely and democratically. It happens to be only too true that if Ministers are dominated by a Communistic ideology, democracy cannot flourish and must be killed, and that good government cannot be secured.

I think that hon. Members in all parts of the House might be kind enough to acquit me of trying to work the Constitution in Colonial Territories so that Conservative elements predominate. Surely the history of colonial policy in the last two years, for instance, in Nigeria and the Gold Coast, are clear proof that such an allegation is totally without foundation. Even the right hon. Member for Ebbw Vale in his most effervescent mood would hardly describe Dr. Nkrumah, Mr. Azikiwe or Mr. Awolowo as staunch Conservatives, or as sharing my views. Yet we have been able to work together, as I think the House knows, for the constitutional advance of their countries, and they have said so publicly on more than one occasion.

[§ Mr. Aneurin Bevan \(Ebbw Vale\)](#)

Before the right hon. Gentleman leaves that point—as he has been good enough to quote from a statement of mine—may I ask him whether he consulted the other members of the British Commonwealth of Nations as to the qualifications a nation must have to become a member of the British Commonwealth of Nations?

[§ Mr. Lyttelton](#)

The right hon. Gentleman is now on an entirely different point. It has nothing to do with what he said. He said: As long as you have the Government we like. I was trying to prove to him that such an allegation has no foundation in fact at all.

[§ Mr. Bevan rose—](#)

[§ Mr. Deputy-Speaker \(Sir Charles MacAndrew\)](#)

If the Minister does not give way, the right hon. Gentleman must not remain standing.

[2172](#)

[§ Mr. Bevan](#) rose——

[§ Mr. Lyttelton](#)

I do not want to be discourteous to the right hon. Gentleman, but I have dealt with this point, and I do not propose to give way on it again.

I will now return to my main theme.

[§ Mr. Bevan](#)

On a point of order. It is always the practice of this House, Mr. Deputy-Speaker, whenever an hon. Member has been referred to in the direct way in which I have been referred to by the right hon. Gentleman, that the speaker gives way in order that the point may be cleared up. [HON. MEMBERS: "That is not a point of order."] It is a point of procedure. A point of procedure is a point of order.

[§ Mr. Deputy-Speaker](#)

Perhaps I could answer that. I do not think that a point of procedure is a point of order.

[§ Mr. Lyttelton](#)

I will now return to the main theme of my argument. Faced with this grave turn of events, what line of action should we pursue? It is necessary at this point—and this takes up, I think, the subject about which the hon. Lady was asking me earlier—for me to say something about the Governor's reserve powers. It is all the more necessary to do so because an influential newspaper has suggested, as I think the hon. Lady did, that the Government of the Colony could have been carried on, without suspending the Constitution, by the continuing use of the Governor's reserve powers.

I think the House is entitled to ask me to explain Her Majesty's Government's view on this point. What would have happened if the Governor had attempted to carry on the present Constitution with the Ministers holding the offices from which they have been dismissed, by the continuing use of his reserve powers? Under those powers, the Governor could, in the interests of public safety, public order, or good government, act contrary to the advice of the Executive Council, provided that, except in urgent cases, he secured the Secretary of State's prior approval. Similarly he could ensure that a Bill which the Legislature had failed to pass should become law, provided that he had the approval of the Executive Council, or, failing that, of the Secretary of State. The Governor could also, in his absolute discretion, refuse his assent to any Bill.

[2173](#) In fact, a study of these reserve powers will show hon. Members, I believe, that they are intended to meet single and extraordinary cases, and cannot in any way be deemed suitable for carrying on day-to-day government. What would have happened had they been so continuously used? In the first place, there would have been a constant clash with Ministers, making the ordinary processes of government impossible. There would have been an ever-increasing tension and risk of disorder. But, even more important, if the Governor had attempted to carry on government by these means, they would, in fact, have by-passed all the provisions of the Constitution.

I do not consider, and I choose my words with the greatest care, that it is constitutionally proper or seemly to set aside the provisions of the Constitution by continuous use of the Governor's reserve powers when there is a Parliamentary procedure by which the Constitution can be suspended.

[§ Mr. Thomas Reid \(Swindon\)](#)

This is a very important matter, and I should like the right hon. Gentleman thoroughly to clarify the position, because, as he knows, a great many hon. Members on this side of the House think that the crisis could have been met without destroying the Constitution. I understand that in this Constitution—I have not seen it recently, although I remember studying it when it came out—there are very strong negative powers in the Governor's possession. I believe that, with the approval of the Secretary of State, he has powers of veto as well. Here is a case, which I believe was correctly stated, in which Ministers were refusing to carry out their duties. Will the Colonial Secretary say whether the Governor or the Secretary of State had legal power, and, above all, practical power, to compel Ministers to do their jobs?

[§ Mr. Lyttelton](#)

I think the hon. Gentleman is reinforcing my argument. I have replied to the first part of the argument that, in fact, it is quite impracticable to carry on a Government with the Ministers going one way and with the Governor trying to pull them back on to the road by the continuous use of reserve powers which are expressly put into the Constitution [2174](#) for dealing with special and exceptional cases.

[§ Mr. Reid](#)

What I am asking is: Had the Secretary of State or the Governor any legal or practical power to force these Ministers to do their job?

[§ Mr. Lyttelton](#)

I do not know of any legal or practical means by which we can force Ministers to do their job. I am on another point of the Amendment, and I claim that I am following the only responsible course which one of Her Majesty's Ministers could pursue, in laying an Order in Council before both Houses of Parliament which de jure suspends the Constitution, and not attempting to suspend it de facto by some juggling with the Governor's powers.

[§ Mr. James Johnson \(Rugby\)](#)

Would the Minister be kind enough to tell the House why, in the light of all this, the Governor did not use his power to dissolve the Assembly and to call for new elections?

[§ Mr. Lyttelton](#)

That is again a very complicated question, into which I am quite prepared to enter if the hon. Gentleman really wants me to do so. [An HON. MEMBER: "Yes."] The Ministers did not advise dissolution. That is the last thing they wanted to do. Some strong reason would clearly have to be given for the Governor's dissolving the Assembly contrary to their advice. This is a very serious constitutional issue. The only reason that the Governor could have given was that it was impossible to work with the P.P.P. A statement of that kind would have meant a descent by the Governor into the political arena with a vengeance. Hon. Members have probably in mind the very severe consequences which have occurred from the use of the power of dissolution in other parts of the world, where the Governor publicly declared his support of one lot of Ministers against another.

[§ Mr. M. Turner-Samuels \(Gloucester\)](#)

Does the right hon. Gentleman not agree that if these Ministers were all criminals, that would be a very good ground for dissolving that particular Assembly?

[§ Mr. Lyttelton](#)

The hon. and learned Gentleman has already convicted them, whereas no criminal charge has been preferred against them.

[2175](#) I will now turn to the effect of all these events upon the economic life of the country. It was being brought to a standstill. There was a run upon the Savings Bank. [Laughter.] If hon. Gentlemen opposite think they can get any comfort from the entirely unfounded allegation that these were large withdrawals, let me tell them that it was in fact the small savers who were drawing from the Bank. In the White Paper there are the names of a number of American or oversea firms who were already abandoning their projects in British Guiana. Firms with British and Canadian capital, although they had not abandoned theirs, were already hanging back and were very apprehensive about the dangerous political climate. I might add on this point that no representations of any kind were received from the United States Government before Her Majesty's Government made their decision.

I must remind the House that in British Guiana the investment of capital on a large scale is absolutely necessary. The Colony is not a cheap sugar grower, and the development of further cultivation depends largely upon drainage and irrigation on a large scale. At the same time we have to develop the mineral resources. There is no surer way of arresting all these possibilities of development than by creating conditions which are inimical to investment either domestic or overseas.

I now turn to the Amendment which is upon the Order Paper in the name of the right hon. Gentleman the Leader of the Opposition. I am afraid this will be very disagreeable. The right hon. Gentleman has my deepest sympathy for having to move the Amendment, which appears to me to accept the premises upon which we have based our action but to recoil from the conclusions. When the Amendment is quoted in the future, right hon. Gentlemen opposite may wish to take credit for their abhorrence of undemocratic methods and at the same time to avoid the unpopularity which would be involved in endorsing the action which they know in their hearts was necessary.

I am entitled to ask, and I must ask, two very simple questions, and I will give way in order to enable the right hon. Gentleman to answer them. If he does not wish to answer them now—which I do not recommend—then we shall press [2176](#) for answers during the course of the debate, and I warn him that my right hon. Friend will expect to be in possession of them by the time he winds up.

[§ Mr. James Griffiths](#) (Llanelly)

Is the right hon. Gentleman referring to myself?

[§ Mr. Lyttelton](#)

No, I am asking the Leader of the Opposition two questions, and I said that if he did not wish to answer them now we shall press for an answer later on. Here are the two questions: If the Labour Government had been in power, would the Labour Party have strengthened the police by transferring troops from Jamaica to Georgetown to ensure law and order? Secondly, would they have kept the P.P.P. Ministers in office?

[§ Mr. Griffiths](#)

I shall, as I have always done, answer the right hon. Gentleman's questions, which is something we would not get from the other side.

[§ Mr. Lyttelton](#)

The first part of the right hon. Gentleman's reply was, as usual, extremely courteous.

I will conclude by referring to our decision to transfer troops from Jamaica to British Guiana. The 700 men or thereabouts who were transferred were to secure law and order. [Interruption.] The right hon. Lady must not get so excited. If the right hon. Gentleman had assented to the first part of my proposition, I need not have troubled the House with the reasons for the transfer of the troops, the 700 men referred to.

[§ Dr. Edith Summerskill](#) (Fulham, West)

The right hon. Gentleman should remember that we are not Guianese.

[§ Mr. Lyttelton](#)

I will not pursue that singularly infelicitous interruption. These 700 men or thereabouts were moved to secure law and order. It is a curiosity that some newspapers referred to this transfer of troops as "An attack upon British Guiana." It was about as much an attack as the stationing of troops in my constituency of Aldershot.

[§ Mr. C. R. Attlee \(Walthamstow, West\)](#)

I want to find out what newspaper. Was it official? It is not right for the right hon. Gentleman to imply that this was done by "a newspaper." I could quote nonsense written in the Tory newspapers.

[2177](#)

[§ Mr. Lyttelton](#)

I am extremely sorry if any impression was given of that kind. None was intended. It was not official. I only said in "some newspapers" the phrase was used.

[§ Mr. Attlee](#)

I am anxious to discuss this as a very grave matter, but the right hon. Gentleman is doing his cause no good by this kind of thing, suggesting that some responsible newspaper has said this. Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman does not know the impression that his words make outside. If it is suggested that this was said by a newspaper, it means that it is put forward by a responsible editor. If, on the other hand, it was said by some contributor, then responsibility rests solely on the contributor. If the right hon. Gentleman is alleging that any responsible newspaper, except possibly the "Daily Worker"— [Interruption].

[§ Mr. Lyttelton](#)

I made no remark about a responsible newspaper. For example— and I am not quoting exactly— what appears in the "Daily Worker" has some significance when we are talking about Communism here. But if the right hon. Gentleman, who seems to be unnecessarily perturbed, wants an assurance from me, I will give it him. I am not referring to a responsible newspaper or anything official. I have already explained why I used the phrase.

The justification for this transfer of troops is that in spite of all the threats of violence which have been rife in the Colony, not a life has been lost and the damage to property, although quite serious, has not been extensive; and the arrival of the troops was a signal for widespread relief in the country. I suppose that the House would like some evidence of this statement. First of all, I received two telegrams. The first said: British Guiana Village Chairmen's Conference, representing unions of local authorities in rural areas, regrets setback to Colony constitutionally, but pledge full support to His Excellency the Governor and interim administration. Conference welcomes arrival armed forces Her Majesty's Government and considered this step necessary to preserve law and order. Conference further takes this opportunity to affirm unqualified loyalty

and allegiance to Her Majesty the Queen. The second telegram read: On behalf of the British Guiana League of Coloured People I am instructed by my executive to convey to you our sense of appreciation [2178](#) of Your Excellency's timely action in safeguarding the peace and welfare of this land of ours. As the premier organisation representing peoples of African descent in this community, I am also to reaffirm our unswerving loyalty to Her Majesty the Queen and pledge our unstinted support and co-operation in your efforts to bring normality back to this Colony. I have here also a list, with which I will not trouble the House, of a large number of other bodies who have addressed the Governor in a similar sense.

I would remind the House that the troops were welcomed ashore and, as usual, have created a highly favourable impression. It is very easy to say because everything is quiet that troops were not necessary. It is equally easy to say that we ought to have known that in considering suspending the Constitution there was danger of disorder. If there had been disorder and lives had been lost, the Opposition would have asked why troops were not sent.

I am afraid that I have detained the House overlong, but this is a highly important subject. I want to pay a tribute to the Governor, and I believe that the tribute will find assent in every part of the House. He was appointed Governor of British Guiana largely on his record in Barbados. His devoted work for the welfare of the peoples of that island earned him their respect and affection. He succeeded in bringing about there a great improvement in racial relations. He is a man, as I think every hon. Member knows, of wide liberal and humane convictions.

It is greatly to his credit that during the tumultuous five months which have elapsed since the Constitution came into force he has exercised the greatest patience, forbearance and tact. When Ministers took office, the Governor and his officials were careful to explain the working of the administrative machinery in every detail and the code of conduct expected of Ministers. I would also say with great seriousness that in British Guiana the Governor has spared no effort to bring Ministers to a sense of responsibility and the Constitution to fruitful vigour, and it is no fault of his that these efforts have failed.

It would have been wrong to provoke an acute constitutional crisis over the first act of the new Government. That, I think, answers the question put to me [2179](#) as to why the reserve powers were not used at the beginning. The portents were alarming and events showed that Ministers had at least begun their office by taking action which had no precedent in any other Colonial Territory.

I would conclude by saying what is quite obvious—that the suspension of the Constitution is by no means the end of the story. We have now to turn to the constructive task, and I think that it is clear—and I hope that the House will follow me in this—that there will have to be a period of direct rule by officials with some body representing Guianese opinion upon whose advice the Governor may rely, but upon whose advice he will not be bound to act in the interim period.

I think that that interim period must continue until we have the report of the Commission, which we shall send out as soon as we can collect the Members. As the Governor said in his broadcast, he proposes to introduce as soon as possible the economic measures which should and could have been introduced by the elected Ministers. There are also proposals in the International Bank

report which will be put into force as soon as possible. I can assure the House that all these matters will now be pushed on much quicker than otherwise would have been possible. But, of course, that period of interim direct rule has to be succeeded by yet another, and in framing that part of our proposals we must rely on the report of the Commission.

It is undeniable that this is a setback, but our purposes in all these matters are sincere. We must steadily, and with patience, seek to build up a political system in British Guiana which will give the inhabitants a chance of developing democratic institutions. Here in British Guiana there was a spark of danger which we have extinguished. It is a setback which affects the lives and the future of 450,000 of Her Majesty's subjects. But we must not lose our sense of proportion, and I ask hon. Members to remember that no Colonial Power is pursuing as progressive a policy as we are.

Let us remember that in other West Indian Colonies democratic government is becoming more firmly established and is looking to still wider horizons. None of the millions in the Colonial Territories [2180](#) need have any fear that the setback in British Guiana will lead us to reverse our policy. Nor need the people of British Guiana have any fear that we shall do other than push ahead as fast as we can on the road which other Colonies are successfully following.

[§ Mr. David Logan](#) (Liverpool, Scotland Division)

Before the right hon. Gentleman sits down, may I put one point to him? We are dealing with a great responsibility today. Is the Minister definitely satisfied as a responsible Minister that the infiltration of the Communist Party there made constitutional government impossible, and would the Government have suspended the Constitution if there had not been that infiltration?

[§ Mr. Lyttelton](#)

Yes, Sir, I am. On broad lines I agree with the hon. Member. The infiltration was, of course, one of the principal reasons—the effect of that infiltration which spread to the whole of the Government.

[§ Mr. Logan](#)

That is the reason why the Government interfered?

[§](#) 4.58 p.m.

[§ Mr. James Griffiths](#) (Llanelly)

The Secretary of State for the Colonies opened this debate by saying that we are discussing today a matter of grave importance to this House, to the people of British Guiana and to the millions of people for whom we are responsible in all the British Colonies. I shall try to speak with the restraint and, at the same time, with the candour which I think the situation justifies.

It was my privilege when I was Secretary of State for the Colonies to take the first steps which culminated in the bringing into operation of the new Constitution in British Guiana in April of this year. It marked an important stage in the progressive development of British Guiana towards responsible democratic self-government. I want to begin by addressing through this House, if I may, some words to the leaders of the People's Progressive Party and the people of British Guiana.

This new Constitution provided their chosen political leaders with new opportunities to serve their people and to assist their people to the amelioration of their living conditions. It was not—if I may [2181](#) use the phrase—as liberal a constitution or as far advanced as many of them would have liked then or as many of them would like now, but it established the basis of a future democratic state. It brought adult suffrage to their people. It established an elected majority in their House of Assembly. It provided that there should be a number of Ministers with executive and administrative responsibilities, and the beginning of a cabinet system.

I had hoped that the responsible leaders, chosen democratically, would have seized this opportunity with both hands. It is my conviction, a conviction borne out not only by my own experience but the experience of others, that the best way to ensure progressive development towards democratic self-government and to eventual independence is to take the opportunity that comes, to use it fully and responsibly, doing all they think is necessary within their competence, ability and resources to ensure the progress of their people.

The People's Progressive Party had a resounding victory in the elections. They won 18 out of 24 seats. They were able to nominate six out of seven Ministers. It was an opportunity. Before I discuss the situation, I should like to say this to them. I am grievously disappointed. I think they missed a great opportunity. I think they misused a great opportunity. I would ask them not merely to take those words of mine but to see what has happened elsewhere, where people in other Colonies, given constitutions broadly and generally of the same kind and character as this, have seized their opportunities and are now well on the way towards their final goal. I, and no doubt all of us, look forward to the day in the not too distant future when we shall be able to claim proudly that we have in this British Commonwealth the first democratic State with a black Prime Minister, a nation independent and a partner in this Commonwealth.

I want to be fair and objective. Disappointed as I am about the way in which they have missed this opportunity, I am not unconscious of their difficulties, and I think it is only fair that I should point that out. It is important for us to realise this. I am not making a party point; I am trying to be fair, but they [2182](#) undertook responsibilities in a British Colony, in British Guiana, which in past years we, as the responsible Government and Parliament, have rather shamefully neglected.

Let me give one example. Yesterday the Colonial Secretary was asked what was the total amount in grants in aid given by this country to British Guiana since the end of the First World War, in 1918. He gave an answer, and I will quote it in round figures because I realise that there is now something to be added to it. In round figures it was 6½ million from 1918 to 1953.

[§ Mr. Ellis Smith \(Stoke-on-Trent, South\)](#)

What have we taken out?

§ Mr. Griffiths

The Colonial Development and Welfare Act began under the Coalition Government and came into operation under the administration of our party. The Colonial Development Corporation was established by us. I am not for the moment claiming credit for the Government of which I was a member, but I make no apology for standing by the record of our Government in this field, nor for the record of successive Colonial Ministers in the Labour Government. It was my privilege to follow two great predecessors in this office, and I claim that I did my best to carry out the plans that they initiated.

Of this £6½ million which we have given since 1918, more than half of it has been given since 1946. So that for the whole of that period up to 1946, all this country gave in grants in aid to that Colony beset with these problems was about £3 million. These are enormous problems. The bulk of the population of British Guiana live on that strip along the coast. It is a bit of Holland in America. The land has had to be reclaimed. They have had to fight hard to wrest a sustenance, to build their townships and to maintain them. I have refreshed my memory, and I have discovered that of the £3 million which we have given in grants since 1946, nearly £2 million has had to be spent on the basic necessity of irrigation and reclaiming land. The consequence is that there is widespread poverty.

To begin with, like many of these Colonies that we developed in the 18th and 19th centuries, their economy was built not to meet their needs but to meet 2183 ours. That is true, and no one can deny it. Every one of them has got an ill-balanced economy. It is true of all the West Indies. They depend upon sugar to a very large extent. Other industries are growing and the pace of growth has been accelerated very much in the last few years. But we all know the history of these territories in the inter-war years. The sugar industry, at best, provides a seasonal occupation. The workers in this industry get a daily wage, and this is an industry in which very few people are able to get work for more than half of the year.

In the inter-war years prices went down. When I hear, as I sometimes do, some people talking nostalgically of what they call the good old days, I remind myself that a part of the good old days that they talk about was bought at the expense of poor people elsewhere.

I ask hon. Members opposite to bear this fact in mind, because this is occasionally a matter of political controversy. For the first time in living memory, because there is now a Commonwealth sugar agreement, with secure markets and guaranteed prices, there has been established a basis for the prospect of future economic development in these Colonies. Without that bulk buying, without those assured markets and guaranteed prices, if we should ever run into a situation such as existed in the '30s, I am sure that we should all shudder at what would happen in these territories.

I say in fairness to these Ministers that they had all these problems of wages, conditions and housing. They were returned to power with great expectations. They probably aroused more expectations than they could fulfil. They were confronted with these problems. Nevertheless, I

say to them: "You missed this great opportunity." I say further to them, as we say in the Amendment: "We condemn your policies, we condemn the methods you employed. We deplore the actions you took and the speeches you made. Beyond everything, speaking for myself, I think you missed a great opportunity of doing real work for your people and of building a foundation for a future democratic State in Guiana."

[2184](#) There is one other thing I want to say to them. I think I ought to say it, and I want to say it. I hope they will bear it in mind. The Colonial Secretary quoted Mr. Manley and Mr. Grantley Adams, two people for whom I have the deepest regard and who have done great service. They share the political views and ideals of Members who sit on this side of the House. They are both restrained men who speak in restrained language, and when they speak as they have done about the leaders of the People's Progressive Party, whatever those leaders may think, or whatever may be their reactions, they will note that these two men, over the last 20 or 30 years, have done so much for their own people in the West Indies, and beyond that, in the Caribbean territories, and they will realise that they have disappointed and shocked those who would be their best friends if they worked this Constitution properly.

There is no need for the Colonial Secretary to talk to us about Communism and its dangers. We, in this party are democrats—social democrats. We are against Communist totalitarianism and against its other forms, too, but not every Member opposite can say, "I am against both forms of totalitarianism." We reaffirm that our colonial policy is to guide the people of the Colonial Territories towards responsible, democratic self-government, and to aid and assist them in establishing conditions and building institutions upon which that self-government can be founded. That is our aim.

We are working towards democracy and not towards a totalitarian government, which we shall not support or countenance. I want to make that clear. That is not the issue here, but it is important to make it clear, for I have lived long enough in politics to remember the time when the party opposite got back to power by Communist scares, which they manufactured, by letters which were supposed to have come from reliable sources.

The issue between us is not whether there was, in British Guiana, a situation which was deplorable, nor whether the People's Progressive Party have behaved responsibly or otherwise. I have made that clear, and I hope I shall not be misunderstood in any part of the House or country. I also speak as a trade unionist, [2185](#) and say that we stand by democratic parties and the democratic trade unions affiliated with the I.C.F.T.U. We support them. They work for the same ends as we do. The issue with regard to the situation in British Guiana is, were the Government right; were they justified in the action they took, the gravest action a Government can take—the extreme step of suspending the Constitution?

I shall try to answer all the questions put by the Colonial Secretary. If by any chance I miss some of them, I shall permit him to intervene so that he can remind me of my responsibilities. I give him the guarantee that I shall give way. At the time when the Government took this action, was the situation in British Guiana of such a character that the only way in which it could be dealt with—let me repeat, the only way it could be dealt with—was by suspending the Constitution?

I wish to put a thesis to the House, and hope that the Government will reply to it. Although the Colonial Secretary may contend otherwise, my view is that it is only when it is the only way to meet the situation that it is justifiable to suspend the Constitution. That is the issue between us, which we have raised in our Amendment. When the decision of the Government was first announced it was accompanied by a statement issued from the Colonial Office, which we read with very great care. It was issued on 9th October. I read it very carefully; I consulted my hon. and right hon. Friends about it, and I said that in my view the evidence provided in the statement of 9th October, judged against the extreme step taken, was inadequate, vague, and did not justify the action taken.

We asked for the publication of a White Paper. We now have the White Paper, and I want to turn to it. I do not propose to refer to every bit of it, but I shall not dodge anything. I shall refer to what I believe to be the main issues. It is to be judged against what is contained in the major charge which was made in paragraph 2 of the statement issued from the Colonial Office on 9th October. It now appears in Appendix B, on page 16 of the White Paper. The Colonial Secretary did not repeat this basic charge in terms, though he made [2186](#) various references to it. This is the charge: From the actions and public statements of these extremists it is clear that their objective was to turn British Guiana into a totalitarian state subordinate to Moscow and a dangerous platform for extending communist influence in the Western hemisphere. I am satisfied from the evidence that has been advanced that some of the leaders of the People's Progressive Party have associations with Communist organisations. I have had the opportunity of meeting these leaders, and I hope that other hon. Members will also do so. It is only fair to say that those leaders deny this charge, but, having heard them deny it I still formed the opinion, from the evidence given, that they are associated with Communist organisations in the industrial and political field. Reading in the White Paper of the policies they pursued, I, too, see in it the kind of actions and policies which have led in other countries to the establishment of a totalitarian Communist State.

At this stage the real issue is whether, when the Constitution was suspended, these actions and policies were of such a character as to justify this action. The charges which run throughout this White Paper are concerned with a number of speeches, many of them in extravagant language and many in revolutionary language. The Colonial Secretary has been in office longer than I was and he will know perfectly well that in all these Colonial Territories it is the fact—as, those hon. Members who are acquainted with the subject know—that in their public speeches and in their Press they all use extravagant language, often when they do not mean it.

I put this consideration as a Welshman. I beg hon. Members to realise that many of these people have learned the English language in quite recent years and that in consequence of that very often they use language to which, as in this White Paper, very often is attributed a meaning that is not intended. I put it no higher than that, though from what I have seen and heard I think it is probable that very often such language is used without any real intent in it. If the Secretary of State were to consider what we may see in the newspapers and in speeches by other leaders in the Colonies, if he were to search the records of the speeches of some of the very fine men he has referred to today, [2187](#) he could beat this White Paper to a frazzle.

Some things have been brought into this White Paper which, quite frankly, I think give the impression of scraping the barrel for evidence. Why, for example, make a tremendous point about the P.P.P. appointing four supporters, three of them teachers, to the Education Committee? I think, in the face of the grave position we have to face, it should not have been done.

I come to the important and grave charges—serious, grave charges, let me admit at once——

[§ Mr. Lyttelton](#)

I do regard the attempted abolition of all denominational control over the schools and the putting in of an entirely new curriculum as a very serious matter indeed.

[§ Mr. Griffiths](#)

The Secretary of State could have said that in the White Paper without dragging in this other matter to which I have referred. I do not want to enter into the educational controversy. Perhaps it would be sufficient for me to tell him that I come from a Nonconformist family, and that my father remembers the Tory Government of 1902.

I turn to the question of the police. The charges here are indeed serious. There is a speech quoted of 3rd May, made by Dr. Jagan, talking about setting up a People's Police, and we know what significance can attach to that in Europe. There is at the same time a statement that he sought to interfere with the police. It is important for this House to realise—very important, because the burden of our case is that this situation could have been dealt with without this extreme step—that the police are not under the control of these elected Ministers. It is outside their control. The Secretary of State agrees, does he not? It is in the Constitution; and within the Constitution the elected Ministers have no authority and no power over the police.

[§ Mr. Lyttelton](#)

The right hon. Gentleman is quite right. The charge in the White Paper is that they used the machinery of Government to attempt to alter that situation and to suborn the police.

[§ Mr. Griffiths](#)

I shall come to that in a moment. What I say first of all is that [2188](#) the police, and all matters of defence, are in the hands of the ex-officio officers responsible to the Governor and to the Secretary of State and not to the People's Progressive Party or the elected Ministers.

This speech was made on 3rd May. These incidents have been spread over some time. Why was not action taken about them at the time? The speech was made on 3rd May—several months ago. So far as I know these speeches were made some time ago. I do not for a single moment condone them. I condemn them. If I do not in specific terms each time, generally I condemn them. Those speeches were made. There is no evidence that they have succeeded or that the Ministers have attempted by a Bill to establish a People's Police. It is a threat, and I condemn the threat; but the fact is that it has remained a threat and only a threat.

Then there is the public service. Of course, I agree entirely—and, indeed, I myself, in the constitutions I brought into operation, made sure—that the civil service in the Colonial Territories before attaining the stage of democratic self-government should be under the control of an independent public service commission. The public service in British Guiana is under the control of the ex-officio Ministers and not under the control of the elected Ministers.

I have no doubt at all that it is their ambition, their desire, to be able to secure control of it. It may be. I have no doubt it is. It may be possible that if they did secure complete control, independent control, they would do this. All I am concerned with at the moment is that it has not happened. It is a threat, and the police still remain under the administration, the authority, of the ex-officio officers, and so do the public services.

Now I come to the serious charges that are made—very serious indeed. The most serious charge of all is that made in paragraph 30 of the White Paper. That is the charge which in terms alleges a conspiracy to set fire to business property and the residences of prominent Europeans. No more serious charge could be made, and if the leaders are guilty of this charge, then they are guilty of one of the gravest charges that could be made against them. There are also charges in [2189](#) paragraphs 20 and 29 about attempts to bring pressure on the Speaker of the House by stampeding the House, by inciting the crowd to rush the House. There is in paragraphs 9 and 28, if the language is to be taken at its face value, and if it is admitted, if it can be proved, and if it was meant, a clear incitement to violence.

These are the gravest charges, and they are not general charges against the People's Progressive Party but specific charges against specific men named in the White Paper. I do not know whether they are true or not. I was, with my colleagues, given an opportunity of meeting Dr. Jagan and one of his colleagues, Mr. Burnham, last night. We put to them many questions on the charges in the White Paper. We put these charges specifically to them. We had their answers, and we had discussions, and we particularly put this charge in paragraph 30, which is the gravest of all. They denied the charges.

They deny the charges. I do not know why the Government have made them. They have named those men. They have made these charges. They have put these charges in a Government White Paper. All I say, therefore, is this. I believe this is important; important to this House, because what the Government do this House does, this country does. I say this. If these are true, if they can be proved to be true, quite frankly they are the gravest possible charges. Here indeed was a beginning of an attempt, a real attempt, to subvert the Constitution and bring it down entirely. They deny it. These charges are denied. My own view is that I do not think that the Government should leave them where they are. They are far too serious for that.

What I, therefore, urge on the Government—and I hope that the Minister will reply to this because I know the difficulties—is—and I put it very strongly to him—that, having made these charges, then in fairness to the men—hostile as I am to their views and disliking as I do the things they do—they ought to be brought to trial and given an opportunity of giving evidence.

I come now to the situation that existed, and I ask, admitting the seriousness and gravity of the situation: was this action justified? I should prefer to reply, [2190](#) before I deal with this, to two

questions which were put to me. The first is this. The Secretary of State asked me whether, if I were Colonial Secretary—and he put it in a personal way—and my right hon. Friends and I were in Government and we were advised from British Guiana by our advisers that it was necessary to have forces there to sustain public order, whether it would not be our duty to act upon it and whether we would do that. May I say that we can do that without suspending the Constitution. That has been done before without suspending a Constitution. We say that if the Government have powers to do so much without taking the extreme step of suspending the Constitution—we have not suspended the Constitution in Kenya or in Malaya—they should use those powers. It would be one of our duties to use those powers, but that could be done within the Constitution, and I would do it.

Secondly, he asked me: would I reinstate the Ministers?

[§ Mr. Lyttelton](#)

I said: would the right hon. Gentleman keep these Ministers?

[§ Mr. Griffiths](#)

I speak as a trade unionist. I have been a trade unionist and I have been a Minister, but I have never been both at once. I would have told them to resign their trade union office at once; one cannot be both.

[§ Mr. Ellis Smith](#)

What about the Freemasons?

[§ Mr. Griffiths](#)

All I can say is that my hon. Friend is speaking about mysteries which are as much mysteries to me as they are to him. The Governor has power under the Constitution to demand their individual resignation. That is true, is it not? If a Minister was not doing his duty I would exercise the right which I had to ask him and to demand of him individually his resignation, which I am entitled to do under the Constitution.

[§ Mr. Lyttelton](#)

The right hon. Gentleman is talking about matters which I mentioned. That is, of course, de facto a suspension of the Constitution.

[§ Mr. Griffiths](#)

Oh, no. I indeed hope that doctrine is not accepted. Although this Government may stay in office for some time, I hope that some of its Ministers may be dismissed. This is not extra-constitutional. This is provided in the Constitution; it is part of it. These are [2191](#) the answers, and I believe that they are considered and fair answers.

Now I come to this situation. We have examined it carefully and we believe that a suspension of the Constitution should be the last and not the first resort. There are ample safeguards in the Constitution. I do not want to go through them, but there are ample safeguards. It is necessary to have them; it is essential to have them. There are safeguards in the passing of legislation. A Bill has to be passed through the Assembly and the Council of State. In the Council of State the appointed members, nominees of the Governor, are a majority. It has to pass through the House of Assembly and also to go to the Council of State. If they reject it, it is submitted to a meeting of both Houses and a joint vote is taken. But when it has gone through the whole of that process, the Governor and the Secretary of State can assent to the Bill and then it becomes law, or they can reject it and reserve it for Her Majesty's pleasure. The final phase rests not in Georgetown but in Whitehall.

In executive action on the part of Executive Council, normally the Governor is bound to accept the advice of the majority.

§ Mr. Lyttelton

I am sorry but I did not pick up one point which the right hon. Gentleman made concerning the dismissal of Ministers. The Governor needs the consent of the Executive Council to receive the resignation of Ministers.

§ Mr. Griffiths

If I may correct that, there is a Clause there which surely indicates that the Governor has the right to demand individual resignations. I have not the reference here, but if I am wrong I will stand correction. In executive action there is that power.

My hon. Friend the Member for Swindon (Mr. T. Reid) asked questions, and perhaps I may be allowed to reply to them. It is quite clear in this Constitution that not only have the Governor and Secretary of State negative powers but also positive powers to carry out executive actions and Bills which are essential to the good government of the colony, notwithstanding that they do not get the consent of the constitutional machinery provided in the Constitution.

2192 I come to this question. The fact is that in these months—let us get this clear—these powers have not been used. The Secretary of State said quite rightly that normally the Governor does not want to use these powers. No Secretary of State and no Governor—and let me say that I know the Governor of British Guiana and I have great regard for him and his fine record—wants to use these powers, but we are not judging whether these powers ought to be used frequently or infrequently. That is not the question at issue. I hope that the Minister will deal with this question.

The question is whether their powers ought to be used before the extreme power of suspension is used. These reserve powers are embodied in the same Constitution. If the Minister says now that he was reluctant or that the Governor was reluctant to use these simpler safeguards how does he justify himself? He is using the same powers from the same Constitution, and we say that, in our

view, the Government were wrong because they should have used these other safeguards and checks and vetoes before resorting to the extreme power of suspending the Constitution.

Let me say this because it is important. Once we suspend the Constitution, what next? If we vote tonight to suspend this Constitution—and I do not put this offensively—let the Minister ask himself this question: has he thought what he is going to put in its place? Have hon. Members opposite considered, when they vote tonight and we take it as a decisive vote and the Constitution is suspended, what is to be the next step?

The Colonial Secretary said that there is to be a Commission to inquire into the matter. Surely consideration might have been given to the sending of a Commission before the suspension; but we have first suspension and then inquiry. It would not have been unprecedented for a Commission to be sent first. Very often a Commission has been appointed to inquire into matters. In this case there is now to be a Commission and it is to be asked to make recommendations to revise the Constitution.

In the context of this announcement, what does "revise the constitution" mean? Does it not mean "revise it backwards"? I merely ask the question. We [2193](#) do not yet know what the terms of reference of the Commission are, but I gathered from some words which fell from the Colonial Secretary that it is intended that the revision shall be backwards and that, having established liberal suffrage, we shall now have some suffrage which is less liberal, having had a majority in the House of Assembly, we are not in future to have a majority, and that having begun ministerial responsibility, we are now to abandon it.

There could be circumstances in which that would be inevitable, but I beg the House to realise that the step of revoking the Constitution, when we think of its future possibilities and consequences, ought not to have been taken until every other step had been exhausted. We must realise that we are doing all this in an age when all over the Colonial Territories there is an upsurge of human feeling. There are nationalist movements. I know they can be exploited, but nevertheless there are such movements. It is clear to us that the P.P.P. was a nationalist movement. In our Amendment we say that we condemn what has been done by some of the leaders of the People's Progressive Party. They are not all Communists; there are others, too, and I feel—I am expressing my own personal view, my own belief and my own philosophy and I express it as a Member of the Labour Party—that the others would become stronger.

But if we have a revised Constitution, we shall be going back. Will that settle the matter? I do not think so. With this nationalist feeling growing, we have to find an outlet for it, a democratic means for it to express itself and to enable it to evolve towards responsible self-government and eventual independence. It is no good our trying to suppress it. History is full of lessons showing that every attempt to suppress a nationalist movement has led in the end to conflict and disaster. Let us seek to harness it and to guide it to democratic expansion. Of course there are risks in doing that, and do not let anybody imagine that there are not, but in these circumstances before this extreme step was taken other steps ought to have been taken within the Constitution.

I now wish to address to the Colonial Secretary a word or two about other [2194](#) steps not of a constitutional character which might have been taken. This matter has been going on for some

months. I know that, because I have served in the Secretary of State's office, and I know that we are well served by our officers both in the Colonies and in the Department. Therefore, the right hon. Gentleman has been kept in touch with it all the time and he has known from week to week what has taken place. Why did he not intervene before? Why did he not invite the leaders to this country and talk to them with the authority of the Secretary of State, if that was necessary? Why did he not come to the House and ask for the support of the House in his going out to speak to them?

I would have gone to speak to them, and so would my hon. Friends, to urge them to take this opportunity in a responsible way; or the Secretary of State could have gone out there, for he knows that that can very often ease tension. He might have failed—I grant that; appeals to reason might have failed—but surely it would have been worth trying before taking this extreme step. That is our case. We say that such steps as that should have been taken before the extreme step was taken.

I now want to say something personally to the Secretary of State. He had a rough passage when making his speech this afternoon. With all respect to him, I believe that he openly invites it. I say this with some diffidence because I claim no undue credit for the period when I was Secretary of State. The office is an interesting, exciting, hard and responsible one, for we are dealing with 70 million people who are growing up. They are adolescents who are politically immature, and how they grow up may very well decide the fate of the world. Beyond everything else, it is my belief—I may be wrong, but I give it as my impression—that everywhere in the Colonial Territories and in the Colonial Office the first thing that we have to do is to get human relations right.

I have come to a conclusion, and I have not come to it easily. What I have now to say to the Secretary of State I say as one who has always tried to avoid engaging in personalities in his political and industrial life, though I do not claim credit for it, because it just happens to [2195](#) be my temperament. In saying what I have to say to the Secretary of State, I speak not only for myself but also for the bulk of my hon. Friends, and also, I believe, for large sections of the population outside my party in the nation. Having looked back at what has happened over the last two years, the conclusion which I have come to is that the country would welcome a change at the Colonial Office.

I beg to move, to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof: whilst emphatically deploring the actions and speeches of some of the leaders of the People's Progressive Party in British Guiana, as set forth in the White Paper, Command Paper No. 8980, and condemning methods tending to the establishment of a totalitarian regime in a British Colony, nevertheless is not satisfied that the situation in British Guiana was of such a character as to justify the extreme step of suspending the constitution.

§ 5.50 p.m.

§ [Sir Walter Fletcher \(Bury and Radcliffe\)](#)

It is 18 months since I addressed this House, and I find myself almost in the difficult position of making a second maiden speech. Possibly, one of these days when change of sex is commonplace there may be some maiden speeches. In any case, I crave the indulgence of the House a little bit in this matter.

We have just listened to a speech from the right hon. Gentleman the Member for Llanelly (Mr. J. Griffiths), which was not a case, as he called it, but a halting apology, and he reminded me very much of the old nursery rhyme: J stands for Jim, Marie's elder brother, Who, saying one thing, Clearly meant the other. Listening to him, one knew perfectly well that what he was saying and what he would have done were worlds apart. In judging the matter of British Guiana we have to go back to find the circumstances out of which this disaster arose.

The chief responsibility for it started in Malaya, when the right hon. Gentleman and his friends were the responsible Government. Week after week I and some of my hon. Friends in this House asked the then Leader of the House, the right hon. Gentleman the Member for [2196](#) Lewisham, South (Mr. H. Morrison), for an opportunity to debate the growing danger of Communism in that country. The Government were well aware that there was a large Communist force there. Week after week we were fobbed off. Constitution-mongering and signing on the dotted line with people of not very much responsibility were deemed to be far more important things than dealing with that Communism which was apparent to every single person who knew anything about the country. I remember tackling the right hon. Gentleman in his room. I was politically very immature, for he showed me to his own satisfaction and to my stupidity that he really had not intended that there ever should be a debate on this matter.

What happened? We all know it was touch and go there. The Communists attempted to seize power in Malaya because of the nervelessness and the unwillingness to think in terms of reality on the part of the right hon. Gentleman the Member for Lewisham, South and his friends. The cost in lives and in economic strain is more than we care to contemplate, and even today it is not at an end.

That was the beginning of the pattern. That was the setting in motion of the idea in the minds of a great many people that it would be safe to take disruptive action without there being immediate and swift retribution. It was repeated in the nerveless inactivity of the right hon. Gentleman when he was at the Foreign Office and was dealing with Persia. Throughout the world these people, in whose minds nationalism has awakened—and I agree about that—are watching carefully for that hair-line of difference between allowing progress and taking into account immaturity on the one side, and, on the other, seeing that the will to govern exists in this country which will not hesitate, when a case has been clearly made, to put into operation the unpalatable but necessary acts that have to be taken in certain circumstances.

The responsibility belongs to hon. and right hon. Gentlemen opposite. It is their pattern which was set, and no amount of tight-rope walking such as we saw this afternoon will alter that one single bit. The party opposite introduced the National Health Service and they take [2197](#) great kudos for it. The right hon. Gentleman the Member for Ebbw Vale (Mr. Bevan) takes most of the limelight for that. But what is the essence of the scheme? It is preventive medicine, taking a

malady in time after a diagnosis has been made, and not waiting until it is too late and the necessary operation is unsuccessful.

§ *Dr. H. Morgan (Warrington)*

Sheer nonsense. The hon. Gentleman does not know what he is talking about.

§ *Sir W. Fletcher*

The diagnosis in this particular case is in the White Paper. What more do hon. Gentlemen opposite want? Do they always want to wait until the appendix is perforated, until the body is full of the poison that they failed to extract when they could have done so? Do they always want to wait? Is preventive medicine not to be on the export list? Should it not be applied here when there is an absolutely clear diagnosis of the trouble, with chapter and verse for what is happening? Must we always wait for the corpses? Must we always wait for the villages in flames?

§ *Mr. John Paton (Norwich, North)*

Give them a whiff of grapeshot.

§ *Sir W. Fletcher*

Before we take any action, must we always wait until it is too late to apply the cure? I was astonished, in listening to the right hon. Gentleman the Member for Llanelli, at the extent to which he failed to grasp the seriousness of this problem. He talked about the human side of it. I have lived a good many years of my life in the Colonial Territories and may possibly have a right to speak about the human side of the peoples there. In the right hon. Gentleman's speech there was not one word that showed any realisation of the human side. It was all thinking in terms of the ballot box and of democratic institutions.

What are the terms that really matter? It is whether the inhabitants of a village in any part of the Colonial Empire feel safe at any time to go about their daily business without the fear of molestation and without the terror that marches by day and by night. Go out to Malaya or to Kenya and it will be seen how the terror still stalks. In spite of the enormous efforts that have been made, we have not yet been able to stamp it out. Those are [2198](#) the real terms in which we should be thinking.

By all means let us make—and I subscribe to what my right hon. Friend the Colonial Secretary said—orderly progress in democratic government in those countries, but it must not be at the cost of human lives and of the means by which the average man and woman earns a livelihood in those territories. We have heard hardly one word of that human understanding, in spite of the magnificent demagoguery with which the case was presented. I think we should think a little bit more in those terms.

Great play was made about lack of economic advancement, but there has been throughout the world a demand for economic advance which the world's total equipment has been inadequate to meet. We are only beginning to catch up. That is important, but it is less important than that peace and order and the ability to cultivate the small garden round the hut should be maintained. I suggest to the gentlemen who have come over here—and I am very glad that they have come; they will be a lively titbit for television—that they go to Hyde Park on Sunday and compete with the professionals there and have 200 questions, and not 20, asked. I hope they will go home realising that any soft pleading that always comes from the Communist camp will not have much effect on the people of this country, who in their heart of hearts are more interested to see economic progress and political progress going forward evenly, but both step by step with the safety of the individual in the Colonies. It is an inescapable duty of any Government—this Government have not attempted for one second to escape from it—that this must be the first question; and though some of the methods which have had to be adopted, such as the cruiser and the troops, are unpalatable in these days, they are, in the last resort, far better than what we have seen.

How easy is it for the right hon. Gentleman and his friends to say, "It was not too late." The right hon. Gentleman asked hon. Members to ask themselves certain questions. I will ask him whether he should not have added to his impressive list one other thing, and have asked it of himself. Is he absolutely certain in his heart of hearts, deep down in his [2199](#) conscience, that it was not absolutely the right thing to do, on the evidence, to take the drastic step of suspending the Constitution, of sending the protective forces and of carrying out the primary duty of any Government to peoples who are immature and who have always looked to a more mature but very democratic country to govern them?

§ 6.2 p.m.

[§ Mr. John Hynd \(Sheffield, Attercliffe\)](#)

I am sure the whole House will join me in welcoming back the hon. Member for Bury and Radcliffe (Sir W. Fletcher), who has just made what I am afraid was a rather typical contribution, but one which was not up to the standard that he had set previously.

In this debate we are discussing an extremely grave step, but, whilst the hon. Gentleman wandered from Malaya to the [National Health Service Act](#), he said very little about the facts of the situation in Guiana. He referred to the purposes of the National Health Service and I wondered when he was coming to the subject of this debate. However, he used that as an illustration of the need for applying preventive medicine rather than dealing with the disease when it was too late. There has, however, been progress in conceptions of medicine and, in addition to the fact that there are alternative methods of treating various diseases than the knife, there are also alternative diseases. It is as well first to diagnose the disease in order to find out precisely what has happened, and then to decide how best to treat it. That is what we on this side are proposing to do.

I do not for a moment ignore the quandary in which any democratic country responsible for Colonial Territories must inevitably find itself from time to time when it seeks to extend self-

government to these territories. We had the same kind of problem when, after the war, we had Germany on her knees. There were people in this country who even talked in terms of keeping Germany permanently on her knees, if not on her back. Many others—the majority I am glad to say—took the opposite view and said that inevitably Germany would find her place in the world and that we had better assist her to find that place in a democratic [2200](#) way, whilst recognising all the risks and dangers.

The same kind of problem arises in Colonial Territories. We do not try to avoid that conclusion but, nevertheless, we have to deal with each situation as it arises. Our point has been made dramatically today by my right hon. Friend the Member for Llanelly (Mr. J. Griffiths). I am certain that anyone who had the privilege of listening to the first two speeches in this debate were struck forcibly by the tragedy of the fact that we have in charge of our Colonial Affairs the right hon. Gentleman opposite and not my right hon. Friend.

That became clear before this debate because in one national newspaper recently an attempt was made to defend the Colonial Secretary in his action. That newspaper went so far as to try to prevent an obvious comparison being made in this House. It invoked the old story about the famous American statesman who was charged with having been the first bull to carry his own china shop about with him and hoped that this would not be thrown across the Floor at the Colonial Secretary during this debate. The fact that the comparison struck them immediately was, however, significant.

What is happening in Guiana? As my right hon. Friend pointed out, there have apparently been certain speeches and even acts on the part of representatives of the P.P.P. Government which were highly reprehensible; which, indeed, in many cases, could be regarded as dangerous utterances or even threatening acts. We accept that and we deplore it, but our point is that in the Constitution, which was established only five or six months ago, safeguards were laid down to deal precisely with that kind of problem. It was the kind of protection which is necessarily and rightly provided in the first stages of the development of self-government in Colonial Territories. We provide either an official majority or a nominated majority or alternatively a second chamber with the right of vetoing the popular assembly decisions, and for a governor also with the right of veto, ultimately referring back to the British Government at Whitehall. These safeguards are recognised as necessary in the early stages of the development of self-government and they exist in this case.

[2201](#) My right hon. Friend has drawn the attention of the House and of the Colonial Secretary—who seemed to hear it for the first time—to the fact that this Constitution provided that the Governor himself had the right, if necessary, to dismiss Ministers, to dismiss Parliament and to call for fresh elections. That was not done and it is because these things have not been done, and because the British Government have taken the responsibility of applying this ultimate force to try to solve a situation which many of us do not believe is as serious as the White Paper tries to set out, that I charge the present Tory Government here with sending troops to British Guiana, not in accordance with the Constitution and for the purpose of preventing a breach of it, but precisely to supervise the destruction of that Constitution.

That was why the troops were sent. The Constitution has been suspended. The Colonial Secretary has told us today that it is not his intention that the Constitution should be restored. So this means a complete abrogation of it and the troops have been sent, not to quell riots and commotions that were going on in the territory, but to prevent the riots and commotions which they anticipated might follow the act of destroying the Constitution. Therefore, I say that the action of sending the troops in these circumstances is itself unconstitutional and illegal.

What has happened in Guiana? We all know that in 1951 a Commission was set up. That Commission reported and the present Constitution was adopted by this Conservative Government. The People's Progressive Party achieved a great victory in the subsequent election and certain of their leaders were responsible for some of these rather extravagant and stupid and irresponsible statements. But the Colonial Secretary has told us this afternoon that, in fact, the P.P.P. is rapidly losing the support of the people. There is fairly clear evidence of that in many quarters, and the right hon. Gentleman himself produced some. For instance, he quoted the Coloured People's Association and various other organisations, as well as Labour leaders in neighbouring territories, and the "loud jubilation" with which the troops were received, as evidence that the P.P.P., in spite of its election victory, no longer has the support of the people.

[2202](#) The People's Progressive Party Government has not refused to call for elections in accordance with the Constitution when the time is due, and, indeed, if the situation demands it, and, as has been pointed out this afternoon, the Governor himself could have called for an election. If it is true, as the Colonial Secretary said, that there is now no substantial support for the Progressive People's Party in the country, then the solution of the problem was clear: it could have been dealt with by the constitutional method of election, when the Progressive People's Party would presumably have been dismissed by the people themselves. So what is all the fuss about? Why did we have to suspend the Constitution and send out the troops?

[§ Dr. Morgan](#)

Because the presumption was false.

[§ Mr. Hynd](#)

My hon. Friend says, the presumption was false. I have grave suspicions on the White Paper myself. I do not propose to go over the whole of its contents but merely to summarise some of the points.

It is alleged, as evidence that there was a Communist plot to overthrow the Constitution, that Communists were allowed into British Guiana. Are the British Government guilty of a Communist plot because Communists are allowed into this country. It is alleged that undesirable publications were allowed. At least, a Bill was introduced for this purpose, but that Bill was not passed. Even if it had been passed, would that have been something unconstitutional? We admit undesirable publications ourselves, and do we not protest against the burning of books in totalitarian countries? So what is monstrous about that?

Similarly with the charge of setting up rival trade unions. It is a strange thing when the Tory Party start talking about plans to set up rival trade unions against the established unions as being unconstitutional! Then, it was said that the church influence in schools was threatened. I do not know the situation in British Guiana, but there is an old controversial issue in all democratic countries on the extent to which church influence is a good thing in schools. But there is no evidence that anything particular was done about it.

[2203](#) I should have liked to have heard a debate in the Guianese Parliament and to have judged any action that might have been taken on the facts of the situation, but nothing was done. Similarly, in regard to the Labour Relations Ordinance, I see nothing particularly monstrous in introducing a Bill to suggest, in accordance with good democratic practice in America and elsewhere, that trade unions which could claim 52 per cent. of the workers in an industry or a plant should be recognised by the owners of that industry or plant. It is only a little while ago that the Members on the other side of the House demanded that the Labour Government should enforce the recognition of an organisation which had a very small minority of the people in the Post Office.

That Bill was introduced but it did not, at first, get anywhere, because although there was this alleged Communist threat of revolution and attempt to overthrow the Constitution, the Speaker said that it could not be pushed through in one day, and the Speaker won. What is unconstitutional about that? And after several days' debate, the White Paper tells us, the Bill was passed.

There have been strikes. They have been incited, it is said, by the members of the P.P.P. But the 1951 and 1952 strikes failed. They failed to break the established trade unions. They failed to get the support of the people. The 1953 strike failed, and the Minister of Health himself—this Communist Minister—took the step of calling on the sugar workers to return to work. What is unconstitutional about that? Of course, they were wrong as Ministers in encouraging strike action. They were wrong as Ministers in holding positions in trade unions which were engaged in industrial disputes of that kind while they were Ministers. That was unfortunate and reprehensible, but it was not sufficient to justify sending out gunboats and troops and suspending the Constitution.

Let us have more of the evidence of the White Paper. Many of the wild speeches were made either before or during the elections, and not by Ministers after the elections; I hope hon. Members have noted that. The famous "bullet" speech—like "Fingers on [2204](#) triggers," for example—was one of the wild kind of statements that are made during elections. I have heard the Prime Minister himself say that we all make extravagant statements in speeches during elections. But this was done on 3rd May, before the Government were elected, as the strikes of 1951 and 1952 were before these people were in government.

The statement about the "People's Police" was made on 3rd May, before or during the elections. Again, as my right hon. Friend pointed out, since the elections they have done nothing about it. If this kind of evidence is to be trotted out for the purpose of destroying a democratic Constitution, may we now expect that the Government will send troops to destroy the Gold Coast Constitution, because I remember clearly that Mr. Nkrumah and others were making speeches of this kind

before the election, but, like the Progressive People's Party in Guiana, they have done nothing about it since they became the Government.

Dr. Jagan has attended a number of W.F.T.U. conferences. Quite a lot of responsible trade union leaders in this country have also attended those conferences. The W.F.T.U. was set up at the instigation mainly of the trade unions of this country after the war. It was our effort to restore the international organisation of trade unions, and we fought within that organisation to prevent the Communists from getting control. Only when it became crystal clear to us that the Communists were using the organisation in the wrong way did many of the unions leave it and form the International Federation of Free Trade Unions. Probably the Guianese have not been quite so clever or smart. Possibly even they are parties to the Communist plot in the W.F.T.U., but all these meetings that Jagan attended were in 1951.

We have the monstrous suggestion that in some respect a P.P.P. Government in British Guiana is responsible for the fact that M. Saillant, a Frenchman, made a certain speech at a W.F.T.U. meeting where one of the leaders of the P.P.P. happened to be present. That is absolute nonsense. To bring that forward as a substantial reason why we should take an unprecedented step of this kind is an insult to public opinion in this country, and particularly to the House.

[2205](#) Reference has been made to the ambitions of the P.P.P. Government in regard to powers for appointment to the Civil Service. All that the White Paper says is that they made the argument We would like to have power to appoint our own people ... Why should they not like to have that power? They did not get it, and they did nothing about it. This also happens in democratic countries. There is a certain amount of political patronage in the U.S.A., Western Germany, France and a large number of other democratic countries.

The Minister rightly said that we in this country have a proud history and record of an impartial Civil Service. To the extent that that is true, it is something that is not found in many parts of the world. Never mind about British Guiana or colonial countries, but in countries with long democratic history that has not yet been achieved. So do not let us be too hard or harsh in judging people like the British Guianese, who are beginning their experiment in democracy and say that they would like to have such powers as there are in America and other countries but have not done anything about it. The same Guianese Minister pressed the Governor to transfer powers for appointment to public boards; and again, nothing was done about it. What is wrong with that?

I want to deal shortly with the economic aspect. I am glad that my right hon. Friend has gone very fully into the basic economic questions, because, amongst the Secretary of State's other failings in the handling of the colonial situation, he has not been particularly forthcoming in regard to economic developments. One of the first things that he did when going into office was to circularise the members of his own Colonial Economic and Development Council—the advisory body for these very purposes of development—telling them that their services were no longer required; and they have never met as a body since the present Government took office.

What are the alleged economic consequences of this Government? The economic facts as shown in the White Paper are, first, that savings bank deposits have fallen. I do not quite understand the

figures, because the White Paper says [2206](#) that from 19th to 31st August the net withdrawals were 323,341 dollars and that from 16th to 30th September they were 373,925 dollars. That makes a 50,000 dollars difference. Perhaps the Minister will explain the significance of this, because it is not clear in the White Paper.

But that is not an unfamiliar kind of argument. When financial interests find that a Government has been elected which they do not like, it has not been unknown, in this country or during the Popular Front days in France, for financial pressure to be put upon the Government to prevent it from getting on with its policy constructively. We remember very clearly the 1931 Election in this country and the Popular Front elections in France.

Then, in paragraph 24 on page 8 of the White Paper, we find that certain American and Canadian financial concerns have withheld certain investments that they intended to put into the Colony. But why did they withhold them? Most of them are exploration rights and not development rights. It does not say why they were withheld, but I should not be surprised if American financiers were not anxious to invest in a Colony where a new progressive Government of any colour, Communist or otherwise, were setting out on new political or economic lines. Again, I need not recall that deliberate capitalist sabotage of any kind of progressive Government is not unknown here. We all know of the call to the steel barons in this country—I need not go further.

In short, much of this White Paper smells of the usual political boycott by big capital against this party. It smells of the Tory practice in this country, the establishment of rival unions and talk of destroying the economy. We have had that thrown at us in this country, not only when the Labour Party were in power but since, and hon. Members opposite have gone abroad to America and spoken of how our nationalisation schemes were destroying the British economy, although yesterday the Minister of Transport was telling us about the wonderful record of the British Transport Commission in 1952 and the great success of the railways under nationalisation. All this talk about attempts to destroy [2207](#) the economy and of not properly facing economic responsibility as a Government is not very unfamiliar to us.

Much of the rest of the White Paper concerns harmless, if reprehensible, statements by representatives of the P.P.P. Government. Our main point remains that the Constitution remained intact and the safeguards provided in the Constitution were there, but were not used. Indeed, the situation had not arisen in which it appeared necessary for them to be used. If the P.P.P. had forced through any of the Bills which the Government did not like—and they did not—if they had been successful in calling general strikes—which they were not—or if there were sufficient evidence to accuse the leaders of industrial sabotage, destruction or arson or any other crime, there were safeguards that could be applied. But even those circumstances had not arisen to make it necessary for those safeguards to be applied.

We have very much in mind the fact that all this is being done under the present Tory Government, and under the present Colonial Secretary, who was responsible for forcing through Central African Federation against the popular opinion of this country. In Central Africa, particularly in Nyasaland, that is creating opposition to the British. This is being done under a Government whose Prime Minister told us only a few years ago that if a Tory Government had been elected in 1945 we would never have quit India. Apparently he was unaware of the fact that

if we had not given India her freedom as we did, we might not have had India acting as one of the great contributors to world peace at Panmunjom and elsewhere, but India might have been an infinitely greater Indo-China, which would have led to Britain being bled to death as a result of Tory policy in that country. Those are the things the Tory Government have stood for. That is why we are more afraid than ever that situations like that in Central Africa and in Guiana are arising, and that the Government are going back to their old Tory methods.

The White Paper superficially sounds very sinister. So did the Zinoviev letter, so did the Post Office Savings Bank scare and also the charges in 1945 about the Labour Party intending to set up a [2208](#) Gestapo. The charges against Harold Laski sound very familiar when one reads this White Paper. We know very well about capitalist boycotts of a progressive government and all that kind of thing. That makes us hesitant to accept some of the allegations in this White Paper. We are perturbed about some of the difficulties but we consider that this Government are acting in a panicky way which can bring very serious consequences to this country.

As my right hon. Friend asked, where do we go from here? If we send out a Commission, if that Commission reports and a new Constitution is set up, what can it provide? It can either provide for a continuation of parliamentary government by popular election or destroy parliamentary government by popular election. If there is parliamentary government by popular election, we will have the same situation with which we started and possibly with P.P.P. in power or else the Constitution will presumably exclude the P.P.P. and any other party not acceptable to our Tory Government. Is that to be the conception of development towards self-government? I believe that on the statement made by the Colonial Secretary today, even more than on the White Paper and some of the protests made in the progressive Press of this country, the Government are condemned on their colonial policy, and that the country will be behind the Labour Party in this House today in voting for the Amendment. I hope that some hon. Members opposite will have the courage to support the Amendment.

§ 6.25 p.m.

§ [Mr. Roland Robinson \(Blackpool, South\)](#)

I am very glad to have the opportunity of addressing the House on this important subject. I am especially grateful for the reason that for 19 years I have had a very practical interest in the Colony of British Guiana. My interest came, not as a politician, but from paying my first visit there in 1934, when I became interested in the possibilities of developing the interior of the Colony. I tried to follow that up in a practical way, and as a result I now have an interest as chairman of the British Guiana Consolidated Goldfields. I think I should tell the House quite frankly that we have never made much out of it, and from time [2209](#) to time the Company has not paid a dividend, but I feel a pride of the achievement when I look at two settlements there with hundreds of people in them earning their daily bread.

§ [Mr. Hale](#)

I am sure the hon. Member does not wish to be ungenerous but wishes to assure the House that the company borrowed £205,000 from the Colonial Development Corporation some years ago, and that otherwise the company might not have survived?

§ Mr. Robinson

The hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Hale) should remember that at that time the Colonial Development Corporation had been formed by his own Government and it was the policy of his Government at the time to come into partnership with private enterprise because they believed in the development of the interior of British Guiana. I feel there can be no criticism of this Government for what happened at that time. That venture has been successful and we have had a very happy partnership. I ask the hon. Member to believe that I have a very sincere interest in the Colony and a firm wish to secure the good will of the whole of its people. I hope I shall be able to approach the situation from the practical point of view.

There are people who believe that British Guiana has a tremendous future. Guiana was the El Dorado of Sir Walter Raleigh. From practical experience, I would say that was putting it too high. However, there are possibilities of development there, especially in the interior. If we open it up and secure communications, there are in that country the means of securing a fair and good livelihood for the people who live there.

I like the people there; they are of mixed race. I suppose the first who were there were Amerindians, but since then there has been a successive influx of Dutch, British, a few Germans, Portuguese, and Africans who came there as slaves and were afterwards liberated. Following them, there were Chinese and East Indians. Somehow or other that vast variety of people have mixed and have got on well, and it has become a Colony in which there has been less racial discrimination than in almost any other Colony in the British Commonwealth.

I think that is a very good thing and I think it a tragedy that some members [2210](#) of the P.P.P. have sought to introduce into a reasonably happy atmosphere the pernicious theories of racial hatred. From what I have seen, the view of people interested in industry there generally is to give the best man the job, it does not matter whether he is white or black. I believe that generally it is in the interests of industry there to employ and encourage the Guianese and bring them along as fast as possible, because it never pays to bring people out from this country to fill jobs when there are men on the spot who can do the job well.

I say also that these are a friendly people. I remember one night, after the day's work, I was sitting with some coloured people and a visitor came in. He said he looked forward to the time when he could go home again. Another man said to him, "What part of Africa are you going to?" The visitor replied, "I am going to England. I regard that as home, because there of all places I have been better treated than in any other country in the world." When you have that feeling, I think any attempt to introduce racial discrimination should be stamped on as quickly as possible.

I do not believe that it comes from within British Guiana at all. I was interested to see in the Press that when the troops came, and indeed on a previous occasion, people paraded through the streets of Georgetown bearing placards stating, "Go home, Limey." In all the time I have been in

British Guiana I have never heard the term "Limey" used once. I have checked with many other people and they say the same thing. "Limey" is a term used very often against us by Americans. It seems to me that there is the leadership and the influence of the American Communist woman, Mrs. Jagan, who is trying to tell somebody else to go home—[Interruption]—I think that is quite fair, and, after all, if the "Limeys" are to go home surely the Americans should go home too. If this American did go home, the position in British Guiana would probably be much more peaceful.

I say that the people are growing. I am firmly convinced that they need a great deal of help. We have given them constitutional advance. I believe most firmly in constitutional advance and I have supported it in this House, but I [2211](#) say that constitutional advance should go hand in hand with social and economic development. I feel that when colonial people cry out, as they have done, for the right to earn their daily bread, it is not sufficient to feed them with a constitution. They want the right to live decently and to live well.

[§ Mr. Percy Wells \(Faversham\)](#)

And decent wages.

[§ Mr. Robinson](#)

Yes, and decent wages. I have always supported a policy of high wages negotiated through recognised trade unions. I believe that the opportunity of raising the standard of living has been steadily declining during the past five or six months under the administration of P.P.P. I believe in the people. I believe, too, that the leadership of that party is in very bad hands indeed. One must ask, that being so, why should they win? Well, the Constitution was new and until now there have been no political parties at all in British Guiana. Elections have been fought by groups of independents. But the Communists saw the opportunity coming. To my mind, there is no doubt that for the last four years they have worked steadily and conscientiously to exploit every grievance, real or imaginary, in order to get the support of the people, many of whom were quite illiterate.

On the other hand, there has been no united opposition in the Colony. The rest of the people have not organised themselves politically and there were practically as many candidates as parties. Therefore, it was so much easier for the united front, Communist-dominated, to go ahead there as they have done in other parts of the world among other people who believe in freedom. And so they won by making wild and extravagant promises and exploiting every grievance.

Having got in by a big majority, we have to ask ourselves why they have not achieved a greater success. Is it merely because the Government is a completely incompetent one? Is it incompetence which leaves a Minister with his work untouched for five months while he is doing other things? I cannot believe it is. I have heard many accusations against Ministers made in this House, but I have never heard anyone suggest that a Minister from either side of the [2212](#) House has completely neglected his work for five months. Are we to believe they are completely incompetent? I think the answer is "No," because the way they have formulated their campaign over the last four years has shown a great deal of administrative ability.

I say that in the last five months they have not used that ability. I believe that, their leaders being Communist, they have deliberately sought to run agriculture and industry into the ground so as to create conditions of unemployment, unrest and chaos which would allow them eventually to take over. It has been quite clear that Ministers have not been doing every-day administrative work, but have been out organising strikes. From time to time I have heard of the difficulties people have experienced in trying to see Ministers and to get on with the job.

If we feel there is a possibility of a Communist plot, I think we have to look very carefully at the possibility of sabotage. The right hon. Gentleman the Member for Llanelly (Mr. J. Griffiths) addressed himself to that point. It is quite clear that in Georgetown, and indeed in most of the country, a fire hazard would be a very real danger. It is a place of wooden houses, and once a fire gets alight it is a most difficult thing to put it out. Only a few years ago there was a fire in Georgetown which virtually destroyed the business centre of the community, and it has taken some years to rebuild it. If a fire takes hold, it is so easily fanned by the steady north-east trade winds which come regularly.

So we are right, when we see all sorts of people beginning to buy petrol—and it is known they have no motor-cars or any legitimate reason to use petrol—to wonder what will happen. I think it right that inquiries should be made. The right hon. Gentleman the Member for Llanelly, when he spoke to Dr. Jagan last night, said, "Did you plan to set fire to Georgetown?" Human nature being what it is, did he expect that Dr. Jagan, would say, "Yes, I did"? Of course he did not, he could not have done, and I do not think that the question had any real value.

[§ Mr. J. Griffiths](#)

Having put the question to Dr. Jagan, and having heard his [2213](#) reply, I thought it only right in courtesy and fairness to say that the question was put and what the reply was. That is all.

[§ Mr. Robinson](#)

I agree. I was not criticising the right hon. Gentleman for putting the question, but I was saying it was virtually impossible that Dr. Jagan would reply, "Yes." It is a well-known fact that Dr. Jagan has Communist affiliations, but, time and again, when the matter has been put publicly to Dr. Jagan, he has denied it.

[§ Dr. Morgan](#)

What proof is there of his Communist affiliations?

[§ Mr. Robinson](#)

The hon. Gentleman has only to read the White Paper. The details are set out——

[§ Dr. Morgan](#)

I have read the White Paper. I have it in my hand now.

§ Mr. Robinson

It is true that it cannot——

§ Mr. Hugh Fraser (Stafford and Stone)

The hon. Gentleman does not understand it.

§ Dr. Morgan

I am being the fool and the hon. Gentleman the stupid wise man. He should read the White Paper rightly.

§ Mr. Robinson

I also say we should be careful about the question of sabotage, because there is the important matter of the sea wall. The whole of the coastal area of British Guiana is devoted to sugar, rice and agriculture generally. It is in places below the sea level and there is a very high water table. If the wall were not carefully looked after, one man could make a breach in the sea wall and let in the salt water and destroy the plantations to such an extent that thousands of people could be out of work for a great many years. In my opinion, it is therefore the duty of the Governor and the Secretary of State, in the interests of the people of the Colony, to see, if there is this danger, that their fields are not salted and their homes ruined.

It is true that there has been no proved attempt to set fire to a large area—there have been a few fires on the sugar estates—but in matters like this, when the danger is so keen, we must look not merely for attempt. We must get there first when we see intent. There is a difference between intent and attempt. Once the Government feel that there is an [2214](#) intent it is their duty to move. They must forestall attempt. In this case the action was prompt and resolute. If it had not been taken and troubles had occurred, it would have been the duty of the House to condemn the Secretary of State for the Colonies.

Communist affiliations have been well dealt with. When we see the accredited representatives of the party going backwards and forwards through the Iron Curtain, we are entitled to draw some kind of conclusion. We have seen examples of how the lights have gone out in Eastern Europe, the most recent being that of Czechoslovakia where people of good will said, "We can work together with these Communists," and that finished with a great statesman Masaryk going out of the window, either because he fell or because he was pushed.

On these matters let us look the facts squarely in the face, let us be firm in our judgment and let us act strongly and resolutely. One of the most astonishing features was the effort of a Minister to bring the crowds into the Assembly Chamber in an attempt to achieve by mob rule what he wanted. What would hon. Members opposite say if our Secretary of State were to bring a howling mob of people here to try to force his will on the House? Hon. Gentlemen would say, "Here is the end of democracy."

I appeal to hon. Gentlemen opposite. They are firm believers in the trade union movement. I have seen the movement grow in British Guiana. When I first went there they were few and far between, but they have developed. In the Colony there are now good trade unions. All the officials are coloured men of first-class ability who are keen negotiators who know how to do their job. Those unions have been fostered from this side. They are good, properly organised democratic unions; they are not employers' unions.

Let us consider where they came from. The last Labour Government sent out to British Guiana a Commissioner for Labour part of whose job it was to foster the development of the trade union movement. He did his job, and now there are trade unions throughout the Colony which are doing well. I met the Commissioner out there and he asked me if I would give his best wishes to his friends [2215](#) in the House when I came back. I said that I would and asked who were his friends. He replied, "I want you, above all, to give my best wishes to Jimmy Maxton and to Geordie Buchanan." If he comes from that kind of a stable, can it be said that these unions he encouraged are undemocratic? The answer is, "No."

It is the duty of this House to protect the unions, where we can, especially against Communist unions which by undemocratic means are seeking to undermine their authority. I know that many excuses have been made about who is to blame. Perhaps the P.P.P. would say that it is the Governor, the nominated Members or what they call the "sugar barons." Believe me, it is none of these. I have no interest in the sugar industry. Looking at sugar from the point of view of an outsider, I would say that in the last few years tremendous efforts have been made to improve conditions. Before the war prices were low. The war and the years afterwards gave higher prices and a guaranteed market. The industry is getting into a position where it can make progress. Since the war about £5 million has been spent on improving conditions in the industry.

There is no doubt that the industry has put into effect most of the recommendations of the Venn Commission. It has indeed put into effect more of the recommendations which were within its power than the Government have put into operation. There has been some criticism. There was an article in the "New Statesman" on 17th October which was full of statements taken out of their context, creating half-truths and the feeling that the Venn Commission had said exactly what they did not say. I hope that that will have no influence on anybody in this House. I believe that the real causes have been made clear, and I congratulate my right hon. Friend on taking prompt and resolute action in time before the old cry went up, "It is too late."

It seems to me that for a short time from now on we shall have a period of direct rule. If so, I say to the Secretary of State, "Be strong and be just; carry out your policy to its logical conclusion and do not let Communist influences do anything to sabotage the work you are doing; when you are gathering your team around you, bring in as many of the [2216](#) Guianese as you can, because there are some men there of outstanding ability; develop your communications; open up the interior and put British and American capital into the Colony to help; adopt, as you have said you will, the recommendations of the World Bank for development and use their resources wherever possible."

Under direct rule let us adopt a progressive social policy. Let us be more vigorous in improving the housing conditions of the people. Let us continue the development of health measures such as

those which are already stamping out malaria. Let us improve the hospitals. Where necessary to fulfil this policy, let us strengthen the administrative team. Let us do as much as we can to develop technical education in the Colony, to encourage the people to work, to take a pride in their job and to create new wealth. By doing this we shall restore the confidence of the world in British Guiana and give back to the people of the Colony their faith in themselves. In that way lies success.

§ 6.48 p.m.

§ Mr. Thomas Reid (Swindon)

I shall try to be brief because many hon. Members wish to take part in the debate. I shall not attempt to go over a lot of the ground which has been covered by others. Looking back for a few months, we find that we have given a new Constitution of a very liberal kind to British Guiana. Recently the overburdened British taxpayer has given the Colony free gifts of £6,250,000. It was hoped that events would proceed smoothly, but they did not. There has been a big upset which I regret very much.

Perhaps I have had more to do with the radical change in colonial constitutions than most people. In the years before 1931 the Donoughmore Commission came out to Ceylon. Naturally the members of it were ignorant about the country. They came to people who, like myself, had been in administration and politics there for a long time. They asked our advice. Some people had the idea that they would bolster up the old system by which the British had direct rule, tamper with the Legislative Council and perhaps allow a few more members to the elected Legislature.

I opposed all that. I said that the whole idea was out of date [2217](#) and must be thrown overboard. I said, "You must give the people not merely power, as they had when they had the majority in the Council, you must give them power and responsibility." I said that an elected council should be set up. The Commission might have come to that conclusion themselves without my advice. In any case, that was what was done. That was the first non-white Colony which got representative Government, and I venture to think that I was largely the author of it. A considerable proportion of the people were illiterate, but I pointed out that these people were not primitive, but that they had two centuries of civilisation behind them, and that some who could speak only one or two languages, or sometimes three, were very able and competent people, although they could neither read nor write. That franchise was adopted, and, though it might have been adopted without my advice, I venture to think I had something to do with it.

After coming to this House I took an interest in the enormous problems of India and Burma, and I was rash enough strongly to oppose the views put forward by the present Prime Minister in which he was trying to induce his party to hold on to British administration in India. I opposed him, and I backed up the Labour Party's policy to give India, Burma and Ceylon complete independence. I do not look back with regret on any of these things, and I mention them here tonight because I want to show those who do not know anything about my past that I am anything but a constitutional die-hard.

In the case of British Guiana, we are at a very difficult stage. When the Constitution of 1931 was set up in Ceylon, everyone who knew anything about constitutions knew that it would not be permanent. It was a half-way house; it gave the people complete power in internal affairs but kept external affairs and a few other things in the hands of the British. We all knew that it would not last, but it was a training period which gave responsibility to Ministers, and it had a great effect. We saw the result of that when there was a troublesome period in India, where there was practically a rebellion, yet in Ceylon there was never a murmur, and, when the war came, they came in behind us to a man. That is the result of progressive administration.

[2218](#) The half-way house is no solution, and this half-way house which we have tried to set up in British Guiana cannot last. There is no really permanent half-way house between bureaucracy and democracy, and if a person comes to me and says, "Do not give them democracy, but stick to personal rule," I say, "You are logical but I disagree with you," but if a person says that the half-way house will be permanent, then I say that that is impossible. In the case of all these new constitutions recently granted—in the Gold Coast and all the rest—enormous risks are being taken, but the risks that are now taken are as nothing to the risks that would be involved if an advance towards self-government was not the policy of all parties.

Turning to affairs in British Guiana, I know people who have intimate knowledge of British Guiana, and I myself have been connected with the trade union movement for years. I have been for 10 or 15 years a member of the T.U.C. permanent committee that sits on this matter, and I have very considerable knowledge of trade unions in the Colonies. In that committee, my advice has been accepted more than once on the subject of sending out trained trade unionists from this country. I am rather proud that the T.U.C. took my advice on how it could be done.

I am going to talk about what took place in British Guiana from an angle which does not strike hon. Members in this House as a rule. This strange story of what has happened is not only the story of what has happened in the last few months. The party known as P.P.P. was Communist from the word "go," has been working for years to establish itself and has now succeeded. I have not the slightest use for P.P.P. in general or in particular. They are a thorough bad lot, in my opinion, and they have not been working in the interests of the people of British Guiana, but have been and are trying to set up a totalitarian Communist State. Quite apart from the evidence in the White Paper, anyone who knows the history of the Colony and the trade union movement knows that to be true.

Let us examine the position of this extraordinary party. Dr. Jagan was chief Minister, and Mrs. Jagan was Deputy-Speaker. Dr. Lachhmansingh was Health Minister, and his cousin. Mr. Singh, was the Local Government Minister. A member [2219](#) of the Lower House is his cousin. That is two families, but there is a third family. Mr. Burnham was the Minister of Education, and his cousin, Sidney King, was Minister of Housing, while his sister, Miss Jenny Burnham, was a member of the Legislature.

[§ Dr. Morgan](#)

Sounds like the Cecils over here.

[§ Mr. Reid](#)

There was the Minister of Labour, Mr. Chase, who was secretary of the Guiana Trade Union, the vice-president of which is Mr. Burnham, who was a Minister in the Government.

[§ Mr. Fenner Brockway](#)

Does my hon. Friend know that that union is affiliated to the International Federation of Free Trade Unions?

[§ Mr. Reid](#)

That I do not know. Hon. Members opposite may not know that there are two international federations of trade unions—one which is free, to which we are affiliated, and the other a Communist dominated one. To which federation this union belongs I do not know. I know for a fact that it completely controls the T.U.C. in British Guiana, and that these three families, through various offices, control the T.U.C. in British Guiana, the P.P.P. and, in fact the Government. It is a very unsavoury state of affairs, and I have not one good word to say for the P.P.P. or its personnel.

When these Ministers came into power, they had not the slightest intention of carrying out or implementing the Constitution which had been set up. Their objective was by various means to set up a totalitarian dictatorship, but, in fact, it would not have been a totalitarian dictatorship. It would not have been a dictatorship of the proletariat, but one of a family band.

I asked a question of the right hon. Gentleman today, and he did not give me a satisfactory reply, as to whether, when Ministers not only do things which can be vetoed by the Government, but when they refuse to do things, there was any legal or effective power to make the Minister concerned do the job. The answer is "No." I tell the right hon. Gentleman that. We can take a horse to water, but we cannot make it drink. These Ministers did not do their jobs, and, therefore, the Government could only ask them to resign.

[2220](#) If the Government had asked these Ministers to resign, in a place seething with emotion which had been worked up by the Communists, what would have happened? Would the place have gone up in smoke? Would any hon. Member of this House have taken the risk of taking that step until he had first got in the troops on whom he could rely? The right hon. Gentleman or the Government, or whoever put in the troops, did a necessary thing to prevent a complete outbreak of disorder, but yet I am not satisfied with the right hon. Gentleman's statement.

When the troops were there and the Governor had the power—one cannot govern without the power—why were there no prosecutions? Surely, in the five or six months' rule of these Ministers, they had committed more than one criminal act? I do not know what criminal code was in force, but I should imagine that it is based on the Indian penal code which exists in all the Colonies. The Indian penal code is not based on case law as in this country. It lays down the offences in such a way that any child can read and understand them.

If some of these Ministers committed an offence, why were they not prosecuted? I am not satisfied, because in this case, if it is possible to prosecute, the culprit gets a fair trial, and then, if he is convicted, there can be no post mortems. When the Minister replies, I should like him to justify the action, or inaction, of the Government in not prosecuting the culprits.

My right hon. Friend suggested that a Commission might have been sent out to British Guiana instead of adopting the action taken by the Government. It is difficult to form an opinion on the matter, but suffice it to say that throughout our history we have always taken that course. When the terrible trouble occurred between upper and lower Canada, Lord Durham went out there. He was a great man, and he laid the foundations, in his report on Canada, of the modern British Empire. His visit eased the situation.

I agree with my right hon. Friend that when trouble is brewing, it is a good thing to send out a commission to try to ease the tension and to come to a settlement. I am asking the Minister to tell us why a commission was not sent out in an attempt to settle this dispute. [2221](#) My right hon. Friend said that a terrible thing has been done in suspending the Constitution and that the matter must be probed by an impartial commission, and I agree.

I think that in the White Paper the Government again made an elementary mistake in proposing to set up a provisional Constitution for the time being. To do that is to pre-judge the issue. When we suspended the Constitution in Newfoundland, we did not set up a temporary provisional Constitution. We set up a temporary bureaucratic administration consisting of six Commissioners who were expert administrators. That is what should be done in this case. A purely bureaucratic administration should be set up until the report of the Commission has been received and until a decision has been reached as to what is to be done.

I think the House will agree that I am progressive in the matter of constitutional advance in the Colonies. Therefore, I sincerely hope that the setback which has been caused by the action of a set of irresponsibles will not prejudice the future constitutional advance of British Guiana. I also hope that when the time comes, and when the Commission have reported, the right hon. Gentleman and his advisers will try as far as possible to keep adult suffrage and all the other advanced things and will not be frightened by a temporary breakdown. The thing must be tried out. Methods must be devised for allowing the Constitution to function tolerably well without taking away the liberties given under it. I hope that in reply the Minister will answer some of the points I have raised.

[§](#) 7.4 p.m.

[§ Mr. Niall Macpherson \(Dumfries\)](#)

The House always listens with great attention to the hon. Member for Swindon (Mr. T. Reid), who almost invariably gives it very good advice, sometimes in a very avuncular manner, but, nevertheless, advice to which the House is well advised to listen.

I am afraid I cannot say the same about the speech of the hon. Member for Attercliffe (Mr. J. Hynd), who seemed to be at variance with even his own Front Bench. If I understood aright the

former Secretary of State for the Colonies, the right hon. Member for Llanelly (Mr. J. Griffiths), [2222](#) his point was that, in broad principle, he accepted the evidence concerning the activities of the P.P.P. and of the Ministers of that party, but that he did not consider it right to take the extreme step of suspending the Constitution.

The hon. Member for Attercliffe, on the other hand, seemed to pour scorn on all the evidence that was given, to throw doubt upon it, and not to agree with his right hon. Friend. He even doubted—and doubts have been expressed in interventions in this debate—whether, in fact, the P.P.P. was a Communist-dominated party. He said that he had put a definite question to the two members of the P.P.P. who have come to this country as to whether or not they were Communists, and that, having heard their denial, he was still of the opinion that they had connections with the Communist Party. He did not draw the same conclusions from the other denial he received concerning their part in an alleged plot to set fire to property in the Colony. When the hon. Gentleman came to what he said was the main question before the House, whether the suspension of the Constitution was the only way in which to protect the Colony, he seemed to be on very much less secure ground.

In the first place, it seems strange to argue that, because some members of the People's Progressive Party are not Communists, there was, therefore, the possibility of working with at any rate the non-Communist Members of it. That certainly has not been the experience in Europe. The hon. Gentleman talked about suppressing nationalist movements. But if one reads the documents provided by the Colonial Office, one finds that all the parties are, to some extent, nationalist movements, and there is no question of suppressing nationalist movements or the liberties of minorities.

The hon. Gentleman said that the proper thing to have done would have been to give the P.P.P. Ministers a good talking to and to advise them, first of all, to give up their trade union appointments, and, if they refused to do that, to invite them to resign. I suggest that there are grave dangers in a Colonial Secretary using his powers in this way. No doubt he has power to send for members of governments in various Colonies, or at [2223](#) any rate to invite them to come to this country. But, unless he does so for the purpose of getting together provinces of a Colony or various Colonies for the purpose of negotiation, there is a grave danger that he will give the impression of going behind the back of the Governor. If there is one thing which is essential for a Colony, it is that the Governor's prestige and position must be constantly sustained by the Colonial Office, and in no way undermined.

Supposing it had been possible for the Governor of British Guiana to dismiss the Ministers of the P.P.P., what would have happened? A vacancy would have been created. Under the Constitution that vacancy would have to be filled, and filled in a certain way, namely, by election in the House of Assembly. Where there is a majority of 18 to six, what would have happened? There would have been another Minister of the same party elected with the majority. He would still be under the control of the Communist caucus.

In point of fact, as I read the Constitution—it is unwise to talk about the Constitution without having read it—it would not have been possible for the Governor to have dismissed a Minister. A particular procedure is laid down. The Governor may at any time propose to the Executive

Council that any person who is a Minister shall cease to be a Minister if the Executive shall so resolve, and the seat of that Minister in the Executive Council shall thereupon become vacant. There was a majority of P.P.P. Ministers on the Executive Council, so it was extremely unlikely that they would agree to suspend or dismiss a Minister.

There is another procedure which says that either Chamber may, by resolution in favour of which there are cast votes of not less than two-thirds of all the members of the Chamber, revoke election to the Executive Council. "Either Chamber" means that it might be the State Council or the Assembly. Suppose that were done by the State Council— obviously it could not be done by the Assembly. The difficulty would be that he would still be drawn from the same party pursuing the same policy under the same management. I do not think that the right hon. Gentleman who spoke for [2224](#) the Opposition really faced up to that prospect. He said that the Governor could have used his reserve powers, but those powers are pretty limited.

The Constitution says that the Governor shall be obliged to consult with the Executive Council in the exercise of all his powers and act on their advice. Then it says that in cases which are too unimportant, cases which are too urgent and cases which are "of such a nature that in his judgment the service of Her Majesty would sustain material prejudice," he need not consult with the Executive. Is it seriously suggested by the party opposite that that provision should have been brought into force in order that the Governor might avoid consulting with Ministers responsible for various departments? It is true that the Governor could with prior approval of the Secretary of State, have acted independently of the advice of the Executive Council, but that would have meant referring everything that was not absolutely urgent to Whitehall. It would have meant direct rule in effect by my right hon. Friend. Is that what right hon. Gentlemen of the party opposite want? They have not faced up to the fact that the Constitution is of such a kind that there was no alternative but to suspend it.

[§ Dr. Morgan](#)

Who gave the Colony that Constitution?

[§ Mr. Macpherson](#)

As the hon. Gentleman is well aware, the Constitution was recommended by the Commission that was sent out. It was approved in principle by the right hon. Member for Llanely and it was put into operation by the present Government.

[§ Mr. Harold Davies \(Leek\)](#)

Knowing the nature of the P.P.P.

[§ Mr. Macpherson](#)

Yes, knowing the nature of the P.P.P. That is my next point.

When this Constitution was put into force, it was widely felt that members of the P.P.P. would act as members of other extreme nationalist or Left parties of the Commonwealth have acted, and would become responsible. It was felt that they should be given the fullest chance to show that they were prepared to act responsibly and to operate honourably within the terms of the Constitution. There was no effort anywhere to prevent [2225](#) them from doing so. It has never been suggested in any quarter that there was.

On the contrary, one of the greatest proofs that they were given the fullest opportunity to show their responsibility is the fact that although we knew in this country that a Communist-dominated party had been elected to power in British Guiana and that there were all the seeds of trouble, and although the Press were presumably on their toes to keep the people in this country informed of what was happening out there, we heard very little about British Guiana in this country up to the time when the storm broke. That is a very remarkable fact, and it indicates the good will that was shown towards the party by everyone in British Guiana and their willingness to try and make the thing work. It cannot be said the P.P.P. have not had an opportunity and there was no alternative to the course that has been taken.

I would congratulate my right hon. Friend on the steps that he took and the courageous and opportune manner in which he has acted. My hon. Friend the Member for Bury and Radcliffe (Sir W. Fletcher), whom we are so pleased to see back with us today, wondered whether, if the party opposite had taken the same courageous action in Malaya, we might have been spared a very great deal of difficulty. Instead, we all know what happened there. The Communist leaders of the trade unions disappeared, taking the funds with them into the jungle to organise the troubles with which we have been beset ever since. I trust that we shall be spared such troubles in British Guiana. It will certainly be no fault of the Government's should trouble arise there, for they have done all that could have been expected of them.

§ 7.18 p.m.

§ [Mr. Charles Grey \(Durham\)](#)

I hope that the hon. Member for Dumfries (Mr. N. Macpherson) will forgive me if I do not follow the line on which he spoke. I want to be very brief and to put points that have not been mentioned by any other hon. Member.

I had occasion to visit the West Indies early this year along with the hon. Member for Reigate (Mr. Vaughan-Morgan), and, in view of the fact that quite a lot has been said about trade unionism, I ought to place on record my interviews with a lot of Labour officers there who went out from this country, and to pay [2226](#) a tribute to them for the fine work they had done. Unfortunately we had not the opportunity of being in British Guiana for any length of time. We were there for only three days, and owing to the distances we had to travel we could not make the contacts that were desirable. We were there four or five weeks before the general election took place. We had not the opportunity of meeting this Dr. Jagan, as for some reason or other he chose not to come where we were. That might be significant or it might not be. We heard quite a lot about him, and I formed my opinion from what I saw and from the evidence supplied to me that he was definitely a Communist.

I think that it will be generally agreed on this side of the House, though there might be objection on the other side, that there is a whole background of events that led up to the present situation. It certainly goes back to 50 years of neglect, bad housing conditions, and insecurity of employment. A great revolt has taken place during the past six months, but this revolt is not confined to the Communist Party. Other organisations as well as the Communist Party have objected. I have in my possession a resolution passed by the Professional and Administrative Officers' Association on 11th February, 1951. That is a long time ago. It is rather long but I am determined to read it because it shows what a widespread revolt there was against certain conditions in British Guiana. The resolution stated: Housing on Sugar Estates. The subject of housing workers on sugar estates is of great concern to this Association. The Agreement that is being signed by the workers on the sugar estates with the proprietors of the estates contains several clauses that are disadvantageous to the worker and his family. This Association condemns the conditions under which the workers were lured back to another form of bondage. All concerned are again being advised not to sign the Agreement of Lease which has received the approval of the Government. Although the Legislative Council passed a Motion in July last recommending the Government that negotiations be entered into with Sugar Producers' Association for the purpose of obtaining freehold titles to estate-owned land for workers, it would appear that Government is so connected with the sugar estate owners that nothing is being done. Most of the sites selected for housing in Demerara and Berbice"— we were in these places and actually saw some of these sites— are located on swampy lands with no provision for proper drainage. The plots are far too small to allow healthy conditions to prevail, [2227](#) and what is more, there is no space for gardening or poultry rearing. The Association is shocked to note that the Government Public Health Department has approved of all the schemes. That is the kind of thing that has been going on for years, and we are seeing the results today. I mention this resolution because no one can say that this Association is in any way connected with the Communist Party. There is a general feeling that these conditions must be put right. If that were done we should have the "preventive cure" against Communism to which reference has been made today.

I wish to refer also, and in particular, to the election law. On this point I may face some criticism from my own side as well as from the other side of the House. I should like an answer to one question on this aspect of the Constitution, because it appears to me that in British Guiana the Communist Party have cashed in on a weakness in the election law. It must be remembered that in British Guiana there is no Communist movement. It might be said that there is a Communist Party, but Dr. Jagan and his wife are the Communist party. They are the individuals in control, and once one has individuals controlling a supposed movement, there is a dangerous situation.

In connection with the election law, I firmly believe that the deposit required from candidates is far too low. It was right that there should be a reasonable chance for all types of people to allow their names to go forward as candidates for the Assembly, but what has happened is that not only has this given an opportunity for any Tom, Dick or Harry to get in but has given the Communist Party the opportunity to obtain sufficient money to block the whole market with candidates. They have cashed in on the situation. That aspect should be looked into. If that part of the Constitution could be altered and the amount of the deposit raised slightly, it might have a restraining effect in preventing certain people putting up for the Assembly.

[§ Mr. J. McGovern \(Glasgow, Shettleston\)](#)

Does my hon. Friend realise that the Communist Party has the whole resources of the Comintern behind it in every part of the world and is one of the wealthiest parties in politics? If the deposit is raised, all that will happen will [2228](#) be that perhaps a hundred more candidates will lose their deposits. The small individuals will be penalised and the Communist Party will put forward the candidates.

[§ Mr. Grey](#)

I concede that, but what is more ridiculous than having an election with eight or nine candidates contesting one seat? We must have the right type of person with the right type of political mind to help the political system to grow, but unfortunately the Communist Party have done their worst. I should like the Colonial Secretary to tell us whether a tight watch is kept on election expenses. I suspected something when I was there and I should like a definite answer from the Minister.

When we were there I had the impression from the prevailing atmosphere that people had very strong objections to this Constitution. Although this was four or five weeks before the election took place, they smelt defeat then, and because of that they certainly did not want the Constitution. Despite the speech made by the Colonial Secretary, I strongly suspect also that he does not want it and that recent events have been more of an excuse than anything else to suspend the Constitution. I affirm what has been said already from this side of the House, that if these people had done anything wrong and had done anything at all to undermine the Constitution they certainly ought to have been arrested and the courts allowed to try them. To suspend the Constitution is a dangerous and backward step.

Nothing has been put in the place of the Constitution, and if we do not put anything in its place there will be more dangers in British Guiana than there are now. I ask the Colonial Secretary to think again and not to suspend the Constitution, but just give it a trial. I warn him that if no terms of reference are given to the Commission which is to go out there to find ways and means of securing another Constitution that will give these people perfect liberty, the Government will deservedly hear objections from this side of the House.

[§ 7.29 p.m.](#)

[§ Mr. J. K. Vaughan-Morgan \(Reigate\)](#)

If I may, I shall not follow the hon. Member for Durham (Mr. Grey) in all of his remarks, as I agree with most of them, and I was with him in British Guiana [2229](#) The House is very indulgent to those who speak from personal experience, even though it is limited in our case to a rather wet week-end in Georgetown. During the rest of the time, however, we managed to cover a large area of that very large country.

It is quite true that the one member of the Legislative Council whom we did not meet was Dr. Jagan, who was apparently not interested in meeting his fellow members of the Commonwealth

Parliamentary Association. He had more than one opportunity. That was a great disappointment, because it was quite clear that he was going to be a very dominant force in the country. Everyone assessed very highly his abilities and his personality, and it came as no surprise to most people that he achieved the success in the elections that he did.

[§ Dr. Morgan](#)

Why be unfair to him?

[§ Mr. Vaughan-Morgan](#)

I am not.

[§ Dr. Morgan](#)

The hon. Gentleman made unfair references to him.

[§ Mr. Vaughan-Morgan](#)

The hon. Member has been interrupting throughout the debate. I was most grateful for the advice he gave me on what I should wear when I went to the West Indies, but neither I nor the rest of us are grateful for his advice on any other matter. I must say that most of the earlier speeches we have heard from the other side have developed into a personal vendetta against my right hon. Friend. It is quite clear that, foiled of their General Election, they now wish to reconstruct the Government on their own.

I want to give some account of the circumstances which, I think, have led up to Dr. Jagan's success. A question was put yesterday by the hon. Member for Rugby (Mr. J. Johnson)—I gave him notice that I was going to raise this—in which he asked why it was that this Constitution had failed when similar constitutions in Barbados and Jamaica had succeeded. The reason is quite clear. In Barbados a party is in power under Grantley Adams, and in Jamaica there is an opposition party under Mr. Norman Manley. Those parties have purged themselves of Communism. Mr. Manley had considerable difficulty with the Communists; it is less than a year since he eradicated them from his own party.

[2230](#) But that did not happen in the People's Progressive Party in British Guiana. It could not happen, because there would not have been a People's Progressive Party left if that purge had happened. This is the one party in the West Indies which is absolutely saturated with Communism and which cannot be reconstructed. We must not exaggerate Dr. Jagan's electoral success; despite all the attractions of his promises and his policies, he got only 30 per cent. of the electorate to the polls. He achieved that success very largely owing to absence of a coherent Opposition.

As the hon. Member for Durham said, there is what I might call political chaos, apart from the People's Progressive Party, in British Guiana. There was an average of five candidates for each seat, and in some cases up to eight or nine, and the People's Progressive Party, with the brilliant

organisation which it has created in the last few years, achieved its success on account of the efficiency which it has shown.

Let me turn to the future. My right hon. Friend the Colonial Secretary has said that a commission of inquiry is to be sent out, and I should like to suggest that on this occasion the commission is not too small, that it should be rather larger than perhaps the last one which was sent out. I know all the arguments; there are against large commissions, but I think there would be a wealth of experience which would be helpful on that commission. If we have a small commission, a triumvirate such as the last, one opinion may perhaps prevail too much. I would also suggest that there should be associated with it, as a member of the commission, a West Indian. Such a gesture would be appreciated by the people of the West Indies.

The other Colonies of the West Indies have produced many remarkable men, and someone who came from that part of the world, with personal experience of the difficulties of this transitional period from bureaucracy to democracy would have a unique contribution to make. I am not suggesting that it should be necessarily a politician, but there are eminent lawyers, chief justices and the like, who, surely, would be willing to serve. It is urgent that the commission should get to work soon, that British Guiana should be able to resume the normal course of [2231](#) constitutional procedure as soon as possible and not lag too far behind the other territories in the British West Indies.

We can derive some comfort from this tragic situation, if public opinion as a whole in British Guiana will now begin to change its mind about the advantages of federation, because if the federation of the British West Indies comes about and British Guiana becomes a member of it, I am quite certain that in the course of time she will lead that federation and become the greatest partner in it. There are enormous potentialities in this Colony, but it needs now a period of tranquillity and confidence.

§ 7.36 p.m.

§ [Mr. J. McGovern \(Glasgow, Shettleston\)](#)

I have listened to this debate very carefully today. I have heard the points of view of the Colonial Secretary representing the Government, and of the former Labour Colonial Secretary, the right hon. Member for Llanelli (Mr. J. Griffiths). I have read all I could bearing on this situation and I have listened to the various expressions of opinion. I agree that it is a very serious thing to set aside a new Constitution, one so recently granted, to any part of our Colonial Commonwealth.

I want to examine one or two things that have not been put in the House today. I am disturbed. I do not think the matter is so simple as even our Amendment would have the public believe. In the event of any part of our Colonial Commonwealth throwing up a Communist Party that would attempt to seize power on the typical lines of behind the Iron Curtain, what should the attitude of a Socialist be towards that? My attitude has always been this, that if we are loosening the bond and granting to the Colonies the right to some form of democracy which will eventually lead to independence, it requires a great deal of guidance from the central executive in this country, the Government, and the Colonial Service.

Also if we had in the initial stages such as this the return of a Communist majority that attempted to take that power that we had granted, like taking something from a child whose care had been entrusted to us, we would have the [2232](#) right to protect and preserve the Constitution that we had granted. I do not think many will dissent from that view. If the Communists attempted to overturn the Constitution by the typical means that have been seen behind the Iron Curtain, I think we should have to take drastic action.

I have examined the question which has been put today, whether there could have been some less drastic action than the setting aside of the Constitution. I listened to my right hon. Friend the Member for Llanelly and the Colonial Secretary, and I still have not heard the complete answer that I want to hear. This is a peculiar Colony. In this part of the world there is an immature democracy. There has been no training ground for political parties. There is little strength of real opposition and those who cash in on a grievance—and anybody who has done the hustings knows how easy it is to cash in and get support from the masses on something——

[§ Dr. Morgan](#)

My hon. Friend has been lucky. Some of us have not been so lucky.

[§ Mr. McGovern](#)

It is the ability to put it over. The grievances are undoubtedly there. It is admitted by all the experts that the conditions are deplorable. All that can be said is that they have been steadily improving. I accept that.

Supposing, then, that we had to deal with a Communist plot. I take the evidence of those who met Dr. Jagan that in this situation he was a Communist who had Communist connections. It should be remembered that any Communist who adheres to the Comintern takes his directions from the Comintern, and, therefore, he has to carry out orders, and the orders carried out in that Colony would be not to improve the conditions of the workers, but to use them to create the greatest disorder and chaos so that our country should be embroiled in difficulties in that part of the world. That is the familiar pattern. Let us not forget—I say this very seriously to my right hon. Friend the Member for Llanelly—that the whole of the Continent had all this sort of woolly Socialist leadership which refused to stand up and was drawn into the net, and the Iron Curtain was extended time and time again because of the refusal to take drastic action when the situation called for it.

[2233](#) If one was compelled to take action against Dr. Jagan and his Communist friends, what would one do? Would one sack the Ministers? Let us suppose that the Ministers had been sacked. Does anybody who knows this House believe that there is not a very small vocal minority in the Labour Party which would have raised Cain in the House because democracy was being treated in such a contemptible fashion?

I am told that there has been a plot—I have heard it from the "Daily Worker" and elsewhere—by the Government to destroy the Constitution. I do not believe that. I believe that there are a few hon. Members opposite who would be enamoured of some form of Fascist dictatorship, for we

have seen signs of it in the past, and there are also a number of hon. Members on this side of the House who can always find a defence for anything that is done by Russia or some other country behind the Iron Curtain. Therefore, both sides of the House are well balanced in that regard.

I believe that a great majority of hon. Members would now like to see—it has taken a long time to gain recognition of this—a gradual devolution by means of a system of Colonial democracy throughout the world in which people would work in harmony and build up economic and political life for a cultured and healthy existence in the community, giving us something better than we have had in the past.

If this action had taken place during the period of the Labour Government, my right hon. Friend the Member for Llanelly would have been faced with the need to take some form of drastic action. It should be remembered that we start off with agreement on both sides of this House that the people who were running the Government in British Guiana are capable of anything. I will never accept the word of a Communist. Communists are full of lying and deceit and will cheat, and they will burn and destroy and be guilty of every fraudulent practice, and also murder and torture. Therefore, I begin by having grave doubts about their honesty and decency. However, if we face the position in which my right hon. Friend the Member for Llanelly had to take some drastic action, it would not matter what action he took, for whatever it was he would be condemned by a section of [2234](#) the Labour Party in this House for the action which he was taking in order to preserve the Constitution.

Let us suppose the action had to be taken. Should we sack all the Ministers? Quite a number of them were involved. We should then destroy the Government of British Guiana piecemeal. We should then call for elections. The sacked people would then go, as martyrs, to the electorate, and they might be thrown up again in even greater strength. What should we do then? Should we accept the *fait accompli*? Should we accept the position that they were the masters and that we had become the servants?

There is my difficulty in this situation. I take a serious view of it. I believe we were justified when we entered the United Nations. That changed my outlook on national defence and the use of arms, because the United Nations was going to preserve the rights of all human beings and would, if necessary, prevent the expansion of totalitarianism in any part of the world. Therefore, if we are faced with a situation such as this just as we have set up a Constitution, are we then going to say to the Minister and to the Government of British Guiana, "In ideas we are as poles apart, but there are some things on which we must unite if we are to preserve the ordinary decencies of democracy"?

It is the easiest thing in the world to condemn the Minister and it is the easiest and the safest thing in the world to play up to a large body of misinformed opinion in the country. I quite agree with practically all that was said by my right hon. Friend in his speech, for he dealt with all the conditions, but in relation to what we are going to do in this situation, there has up to the present moment been no clarity from this side of the House. I rule out the "plot." That sort of thing need not be brought into the picture. That is an easy way out for the man who does not want to think or to face up to responsibility.

I consider that Dr. Jagan and his party are a menace. My assumption is that they admit loyalty to the Comintern— they have no other loyalty to anyone else, neither to God nor to man—and thus they are prepared to overthrow the Constitution and set up one of their own. If we are honest, we must say that the time to take action is now, and not leave [2235](#) it too late as in Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland and other places which were drawn into the net. If disorder and chaos can be established in British Guiana, then the Communists have their foot in that part of the world. If there is anything we have to do at this stage, it is to prevent them from extending their power in any part of the world.

Therefore, in all the circumstances, and on all the evidence at my command, I cannot say that I believe that the British Government did the wrong thing in this situation. So far as I am concerned, nobody can take responsibility for my vote, my actions, and my decisions, and I have honestly come to the conclusion that I cannot, I regret to say, go into the Lobby tonight along with my party on this issue.

§ 7.49 p.m.

§ [Mr. Philip Bell \(Bolton, East\)](#)

I find great inspiration in the speech to which we have just listened. On many occasions we are inclined to be a little cynical about speaking and merely try to score party points or just sit down and shout "Groundnuts" or "Red meat," as the case may be. It has been a very rare thing for me to hear such an eloquent and sincere speech as that just made by the hon. Member for Shettleton (Mr. McGovern). Nobody likes speaking against his side on these occasions; however big the issue is, it is an effort for him. I have drawn a lesson from it. I had prepared one or two "smart aleck" remarks to make about Members of the Opposition who have been annoying me a little, but they went out of my mind when I listened to the hon. Gentleman's speech.

I should like in an old fashioned way to bring the House back to the Amendment. It is interesting to see that it is in three parts. It starts with ... emphatically deploring the actions and speeches of some of the leaders ... I thought from the interruptions during my right hon. Friend's speech that there were very few people deploring emphatically the actions and speeches of anybody. The second part of the Amendment condemns methods tending to the establishment of a totalitarian regime ... One would have thought that that was being challenged, but as the Motion stands it is not right for Opposition [2236](#) Members to associate themselves with anything which contradicts it.

The only issue remaining is whether the remedy which was taken needed to be taken. Indeed, the right hon. and hon. Gentlemen who framed the Amendment wisely did not condemn the remedy. They did not say it was a violation of democracy, but they said rather mildly that they were not satisfied. I hope after this debate they will be satisfied and that they will realise that in these matters of making a decision in an emergency the position of the Executive is not that of a High Court judge. It is not possible in an emergency to have statements of claim, defences, interrogatories, hear the witnesses on oath, and then appeal to another court. Government cannot be run in that way. Hon. Gentlemen opposite know that as well as anybody.

In an Executive Ministers are not solely judging. They have to make some judgment, but it cannot be done on facts. A lot of it is hearsay and a lot of the reports have to be accepted on their face value and a decision has got to be made. My right hon. Friend cannot say, "I will not rely upon it. I will not do anything because I have not heard the witnesses on oath nor have I heard anyone cross-examined." He has to act.

The position is this. Is the information in this White Paper sufficient? Many hon. Members accept it, but do not look at it from the position of government which they may be in some day. Having this information in front of us we must ask ourselves, is it enough? Having read it, is there a reasonable doubt in our minds, or is a prima facie case made out to take some action? We cannot ask ourselves whether every item is true, but is the general picture such that we are entitled to take action now?

In an ordinary case of defence a man must have a reasonable apprehension of injury before he can strike a blow in self-defence. He is not asked to prove that the attacker had a gun which is loaded. It is sufficient for him to say, "The man pointed the gun at me. I did not know whether it was loaded, but I took a brick and threw it at him." There is no use saying afterwards, "You should have seen whether the gun was loaded or not." It is the same with the Executive. They deal only with the facts [2237](#) they have got. It is not judicial, but it is the only way that government can work. Once we can say—and I am not asking anyone to swear to the truth of every syllable in the White Paper—that the picture is such that there is a reasonable presumption on which anyone could act——

[§ Mr. Harold Davies](#)

That is the most dangerous thing in politics.

[§ Mr. Bell](#)

But it is a condition of life or of an Executive. The real issue here is, was this step the right one? The suspension of a Constitution, whatever the emergency, is a grave move, and there has to be some great consideration before such a step is taken. But on a question like that I should have thought that the benefit of the doubt would go to the Governor, to the Colonial Secretary and to those associated in the administration of the Colony.

When I look at Part II of this White Paper and see the particular difficulties which were arising, I feel myself that there was nothing but to suspend the Constitution in order to deal with the matters which are mentioned in the White Paper and are set out under nine headings in paragraph 4. It is not a question of passing a few laws. It is not a question of getting rid of a few people. If six Ministers were expelled no one would be got from their party to carry on. They would not dare do so, because part of the system is intimidation and part strikes. If we went to the opposition party and asked them to form a Government, then the disaffected people would say that we were taking sides.

Is it not better in these cases, unpleasant as it is, to have a clean operation and not a duly dallying? It is not an abolition but a suspension. All Ministers work under pressure and under

difficulty, and surely on the facts as we have them here it is not too much to say that we are satisfied that this was the right step to take.

There is another argument which has not been raised but which has been inferred from interruptions, and that is that we were wrong to interfere at all. Having given a Constitution, we should let the elected Government do what they like. They should go on being Communists and kill and plunder and destroy. [HON. MEMBERS: [2238](#) "No."] It is not a point that has been put forward, and it is as well to realise that anybody voting for or against the Motion does not support that idea. But behind a lot of this talk about interfering with freedom we have still got to face the fact that here is an immature Colony which has not got the opportunity to get political experience, and power without experience leads by a quick and short way to murder, plunder and riot.

[§ Mr. Manuel](#)

I want some guidance and education from the hon. and learned Gentleman. Apart from speeches and certain writings, can he tell us what overt act against the Constitution has been committed that makes it possible to suspend the Constitution?

[§ Mr. Bell](#)

I am complimented by the hon. Gentleman asking me to advise him, but I prefer to leave that to my right hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Local Government, who will do so in detail. But is it not sufficient to read this White Paper? There are overt acts here such as the misuse of the right of appointments to boards, which does not look like an attempted misuse, the spreading of racial hatred, and the acts which were taken to undermine the loyalty of the police. There may be some overt act which makes a case more compelling, but an overt act is only a culmination of a conspiracy. A conspiracy exists before an overt act.

I say that we are entitled to take action against a conspiracy before the bullets fly and that, on reasonable grounds and summing up the whole position as we see it, we must reach a definite agreement with the Government. I suggest to hon. Members in all parts of the House that we should not misunderstand each other, because it is terribly important in the matter of the international position we have in the world and the confidence we create. Let us differ about things which we must differ about, but I do not think that we should differ on the words of this Motion, for they are mild words. We should not differ on "not satisfied." Is it not better to say "not proven"?

[§ Dr. Barnett Stross \(Stoke-on-Trent, Central\)](#)

If I may interrupt the hon. and learned Gentleman, would he answer this question? He has given us a surgical [2239](#) analogy and has asked for a clean operation. He has put it to us that this was more desirable than to dilly dally or to waste time. Would he not agree that it is desirable, if a surgical technique is to be used, that there should be a complete investigation of the facts and then, and then only, come to a firm diagnosis? For, if there is any hesitation whatever, the surgical operation will never be clean, will have been useless, and should have been prevented?

§ Mr. Bell

I accept that, but what we are discussing is whether it was proper to take those steps. We might investigate afterwards and find out in the light of subsequent information that the gun was not loaded, but on the information we had, I say it was a reasonable step to take. I accept that we should have a general inquiry into the matter afterwards with, maybe, criminal prosecutions, but we are discussing whether the action taken in the light of that information was reasonable or not, and whether there was any practical alternative. I suggest, with the greatest respect, that there is not enough evidence to show what other alternative could have been taken in those circumstances.

§ 8.2 p.m.

§ Mr. J. Grimond (Orkney and Shetland)

I must confess that I think that in the White Paper certain overt acts, such as attempts to alter the police system, are set out. Also I have been much struck during the course of this debate by the apparently unanimous agreement that the leaders of the P.P.P. are Communist or Communist-inspired. I think the right hon. Gentleman the Member for Llanelly (Mr. J. Griffiths) gave that as his opinion and it came from both sides of this House. Indeed, the Amendment of the Opposition says that they condemn "methods tending to the establishment of a totalitarian régime."

It would seem to me that if we accept that the P.P.P. is a Communist or authoritarian party, then a great deal of the case against the Government must fall to the ground. It is vital in considering this question, which I do with no personal knowledge of the conditions in Guiana, to decide if they are a democratic party, however misguided, however violent, however Left wing. I can imagine [2240](#) that in a Colony with a new Constitution, in a party which has only three members who have never played any part in public life before or in local or national government, and in a situation in which they might be goaded on to make extravagant statements by the social and economic conditions in the Colony, there might be all sorts of trouble. There might be wild words which we would do well to ignore if we were satisfied that the party was fundamentally well-intentioned, and that it was a democratic party in the sense that it was prepared to accept any opposition and was prepared to accept the rights of minorities.

But, as I say, the Opposition's own Amendment appears to give it as their opinion that it is not a democratic party but an authoritarian party which presumably believes in getting and maintaining power by force or by trickery. I do not say that it is necessarily a Communist Party because I think that word is over-worked. It is applied to anyone with whom we disagree, anyone who is unorthodox. For instance, the hon. Member for South Ayrshire (Mr. Emrys Hughes) is sometimes described as a Communist, though I do not doubt that in any well-run Communist country he would be liquidated soon after entry. The whole language of cells and Communist plots is the common currency of propaganda today. If we succeed in setting up a good organisation and getting a lot of people to vote for us, that is known as the fine flower of democracy; if our opponents do it, it is the sinister planting of a cell.

In the White Paper itself there are pages which read to me suspiciously like the kind of things put out from behind the Iron Curtain. I am afraid it shows how far we have come in the modern world. There are a good many accusations in the White Paper, such as that Ministers were behind-hand with their work, which should be discounted. Nevertheless, I think there is evidence to support what is apparently the official view of the Labour Party, that the P.P.P. is a party which believes in force and not in democracy.

§ Mr. J. Griffiths

If the hon. Member will look again at the terms of our Amendment, he will see that it refers to some of the leaders. We have done that because, to the best of our information, [2241](#) this is not an entirely Communist party and we thought it was important, as I still do, to realise that if we dubbed them all Communists we should be playing into the hands of Dr. Jagan. It is a great mistake to dub them all Communists.

§ Mr. Grimond

I accept that, and I am glad that the right hon. Gentleman has made that clear. If extra evidence were needed, we have the evidence of those who have been to the Colony, in particular Miss Hinden, who, in that most interesting article in the "Manchester Guardian" which has been quoted, said that when they came to give evidence before the Commission, they gave it as their opinion that if they could get a majority, they had a right to do more or less what they liked. We also have the evidence of the White Paper, which may be discounted as a partisan document, but which I think makes a prima facie case, and that, added to the rest of the opinions we have here, must lead us to suppose that this is not an entirely democratic party.

That being so, the second question then is, was it right or not to take the step of suspending the Constitution and of sending troops? That was a grave step. The alternative which has been suggested by the right hon. Member for Llanelly was to use the reserve powers of the Governor, to dismiss the Ministers and to have a new election. I cannot believe that the reserve powers are intended to enable a game of pull devil, pull baker to be entered into between a Governor who is trying to run a democratic state and a dominating party which wants to run an authoritarian state.

It seems to me that those reserve powers are pre-eminently for the case where there is an inexperienced or extreme democratic party but one which really believes in the democratic processes. Once the Governor came up against a party, some of whose leaders were not democrats but were prepared to use force and trickery to gain their ends, the position became very difficult indeed, if not intolerable. It might well have ended in bloodshed, and I agree with those who have said that we should be grateful at least for the fact that there has not been bloodshed. I can imagine that had there been serious riots and deaths in that Colony, and troops had [2242](#) not been sent or swift action taken, there would have been severe criticism in this House, and rightly.

I still do not understand why individuals who clearly appear to have been breaking the laws were not prosecuted, and we are entitled to some further answer on that point. Some of them, after all,

were not members of the Government as far as one could find out. Have there been any prosecutions for sedition, conspiracy or other similar crimes? But prosecutions would not, of course, settle the main issue.

In recent debates in this House on Africa many of us on this side expressed the view that we had faith in the Colonial Office; that we believed, on the whole, that they are genuinely interested in the welfare of the Colonial peoples; and that we preferred they should be in charge of certain parts of the world rather than the Commonwealth Relations Office. Having listened to this debate, and starting with great ignorance of the subject, as I have said, I feel one must maintain that faith. I think the Governor of this Colony rightly bears a high reputation. We have not been told so explicitly, but perhaps we may be told that he has approved of what has been done. He is there on the spot and I, sitting here in Westminster, feel disinclined to make nice calculations of less or more when the result might have been anarchy or bloodshed in conditions about which I know very little.

Nevertheless, I feel that however we may view the situation now, that it should have arisen at all is an extremely grave matter. It seems to me a grave criticism of Parliament, to begin with, and of this country that we can be so ignorant of conditions in our Colonies. We ought to look at the whole machinery for reviewing and keeping ourselves informed of the Colonial Territories. In how many more Colonies, for instance, are housing conditions very bad? In how many more are the people in poverty and illiteracy? In how many more, indeed, are we breeding further troubles of this sort?

Further than that, it seems to me that it should shake our belief in many of our most cherished assumptions. It is even forcing us to some of the very methods of the Communists themselves. [2243](#) We have tended to assume that such are the advantages of the free world that no majority in a country in the free world would ever willingly go over to Communism. But can we now be quite sure after the experience in Guiana? Lord Russell has rightly posed the question, what does democracy do then?

In my view, if it is a fair decision, fairly arrived at and firmly adhered to, on adequate information, by what I would call a properly literate electorate, a democrat must accept that decision; but if it is not fairly arrived at and is the result of a small majority at a single election in a semi-literate country, I do not think we can accept a decision of that sort. But it is our teaching in this country that the smallest possible majority entitles the Government to do what they will. In this country, of course, the Government are restrained by a long tradition, by all sorts of conventions, by the general conditions of the country, by the comparative lack of extreme poverty; but, whether we should try to transplant our ideas into very different countries where these conditions do not exist, is doubtful.

It seems to me—I agree here with Miss Hinden in her article—that the ultimate checks must always be the good sense of the people. But the system of voting, the checks in the Constitution, a strong Second Chamber and adequate political information and training, are also extremely important if we are to run a democracy and if we are to be sure that we will not get into the sort of difficulties that we find in British Guiana.

We blame the leaders of P.P.P. for going behind the Iron Curtain, but do we ourselves offer them the training and political education which is required? When coloured people come to this City of London, do they go away with a great feeling for democracy or with a feeling that we are disinterested in the Colonies; and do they go away offended by such things as the colour bar?

We must face it that in this case, for the best of reasons, we gave a Constitution too soon. The answer to that is not to delay constitutions, but to try to speed up the creation of conditions in which a constitution will work. Among those conditions pre-eminently are education, a [2244](#) proper system for the dissemination of political information, decent economic conditions and, if possible, experience in local or other forms of government.

What I am quite sure we have to realise is that Communism today offers an alternative, and one to which the people of Asia, Africa, South America and elsewhere will turn unless they see that they will get from the Western democracies a form of life and of government which will meet their needs. We are much too smug about our own form of government and also about the form of government which we have exported. We can do a lot to improve it at home and we must look very carefully in future at the brand which we send abroad.

§ 8.14 p.m.

§ [Mr. Græme Finlay \(Epping\)](#)

The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Grimond) spoke with exceptional moderation when he described P.P.P. as not entirely a democratic party. I should have said that a party that had committed under the direction of its Ministers some of the activities which are set out in the White Paper, even though, perhaps, some of them are not as sinister as some would seek to say, had certainly forgone any claim to be called anything like democratic. I should have thought the evidence of that was overwhelming.

From time to time the question has been asked: Why, if these men were breaking the law, were they not prosecuted? Let us reflect about that and picture the position of the official Attorney-General. In May an experiment was started with the best of hopes, and to this somewhat raw, primitive people was entrusted a Constitution with mature democratic rights. Inside the first few months, things have gone so far that one is faced with impartial, detached legal questions of prosecutions for sedition and conspiracy. One thing which stands out a mile is that prosecutions for sedition would only have made martyrs very early on, and prosecutions for conspiracy, a difficult offence to prove, might have done more harm than good. Those questions should be present in the minds of those who wonder whether prosecutions should have been undertaken.

I was glad to hear the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland, in common [2245](#) with the right hon. Member for Llanelly (Mr. J. Griffiths), pay tribute to the character of Sir Alfred Savage. It is extraordinary that nobody during the debate has referred to the Governor's message on the radio which proves beyond peradventure that he was a liberal, responsible administrator with a fine record in Barbados, who faced these steps only as a matter of the greatest reluctance, and that it was a matter of great personal unhappiness to him that he had to do this thing. I am sure

from what I have read about him that that is true. It is clear that he was seized with great hopes at the start of this Constitution that things would turn out very much better than they have done.

The right hon. Member for Llanelly was understating the case when he said that the P.P.P. Government had not taken their chances. They have gone far further than that. They have abused the trust which has been given to them by this Government, and abused it in tragic circumstances, because it is the people who, they allege, democratically elected them who will suffer as a result of their activities.

There was a disposition to pass off somewhat frivolously the inactivity of the Minister of Works. The Minister of Works is a much more important Minister in Guiana than he may be in this country, for the simple reason that he controls all the land drainage works and schemes of irrigation. It is well known that the neglect of these matters in a country like Guiana, which is under sea level, can lead to a great deal more disaster than is apparent to many people who have spoken in the House today.

It is difficult to have reached the conclusion which the Amendment has arrived at about these sinister activities and then to recoil from the further step. As somebody rightly said, one can only act upon one's information as reasonably as possible in circumstances of this sort, and it is difficult to find an intermediate stage between running the thing according to democratic lines and withdrawing the Constitution.

I do not believe that if the evidence shows—I think it does show—that the Ministers and the P.P.P. were not prepared to play the democratic game, one can do anything with an intermediate position. The arguments have been quite [2246](#) cogently stated against expelling the Ministers or against the other alternative of going to the country and having a fresh general election and, perhaps, getting a new Parliament. As has been said, I think the only thing which could be done in those circumstances was to make a clean break and revoke the Constitution. I do not think the reserve powers of the Governor would in fact work. I do not believe that is possible when there is a régime which is not prepared to cooperate on reasonable lines.

I should like to infuse some ray of hope into the future for this Colony. I hope the Colonial Secretary will encourage everything possible in the way of housing and that nothing will be neglected in the matter of public hospitals there, but everything possible will be done to make the people there believe that our system is better than the dangerous alternative of Communism. A very severe responsibility lies upon us. If it is neglected we have only this sort of thing to expect in the future. I hope very much that no step will be left untaken to see that the development of British Guiana is progressively maintained.

§ 8.21 p.m.

[§ Mr. Wedgwood Benn \(Bristol, South-East\)](#)

I should like to draw the attention of the House to a question which has hardly been touched upon by any hon. Member in tonight's debate—that is, what is to be the next step? Some hon. Members have dived deep into their experience of colonial administration and told us how they

would handle the situation up to the moment of suspension of the Constitution. Others, in my view equally misguided, have spoken as if every man-hovering on the brink of Communism in the Colony is like another trouble maker in his own trade union branch at home.

I do not think that approach is going to get us very far. We have to bring the Colony, whose whole constitutional advance has been delayed, back into the broad stream of development to self-government. Now is the moment when the Government ought to reaffirm absolutely frankly what is to be the ultimate position of the Colony. It might be held that it is unnecessary in this House for a Minister to say that it is still the intention of the Government that British Guiana shall be brought to full self-government [2247](#) at the earliest possible moment. It should be unnecessary to say whether it should be inside or outside the British Commonwealth. It may not be necessary to say that in this House, but the speech of the Minister will be read in British Guiana tomorrow morning and reaffirmation of the basic principle laid down by my right hon. Friend the Member for Llanelly (Mr. Griffiths) of the Colonial policy of this country might be of the greatest value.

We are now in a position, by the suspension of the Constitution, of having set back the development of the Colony more than 100 years. It was in 1893 that the first modification of the Dutch system of Government was brought into effect. In 1928 the elected system was introduced and 10 years ago the majority system was introduced for the elected Members to the Legislative Assembly. At the beginning of this year Ministerial responsibility was given and universal suffrage was brought about. What do we do now when we have stopped that entirely and the forces which brought about the breakdown of the Constitution are still there, more frustrated than before?

One has only to look at the countries which have faced this problem since the war to realise what can be done if we are ham-handed in our approach. Take India, on the one hand, and Indo-China on the other. When the British Government gave self-government to India it placed responsibility for looking after themselves firmly on Indian shoulders. They rose to the challenge, became the most respected Asian nation and have a world position quite unrivalled, and incidentally quite undreamed of by hon. Members opposite 10 years ago.

[§ Mr. Ellis Smith](#)

And more friendly towards us.

[§ Mr. Benn](#)

As my hon. Friend says, more friendly towards us. Look at Indo-China, where the tough policy was applied and no attempt was made to bring in self-government. Because of that every nationalist leader was forced into the hands of the Communists, because when they are in the struggle against a Colonial Power which does not want to give up control they turn to the Communists who are trained in every [2248](#) art of subversion. There must be many people in British Guiana who felt happy that the new Constitution would work but who will now go back as a result of this suspension disheartened and unable to answer the Communists who say that

their only hope now is to go in for guerilla warfare and the Mau Mau method. That is the problem the Government have to face.

I want to confine myself to the question of the Commission of inquiry, because it is essential that a Commission should be sent out as quickly as possible. The first question is to ask ourselves, what is that Commission to do? There are various types of Commissions which are sent out to Colonies. A group of Members of Parliament may go for "a wet weekend at Georgetown," as someone described a recent visit to Guiana, and come back and tell the House in five minutes what they found. Or an investigating committee may go whose only duty it would be to report on the incidents which led up to the suspension of the Constitution. A Commission may go to report on the possibility of a new Constitution different from that introduced in May of this year.

I submit to the House, particularly to the right hon. Gentleman who is to reply on behalf of the Government, that in deciding on the sort of Commission we should send, we should pick a body of men capable of considering the whole situation, not just one aspect of it. I think it would be a very great mistake if the terms of reference of the Commission were limited to reporting what has happened up to now, because we must have recommendations.

It would also be a great mistake simply to recommend a new Constitution when it may be that a Commission in reporting on what has happened would come back with proposals for minor modifications by which the suspended Constitution could be reintroduced. My hon. Friends are still pledged to the principles of the Constitution, universal suffrage, Ministerial responsibility and the elected majority. I suggest that this Commission should be allowed to look at the economic problems which in part lie behind the constitutional crisis.

[2249](#) In this connection, in all sincerity I want to make a suggestion to the Government as to the membership of the Commission.

It seems curious to me that few hon. Members speaking of British Guiana today have mentioned the only other very close parallel to this type of Colony facing a new type of constitution—the Gold Coast. It is very much to the credit of the Colonial Secretary that only yesterday he was able to announce to the House of Commons that he was to give the Gold Coast the next stage of development towards self-government and towards what I hope will be the first black Dominion in the British Commonwealth. It is interesting not only to people in the Gold Coast, but also to people in British Guiana, to consider why it was that the Constitution seemed to work in one case and not in another. I suggest to the Government that we would be very wise to associate an African from the Gold Coast in the Commission of inquiry into British Guiana.

Of course, not only are there many people of African origin in British Guiana—I think there are 160,000 of the descendants of the slaves brought over there from West Africa; more important, in the Gold Coast and British Guiana people are trying to work a democratic form of government on a very low standard of living. I confess to being sometimes rather annoyed by what look to me to be well-fed, well-dressed and well-educated people talking about what it must mean to run a system of ballot boxes, committee stages and report stages in a Colony which enjoys none of those advantages.

If we can send on that Commission a man nominated by Dr. Nkrumah it will do a great deal to associate at least two Colonies which have to face the same problem. In order to give greater force to my suggestion, I have taken the step of communicating with Dr. Nkrumah to ask if he would be willing. I had a telegram two days ago in which he said that if asked to do so by the United Kingdom Government he would be prepared to nominate a suitable African member of the Commission.

If one is to widen the Commission, the next suggestion I have to make is that India should be included on it. I have already referred to the position India now [2250](#) occupies in the world. It is right to add that its participation in the Neutral Nations Repatriation Commission in Korea has raised its reputation still higher in the world. "The Times," which is a rather cautious and practical newspaper, which employ rather cautious and practical reporters, in its despatch from Panmunjom has waxed almost lyrical when referring to the "Gandhian soul force" of the Indian officers trying to deal with the human tragedy which we are seeing enacted in that far country. If the reputation of India and of a distinguished Indian could be at the disposal of the Commission, it would be of great value. Not only would it mean that the Commission sent out by Her Majesty's Government would be more warmly received by the people of British Guiana: I think we should find that a report from people with experience similar to that facing the Colony would be of great value to us.

It is, of course, far more difficult for India, which is an entirely independent country, to volunteer to offer its services on such a Commission, but I say—and I can substantiate this, by some correspondence, with the Secretary of State, if he is interested—that I am quite convinced that the Indian Government would receive such a request and would probably be willing, if conditions were suitable, to arrange for a suitable Indian to be available to Her Majesty's Government on this Commission.

I say to the Government that it is only if we try and think along these lines that we shall be able to tackle the job of bringing some of these Colonies to full self-government. It really is not easy for us, however much good will we have, indeed however much experience we may have—those of us who have been in the Colonial Service, those who have had administrative experience—to put ourselves in the position of people trying to operate this Constitution.

Up to the war the British Commonwealth consisted simply and solely of the white Dominions. Today it is, by majority, neither white nor Christian; it is by majority of population a coloured and non-Christian Commonwealth. I believe that a sound policy for us to adopt would be to draw on the experience of the Commonwealth in order to see if we can help each other in whatever way possible. I submit the proposals which [2251](#) I have made in all sincerity to the Government tonight in the hope that they will try to break the deadlock, which I believe they have in part brought upon themselves by this precipitate action of suspending the Constitution, by cashing in on the good will and great experience of our brothers in the Commonwealth.

[§ 8.33 p.m.](#)

[§ Mr. Nigel Nicolson \(Bournemouth, East and Christchurch\)](#)

The speech of the hon. Member for Bristol, South-East (Mr. Benn) has been in tune with the character of the whole of this debate. Some people may have been surprised and gratified that more acrimony has not been shown in the discussion of the affairs of this Colony. Before the House met after the Recess a great many hard words were thrown about and an impression was given that when the matter came to be debated in Parliament it would be an occasion of acute differences.

In point of fact we have had a very moderate Amendment put down by the official Opposition, and scarcely a speech from the other side of the House which has given voice to that bitter feeling. We have had a speech from the hon. Member for Shettleston (Mr. McGovern) in which he very boldly said that he did not feel that he could go into the Lobby in support of his own party's Amendment. We have had a speech from the official spokesman of the Liberal Party, the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Grimond), in which he said that he has decided that, on the whole, our Government have taken the right action.

Only at the very beginning was a note of criticism of the Secretary of State introduced. It has been said that he is a hard-headed man; it has been suggested that he finds pleasure in taking such action as he did a short time ago in British Guiana. I merely ask the House, is it possible for a Minister in his position to take pleasure in suspending a Constitution which has only come into existence during his own term of office? Is it possible that someone like my right hon. Friend would want to look back after his term of office and boast that not one step has been taken towards the realisation of the aim we all desire, namely, greater democratic government for each Colony in the British Commonwealth? I do not think that is possible.

[2252](#) A great deal has been said, quite naturally and rightly, about the question of the degree of Communisation to which the P.P. Party was subjected. I do not think anyone so far has suggested that this party drew any of its funds or received any tactical assistance from Communist Russia. It has never been suggested that the leaders had direct contact with Moscow, or that they received their orders from Moscow. What has been put forward in the White Paper is that these leaders were in the habit of going frequently to the other side of the Iron Curtain as delegates and coming back infused with Communist ideas.

The programme upon which they fought the first election under the new Constitution was not a Communist programme. There were few individual items in it which could tend to be Communist, and the probability is that the rank and file of this party is not in the least aware that it is being led upon Communist lines. Indeed, I can well understand that Dr. Jagan himself may feel quite honestly that he is not a Communist. He may feel simply that he has been given a duty, a mission in life, to look after the interests of the poor people of this Colony; having gone to the other side of the Iron Curtain and seen something of the spirit there, he has returned filled with idealism without any intention of introducing Communism on the Russian model into his own Colony. But What I think is——

[§ Mr. Bernard Braine \(Billericay\)](#)

I wonder if my hon. Friend will permit me to interrupt him? He is pursuing a most interesting line of argument, but is not he aware—I think it is referred to in the White Paper—that Dr.

Jagan, in his capacity as a Minister, has expressed the view on the wireless to the people of Guiana that ultimate Communism is the ideal towards which he himself is striving?

§ Mr. Nicolson

I would not contradict my hon. Friend, but the argument I am advancing is that it does not matter whether it is Communism we are dealing with or another form of totalitarianism.

The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland said we are too much in danger of attributing to Communism all Left Wing or nationalist movements. All radical parties, all radical movements, in [2253](#) their aims and methods have something in common, and to attribute all these movements to the same source is, I think, ridiculous. He may not be a Communist, but what is certain, as is said in the Amendment put down by the Opposition, is that he is heading for some form of totalitarian government. It is very significant, surely, that after two and a half hours of conversation—so we learn from the Press—with Dr. Jagan himself, leaders of the Opposition have not been able to convince themselves that he is acting in good faith, and that after than conversation they put down this Amendment suggesting that he is moving towards totalitarian rule.

There has been no sign in the activities of the P.P.P. since they came to power that they have been embarrassed by having suddenly thrust upon them the responsibilities of constitutional government. Indeed, they have set out from the very start to make it impossible for any other party to come to power by the same means as they came to power themselves. They have done their best to seduce the police, the trade unions and the civil service from their proper allegiance and attach them to themselves. They have done nothing for the welfare of the people. They have scared off the very people who might have come from abroad with what is so badly needed, foreign capital, to assist this Colony to get back on to its feet. These activities are what the "New Statesman" call: seeking wider mass support for P.P.P. as a Government. I would call it an attack upon the Constitution itself.

This Constitution is not the Constitution of a sovereign State. It is the Constitution of a Colony which is dependent in the last resort upon the decision of my right hon. Friend and the British Houses of Parliament. The Colony cannot change its own Constitution. No party which is elected under the Constitution to a position of power can assume to itself the right to change the Constitution and give itself greater powers—not even when violence is not involved. But I am satisfied, if other hon. Members are not, that in this case violence was involved. I do not suppose that any Secretary of State has on any previous occasion thrown open so wide the files of his secret State papers in order to make that position perfectly clear.

[2254](#) In my opinion it would not have been possible to deal with this situation by exercising the reserve powers of the Government, yet this one point is all that divides the Opposition from ourselves. Should we have suspended the Constitution or should we have made use of these reserve powers? If we had merely made use of these powers what would have happened? We should have found a position in which, day by day, the Governor was being forced to revoke, one by one, the different sections of the Constitution, to overrule Ministers and veto the laws which they wished to pass.

Government would have become impossible. The presence of troops upon the spot showed that it was already a form of military law. The Governor was ruling through the threat of action by the troops whom he had been obliged to call in. The emphasis which has been given by suspending the Constitution would have been lost. The Colony would have been allowed to go downhill. Eventually the people would have been allowed to starve.

§ Dr. Stross

The hon. Gentleman has said that the Colony might have been allowed to starve and that there would have been a worsening in the economic situation of the country. That is the inference. When he mentions facts of that kind or expresses opinions like this, and says also that badly needed foreign capital is driven away, he forgets that we are dealing with a country inhabited by folk whose ancestors were brought to it in the olden days not necessarily of their own free will from two other continents. He forgets that in spite of the foreign capital put into that country the people had such a low standard of life that they have no belief in foreign capital ever being able to help them.

§ Mr. Nicolson

The new Constitution was introduced earlier this year to coincide with the infusion of new capital. It was hoped that the combination of this new financial stimulus and this new political stimulus would result very soon in the Colony being raised far above the status it enjoyed hitherto.

In all that my right hon. Friend said I was most impressed by the two telegrams he read out, one from the representative of local government in the Colony and one from the representative [2255](#) of the Africans. Both those two responsible leaders representing two sections of the population who, if anything, one would have supposed to have been on the side of P.P.P. and against my right hon. Friend, have on the contrary welcomed most strongly the action which he has taken as if they felt that they had been delivered from a form of tyranny and not subjected to one.

What are we to do in the immediate future? A former Colonial Secretary, of the party opposite, Mr. Creech Jones, writing recently about this crisis said that concession is always the wiser course and that people learn from practice the significance of responsibility. Surely, that is only true, if it is merely experience that was lacking among leaders. If they also show malice, which in my opinion Dr. Jagan did, and if they showed their intention to change their Constitution, then I think the time has come for the State, Whitehall, my right hon. Friend and this Parliament to step in and say "Thus far, and no further."

We in this House must decide when a Colony, or any overseas territory for which we are responsible, has overstepped the limits of what we regard as decent government. When something is done which seems to us outrageous—and by us, I mean sensible people of all parties—it is surely the time for us to step in. Even now, there is no disagreement at all upon the principle of what has been done, and the only disagreement we have heard has come from a minority who have not made their voices very loudly heard in this debate today.

I therefore conclude that, since the British Constitution is not confined to this country, and since we here are responsible for this Colony until it assumes Dominion status, we must put its Constitution in splints, so that it may work out its own future, both economic and political, when the men who have led it so unwisely up the wrong path have either been dismissed or have come to regard their error for what it is.

§ 8.47 p.m.

[§ Mr. Michael Stewart \(Fulham, East\)](#)

The Constitution of British Guiana, whose suspension we are debating tonight, is one of several examples of an advance towards self-government throughout the [2256](#) Colonial Empire, and, in common with the other attempts which have been made, it possesses the feature that it gives certain power and responsibility to native elected Ministers while keeping certain reserved powers in the hands of the Government. One may reasonably assume that the reason for that arrangement is that, when a Colony attains self-government, to begin with everything will not run smoothly, and reserved powers are put there in order to deal with that situation.

Surely it is of the very greatest importance that, when an advance like that is made, it should not be revoked unless we are faced with inescapable necessity, and unless it can be shown that there was really no other step that could have been taken to deal with that situation. That, as was realised by the hon. Member for Bournemouth, East and Christchurch (Mr. N. Nicolson), is the issue we have been discussing, and I could have wished that the Colonial Secretary had realised more precisely in his speech that that is the issue we are considering. Mere inefficiency in government on the part of a colonial administration cannot be used as evidence justifying the suspension of the Constitution.

There is bound, I believe, in the case of these advances towards self-government, to be a fair amount of inefficiency on the way. In suspending the Constitution, it is not enough to say that Ministers have neglected their work or have acted unwisely. It has to be shown that there was grave peril to law and order and the whole life of the people of the Colony, and that there was no other way in the existing constitutional set-up in which that situation could have been met.

[§ Mr. Lyttelton](#)

I think I should also add—Ministers acting against the spirit of the Constitution.

[§ Mr. Stewart](#)

Even if that were added, it still has to be shown that the suspension of the Constitution was the only way to meet that trend. It seems to me that if one side to the bargain—the native side—showed unwillingness to work the Constitution, that fact puts an even greater responsibility on the Colonial Office to try to make the Constitution work. Reserve powers are surely included for that very purpose.

[2257](#) What is the evidence of necessity that is put before us to justify the suspension of the Constitution? There are the allegations in the White Paper. Indeed, I would agree that many of them go further than allegations, and we can treat them as accepted facts, though not all. What is disquieting about the White Paper is the extraordinary lack of discretion and judgment with which it is compiled. There are things in it which cannot in the least be regarded as reasons for suspending the Constitution, such as the introduction of legislation considered to be unwise, but which was undoubtedly within the constitutional powers of the Ministers.

One feels that anyone who brings forward that kind of evidence as a reason for suspending the Constitution is a rather unreliable person when it comes to the very serious, though not entirely proved, allegations of threats of arson and conspiracy against the Constitution. Besides the White Paper, we have such additional stuff as that with which the Colonial Secretary provided us today. The right hon. Gentleman is asking the House to justify so serious an action as the suspension of the Constitution on what is, in fact, his allegation. He tells us that police agents discovered this alleged arson plot. The House would find it a bit easier to accept that kind of thing if the Colonial Secretary adopted a less flippant manner with the House when putting forward his case. It seems to me that any Indian or African who heard the two opening speeches in this debate, and then realised that it was the right hon. Gentleman opposite who was in charge of affairs, might really have wondered whether the people of this country ought not to have some reforms made here.

What are some of the things cited in the White Paper? That they introduced imprudent legislation and tried to get hold of the Public Service Commission. But under the reserved powers, they could be stopped by the Governor, and he could and did prevent them from getting hold of the Public Service Commission. So far as those points are concerned, there is nothing to justify the suspension of the Constitution.

Then there is what I regard as a serious matter, the neglect, and, I think, on the evidence, the wilful neglect of their [2258](#) proper work by the Ministers of the P.P.P. That was much harder to deal with by the reserve powers, because it is much easier to use these powers negatively to prevent an administration from doing something unwise than to prevent the wilful or deliberate neglect of duty. But what is disquieting is that the White Paper does not tell us anything substantial about whether any attempt was made to use such of the reserved powers as can be used for positive action.

It is true that to use those powers positively necessitates, except in a case of emergency, the prior approval of the Colonial Office. It is a slow and cumbrous procedure, but was it considered at all? Did the Governor at any time say, "Here are Ministers with important work to do which they are neglecting. Instead, they are engaging in this undesirable political activity. Ought I not to be considering with the Colonial Office the use of such powers as I have under the Constitution to introduce positive measures?"

Quite possibly all that was considered, but the White Paper does not say so. We are told in one part of it that on many occasions the Governor impressed upon Ministers the need to get ahead with constructive work. But we are not told what piece of constructive work he urged upon them, or what was the view of the Colonial Office. We would have welcomed a little more of that kind of information and less of those appendices dealing with visits of Ministers and their wives to

various conferences. Everybody could have guessed that kind of stuff from the rest of the document. We might have had a little more useful and constructive information before taking the drastic step which we are being asked to take tonight. It may be that there are answers to all this, but it is a great pity that we have not had them already, either in the White Paper or in the Colonial Secretary's speech.

[§ Mr. Lyttelton](#)

I spent about a quarter of an hour talking about the reserved powers.

[§ Mr. Stewart](#)

But the Colonial Secretary did not explain whether the Governor had taken up with Ministers the neglect of their duties and the definite proposals he had put to them as to what they ought to be doing, and whether there had been any consultation between the [2259](#) Governor and the Colonial Office as to the positive steps he could have taken.

The impression one gets from this White Paper, and anything the Colonial Secretary said to the contrary, is that this matter was allowed to slide for months. Some hon. Gentlemen on the Government benches have praised the Government because they said the Government acted in time while we on this side were advocating delay until too late. On the contrary, our contention is, in spite of anything we have been told to the contrary, that no attempt was made—the Colonial Secretary is laughing but if he had told us something about this when he was speaking, instead of sitting there doodling now——

[§ Mr. Lyttelton](#)

The hon. Gentleman is rather failing in his ordinary manners, which as a rule are courteous. If he wants me to, I will say that every day since the P.P.P. came into power—I thought this was well known and I paid a tribute to the Governor—the Governor has used every method, with tact, patience and forbearance, to try to get Ministers to work the Constitution, and he has failed.

[§ Mr. Stewart](#)

The right hon. Gentleman has not met my point. We have had all those generalities before. We want him to particularise in regard to the Ministers who are being charged with neglect. What were the particular measures that were urged upon Ministers by the Governor? Were there consultations between the Governor and the Colonial Office, and could his reserved powers have been used for this purpose? In fact, was there a genuine exploring of every alternative to suspending the Constitution before the Constitution was suspended? We have very serious charges made in the White Paper—I will not dispute them factually—about threats of violence and the use of violence. There again, the police were in the hands of the Chief Secretary. There were ordinary police, and judicial procedures to deal with conspiracy and the threat of violence. It is argued that the reason they were not used was that attempts were being made to suborn the police and that the police possibly were not reliable.

It is very significant that, although the White Paper talks of attempts to suborn [2260](#) the police, the evidence given of this in the White Paper does not suggest that the attempts had had any success. There is a paragraph describing a striking scene when the Parliament House was invaded, but it is significant that, unseemly as that scene was, apparently no property was damaged and nobody was killed or injured. The police were able to give protection to the Leader of the Opposition. They may well have been outnumbered, but there is no suggestion at all in that paragraph, which is vital to the argument, that the police were in any way unreliable. Once again, the case is not made out.

Further, if there were these threats of violence possibly the bringing in of reinforcements to the forces of law and order in the Colony was necessary, but, as my right hon. Friend the former Colonial Secretary pointed out, the bringing in of reinforcements need not necessarily be accompanied by a suspension of the Constitution. On this question of bringing in reinforcements the Colonial Secretary quoted certain telegrams expressing approval. This is a matter on which anyone ought to speak with great caution. I think it is well known that the local paper, the "Daily Argosy," which is not a paper of Left views at all, takes a quite contrary view on this matter. We ought to hear some comments on the views it expressed. It has expressed the view that the situation has deteriorated as a result of the use of force. That is a responsible criticism on which we ought to hear comment.

Finally, there was the possibility of having a fresh election to the House of Assembly. It was suggested that if that had been done it would have meant inevitably the Governor taking sides in the matter. But it must have been known from the way that events were going that in effect the P.P.P. Ministers and the Governor were on different sides, and if the maladministration mentioned in the White Paper were not sufficient ground for having a fresh election what could have been regarded as sufficient ground? The Colonial Secretary himself suggested that there was the possibility, at least, that if there had been elections they would have gone against the P.P.P.

What we are concerned about on this side of the House is that we feel that, instead of taking moderate powers which [2261](#) could have been taken earlier in order to deal with the situation, the Government have been content to let the thing slide and then use this extreme measure because the Government and the present Colonial Secretary have not that earnest desire to make a democratic Constitution work which will be necessary if colonial policy is to be a success throughout the Commonwealth.

§ 9.1 p.m.

§ [Mr. C. R. Attlee \(Walthamstow, West\)](#)

We are today discussing a matter of very vital importance to the whole of the Commonwealth and Empire. The suspension of a constitution anywhere is a matter that can only be done under very grave circumstances, and it is the duty of the Government to give the very fullest possible reasons and the duty of the Opposition to inquire into the sufficiency of those reasons. Because the Opposition make that inquiry there should be no suggestion whatsoever that we are in the

least approving of what has been done by the People's Progressive Party in British Guiana. We have expressed that in the Amendment which we have moved.

We must all look at this matter from the point of view of British Guiana, from the point of view of the Colonial Office generally and from the point of view, not only of the immediate present, but of the future. We had two speeches to open this debate. They made a very great contrast. I wish for many reasons that the debate might have been opened by my right hon. Friend the Member for Llanelly (Mr. J. Griffiths), because he was persuasive, reasonable, fair and made no party points. I wish the same could have been said of the Colonial Secretary. I felt that a good deal of his speech was quite unnecessarily provocative, that he did seek to make party points and that he set a tone which has fortunately not been followed and which was not really applicable to this debate.

I have been a long time in this House and I have known hon. and right hon. Members who were extraordinarily good at striking just the right tone for a debate. The late Stanley Baldwin was extraordinarily good at that, but, whatever the other qualities of the Colonial Secretary may be, I do not think that he has that quality. I have noticed him on [2262](#) occasions on which he has been flippant where he ought to have been serious and party political when he might have been speaking in a broader and national sense. That seems to indicate a certain insensitiveness on his part. It has led some people to question whether part of the troubles in the colonial sphere, which have increased so markedly during his term of office—[Interruption.]—I am not saying everywhere—may not be due to a certain lack of appreciation of the views of other people.

Take, for instance, the present position. He obviously looked at our Amendment as if it merely attempted to make a party point. He does not seem to understand that there are a great many people in this country, not by any means all of our political persuasion, who do consider that it is a matter of grave doubt as to whether his action was wise. He does not seem to see that it is possible to condemn the People's Progressive Party and all its works and yet not approve his particular attitude.

I thought it was rather characteristic that he tried to indicate that we were opposing the sending of troops. No one on this side of the House has ever suggested that. He seemed to suggest that we should have been afraid to send troops. We would not have been. We have never criticised it at all, although there may be criticisms of the way in which it was done. Indeed, I have heard criticisms from British Guiana that it would have been more useful to have had troops there before the Constitution was suspended, and not afterwards. They had some days of rather painful anxiety. In principle, it is quite obvious that law and order has got to be maintained. I think it is unfortunate that the right hon. Gentleman should have taken that kind of line.

We have to consider just what this position is. We have this very backward country; there was an election with inexperienced people, at which I gather there were a vast number of candidates. There was one organised party, and that party got control of the Government, although it got only 51 per cent. of the votes. The important point is that the whole of the country was not behind the P.P.P. The right hon. Gentleman himself read telegrams, and I have received telegrams from various sections showing [2263](#) that there is great opposition to the P.P.P.

I gather from the Governor's broadcast and from letters that I have received that in the period which has elapsed since this party took office there has been a growing dissatisfaction with this Communist-led party. I do not think it is necessary to go into details as to the make-up of this party, whether its leaders are members of the Communist Party or, what is equally probable, Communist stooges. In any case, if they had been successful their lives would probably have been short. It is quite clear that they speak the language of the Communists and they feed on Communist literature.

The question we have to consider is what is to be the future of this country and how it is best to counter Communism. The way to counter Communism is to prevent the Communists getting the lead. In countries where Communists have been successful they managed to put themselves at the head, sometimes of nationalist movements and sometimes of other movements. The danger throughout Asia, Africa and other parts of the world where living conditions are low is that those are the kind of conditions in which, through their organisation and their specious promises, Communists can take the lead. Therefore, what has always been emphasised is the importance of getting the people as a whole against them.

We can look at what has been done in various places. I do not know why Malaya is so often mentioned. It was mentioned singularly ineptly by one hon. Member opposite who seemed to think that if we had suspended the Constitution there we could have ended the trouble in the Malayan jungles, which seem to me to show a certain lack of knowledge. What have General Templer and Mr. Macdonald been doing? The endeavour has been to get the masses of the people, whether Malays or Chinese, against the Communist gangs. That is exactly the sort of thing which is indicated in General Erskine's recent pronouncement in Kenya. The important thing is to get the mass of the people against the Communists.

We now have to see whether the line which the Government have taken is proving effective. I rather gathered that there was a growing lack of support for [2264](#) the P.P.P. They were showing complete ineptitude in government. They had called numbers of strikes, ineffectively, very largely, except for ruining the economics of the sugar industry. They had fulfilled none of their promises. There seemed to me to be evidence coming in that they were on the downgrade.

Therefore, the important thing was not to give them a rallying cry. A possible rallying cry for them is nationalism, or anti-colonialism, and one is also provided if they, as Communists, are left to appear as the champions of democracy against alien rule. It was essential that no such rallying cry should be given them. The question now is whether the action of the British Government has given the Communists just the opportunity they wanted and whether, instead of being on the down-grade, they have now been given the opportunity to get on the up-grade again.

The Constitution was attacked by them from the start, as frequently happens. We have seen shining examples of how to work a limited Constitution. We have seen it in the Gold Coast, in Barbados and elsewhere. It is a very great credit to the British Commonwealth and Empire that we have men like Mr. Manley and others who are showing highly responsible leadership. The people with whom we are concerned in British Guiana have to be shown as failures and not as successes.

I am afraid of the results of the action which has been taken. I wish to know from the Minister who is to reply how far the Government considered other methods. It is the essence of a limited Constitution that there should be checks. I gather that it was thought wise at the start—in what I say I am not in any way whatever attacking the Governor, for whom we all have the very greatest respect and regard—to let these people have their heads to a large extent. That may have been right at the start, but if things are going wrong, that is where reserve powers come in. It seems to me that there was no attempt to use any of the reserve powers—there were no light taps until the sledge-hammer was brought in—and it is questionable whether that was the wisest policy.

Let us take, for example, a matter which has arisen very prominently, the [2265](#) question of the police force. We are not told in the White Paper how far the police force was really being corrupted. Obviously, some of the people wanted to do it. Were they succeeding? What steps were taken to counteract it? When the incidents came—there were some quite serious incidents—were there instances of the police failing to do their duty? If they were failing to do their duty, it was right to reinforce them. But this was a matter entirely in the Governor's hands. It may be that some of the Ministers made speeches—I gather that in those parts of the world speeches are habitually stronger than the ones to which we are accustomed here these days—not unlike some of the speeches which used to be made in this country years ago, and I wonder what was actually done about them.

We are told about this criminal conspiracy. That is a very serious accusation to make against public men. If it is made, it should be backed up. If there was a real danger of the burning down of Georgetown, then the right thing to do was to bring these people before the courts. That has not been done. All that has been left over and this other action has been taken.

There is another thing which seems to me might have been done, and it was referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Fulham, East (Mr. M. Stewart). Why not have a dissolution? The Colonial Secretary, I must say, dismissed that in a very peculiar way. He said that if the Governor were to order a dissolution he would be taking sides in politics, or words to that effect.

[§ Mr. Lyttelton](#)

I did not say that at all.

[§ Mr. Attlee](#)

He would be drawn into the political arena.

[§ Mr. Lyttelton](#)

The right hon. Gentleman will be able to read in HANSARD what I said, and he will see that he is misrepresenting me now.

[§ Mr. Attlee](#)

I am not trying to misrepresent the right hon. Gentleman. I am trying to give the sense of what he said. I understood him to say that the reason for not having had dissolution would be that the Governor would be brought into the political arena. If I am wrong in [2266](#) that the right hon. Gentleman can correct me.

[§ Mr. Lyttelton](#)

The right hon. Gentleman is quite correct that that is the conclusion, but he must add that the only grounds on which the Governor could propose a dissolution was that the P.P.P. Ministers were unsuitable Ministers and that would involve the Governor taking part in politics.

[§ Mr. Attlee](#)

I cannot see how, if the Constitution is suspended on the grounds that Ministers are conspiring to burn down Georgetown among other things, that that is less emphatic than saying that by having a dissolution the Governor would be interfering in politics. I always understood, and I heard it very often from unimpeachable Conservative sources, that one of the supports they have for the powers of the House of Lords in old times was that the House of Lords might force a dissolution in order that the electors might reconsider their previous decision which had turned out foolishly. Surely that would be very good grounds.

I gather that the people were suffering from the incompetence of this Government and they had been calling strikes all over the place. We are told that there was a run on the banks, that the Government would have difficulty in paying their way, that the finances were in a mess and so on. Surely under those circumstances it was possible to say: "We had an election this year. Your are very inexperienced Ministers but we will give you another chance. Why not have a dissolution?" How can it possibly be suggested that a dissolution is more drastic or more political than the suspension altogether of the Constitution. After all, in this country there used to be dissolutions called by the King, but I think we call that less drastic than Oliver Cromwell taking the Mace away. I do not think that that is an argument at all. I should like to know whether any serious consideration was given to that, because it is obvious that there are elements in that country which can be appealed to.

The right hon. Gentleman has given examples from letters which he has received from various organisations, important ones. There are the heads of the villages, there is the other trade union, there are the other political parties and various groups. I have not seen any of [2267](#) them, but I am hoping to see some of them. I have seen the leaders of the P.P.P. and had a considerable talk with them. They did not in any way disabuse me of the idea that they were behaving extremely unwisely and that they were either Communists or Communist dupes. However, I understand that there are these other elements, and the important thing is to appeal to those elements.

I am not sure whether, on the information I have received, the action of the right hon. Gentleman will have made it more difficult for those people to rally to the reasonable, the democratic cause. It is one thing for the P.P.P. to go to the country with all their sins upon them and to say, "Support us" just because the Government is dissolved; it is quite another thing when they are

able to beat the big drum and say, "We have had our constitutional rights taken away" and so on. That is why we doubt the wisdom of the action of the right hon. Gentleman.

We have not disputed that it might be necessary to bring in troops. If there was serious disaffection among the police and if there was real danger of violence, it was obviously right to do that. But I do not think there should necessarily have been the suspension of the Constitution. I do not think there would have been much outcry about the presence of troops. If people are being intimidated, they are rather glad of them and we often find that our troops are the best ambassadors we have anywhere. I do not see why great trouble should have been expected over that. There could then have been a dissolution, and although one cannot prophesy what would have happened, there was a chance of getting more reasonable men in.

What has happened is that almost for the first time—except in the rather peculiar case of Newfoundland—we have had this step backwards and I do not know quite what is intended now. When a Commission is sent out, will it recommend a restricted franchise—I do not think that would be effective—or a further restriction of powers, or what will it recommend? In any case presumably, in some way or other, there will be a retreat. I do not think that will rally support.

There are really plenty of powers in this Constitution in the ordinary course of [2268](#) events, provided there is a fairly reasonable Government. I do not think that the Government they had would work anything because, as I say, I think they were under Communist influence. But if there were another one, perhaps inexperienced, I think they could be guided. All people, no doubt, including ourselves, make mistakes in the beginning of working the most difficult system of all, democracy. I think the people of British Guiana made a very big mistake but, if we take this step backward, I think there will be great difficulty in getting anything but a people led by these Communists.

Therefore our ground is this: that the matter has not been well handled. We have no dispute whatever about the dangers of the situation and of the need for action. I leave for the moment the other suggestion we made about action that might have been taken by the Colonial Secretary and the Governor. Our indictment is that there were other methods: that the Government brought in the last thing they should have done and that they brought it in first.

[§](#) 9.25 p.m.

[*§ The Minister of Housing and Local Government \(Mr. Harold Macmillan\)*](#)

This has been a very interesting day's debate, particularly so because many of the speeches were made from different parts of the House by Members with special knowledge of this problem. We are indebted to the hon. Member for Durham (Mr. Grey) and to my hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Mr. Vaughan-Morgan), who gave information based upon personal visits. The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Grimond), in a most polished contribution, made a balanced case but, fortunately, came down—I was watching anxiously—upon the right side of the balance. The hon. Member for Shettleton (Mr. McGovern) made a most robust contribution, and made the most sensible speech that I have heard in the House for a very long time.

As a result of all these speeches, from the Front Benches as well as the back benches, three main questions have emerged. These questions have been uppermost in our minds, and on the answers to them the issue must depend. The first is whether the home Government have produced evidence of a danger in British Guiana so serious as to justify the measures which were taken to meet [2269](#) it. The second is whether those measures were taken prudently and efficiently so as to minimise the loss of life and property and the risk of violence. The third, perhaps underlying it all and almost the most important of all, is whether the Government in the United Kingdom have the right and the duty, even at the cost of the temporary suspension of the democratic Constitution, to prevent its reality from being undermined from the misuse of its form. Those are really the problems.

[§ Mr. J. Hynd](#)

They are not the questions.

[§ Mr. Macmillan](#)

As regards the first question—[Interruption.]—they are the questions which the Opposition have put down in their Amendment—I believe that the House must be convinced by the evidence published in the White Paper. Even the Amendment seems to be convinced of it. It may be true, and I think it is true, that none of these separate accusations against the People's Progressive Party leaders could be held sufficient in itself to justify the serious course which Her Majesty's Government have had to adopt; but surely, taken together, they are really conclusive.

After all, these men were Ministers of the Crown as well as party leaders. The Amendment conveniently, perhaps significantly, omits reference to that fact. It simply deplores the work of the party leaders, not of the Ministers; there is a difference. A certain sense of responsibility comes upon Members opposite when they are given the work of office.

Surely, the actions of these men—this, after all, is the accusation—in removing the ban against Communist propaganda and the entry into the Colony of notorious West Indian Communists; their encouragement of subversive literature; their tampering with the police, both overtly and covertly; their declared intention of abolishing, by refusing the necessary funds, the Public Service Commission, and thereby destroying something which is quite essential to Parliamentary Government, that is, a loyal and impartial body of civil servants—sometimes we do not altogether recognise enough, even in this country, how much we owe to that great tradition of the Civil Service and the loyalty which successive Ministers enjoy from it—their "packing" of the various committees and boards; their declared [2270](#) intention to introduce political bias into the field of education and to destroy the position of the Churches and to take away their rights over the schools which the various denominations have themselves provided; finally, their tampering with the public servants of these legally appointed boards; their dangerous stimulation of racial hatreds; their subversion of the properly-constituted trade union structure and their interference with the procedure of joint consultation and conciliation; their rash attempts to force this revolutionary legislation through the Assembly without regard to the rules of order or the rights of the minority, which were forestalled by the Speaker's firmness, although the Bill was ultimately passed, and then their active fomenting of industrial strife instead of using their

position as Ministers to calm and alleviate it; their reckless disregard of the economic interests of labour whose major need is to attract, not to repel, capital investment from the outer world, and their clear determination to achieve their ends by every possible means, legal and illegal, not excluding violence, disorder and even, it is suspected, arson—[HON MEMBERS: "Suspected."] I will come to that. Curiously enough, the Deputy-Speaker was to take a hand acting with the leading Ministers.

All these I say, taken together, form a cumulative indictment which is overwhelming. I think that any British Government in this country which had failed to act faced with this evidence of folly and misdemeanour, or which had shrunk from using its power, would have been guilty of dereliction of its own duty both to the Colony and to Parliament.

The right hon. Member for Llanelly (Mr. J. Griffiths) said that the grave charge of arson, if it could be maintained, merited prosecution. That, of course, is true, but he knows that that does not rest with the Home Government. It does not even rest with the Governor; it rests with the Attorney-General—[HON. MEMBERS: "Will he take action?"] We do not know whether he will take action or not, but I am bound to say that the right hon. Member has not very much helped these leaders in their cause. He gave us a very graphic description of his interview and he said that they denied the charge of arson. But just before that, he told us that they also denied the charge [2271](#) of Communist affiliation, and he said, "When they denied that, I did not believe them." I do not know whether he is to be treated as a friendly or a hostile witness, but it will not do them very much good in court if he gives that evidence.

[§ Mr. J. Griffiths](#)

I did not believe that because they did not deny the evidence that they had Communist affiliations. We asked them, quoting paragraph 30, "Are you or are you not guilty? Do you accept or do you not accept the charge here?" They said, "No." I reported that to the House because I thought it was the right thing to do.

[§ Mr. Macmillan](#)

Exactly, and I will say again that they denied the accusation, but the right hon. Member did not believe them. His words are in HANSARD, and he will see them tomorrow.

The right hon. Member knows quite well that no one could have been more reluctant to take so grave a step than my right hon. Friend. The House has very great sympathy and respect for my right hon. Friend. He has inherited a very great office and he has the special and unusual privilege of serving in a post which his much-loved and greatly-respected father held before him. But he has also inherited many great difficulties and baffling problems. The right hon. Gentleman the Leader of the Opposition made a rather bitter attack upon my right hon. Friend. He said, "Why do you not behave with the same liberality and the same democratic method that has won such success in Malaya and in Kenya?"

[§ Mr. Attlee](#)

Really, the right hon. Gentleman should try to stick a little more closely to the text. I never said anything of the sort. What I said was that the authorities out there took the line that the most important thing in dealing with Communists was to get the support of the population.

§ Mr. Macmillan

But under whose authority is General Templer acting? Under my right hon. Friend's. The Leader of the Opposition, in his rather peevish and waspish manner, talks about making party points, but he gave no credit for parts of the world where he thought —[Interruption.]

§ Mr. Attlee

There is no party point whatever. I thought that everybody in [2272](#) this House knew that General Templer was appointed by this Government; everybody knew in the case of General Erskine. I was only contrasting the methods being employed here with the methods there. I was not trying to award any credit or discredit. Try to get away from the party line a bit now.

§ Mr. Macmillan

I see that the right hon. Gentleman is in rather a difficulty because he praises my right hon. Friend in one direction but not in the other.

Apart from the accusations and charges in the White Paper, apart from those specified of the associations and affiliations of the Ministers in British Guiana, we are not at all surprised. We know, and hon. Gentlemen opposite know, that there is only one source from which such inspiration flows. An hon. Member below the Gangway put his finger on it. We know it only too well. The great Labour organisations in this country—the great trade union organisations—know it only too well. It comes from the poisoned well of international Communism. Strong heads, firm in a long tradition of democratic institutions and long nurtured in freedom, can perhaps afford to disregard this danger, but those who are making their first experiments in democracy have a right to be protected.

Now comes the second question, and I am glad to note that there seems to be a general unanimity emerging. It is, have the Government acted prudently as well as boldly? The despatch of troops to support the civil power and police is always very distasteful, but if it is timely it is much more merciful than if it is too late. My right hon. Friend has this supreme justification for his action: it has been successful—at least up to the present—in its chief objective. That is, and always must be, the avoidance of any breakdown of law and order. Such a breakdown always results in the greatest suffering being inflicted on the most innocent, for in civil disorders the major criminals and the chief instigators to violence generally get off the lightest. The severest blows and hardships fall more often than not on their deluded victims. The actions taken by Her Majesty's Government have been justified by their success in averting these calamities. It is naturally a disappointment to every Member of the House; it is a setback to our hopes for British Guiana; but, as I think is [2273](#) generally accepted on both sides of the House, we must expect these occasional disappointments and setbacks.

In spite of its well-established sugar industry, its mineral resources and its reserves of forest wealth, British Guiana is by nature a poor country. The greater part of the population live in the narrow coastal belt from which the sea can only be kept back by large dykes and drainage works which are most costly to build and to maintain. The natural cost of producing sugar and other crops is very high, and, in addition to these, there are other handicaps from which it suffers. Strangely enough some centuries ago this was the area that was supposed to be the place where the fabled city of El Dorado was situated——

Hon. Members

Oh.

[§ Mr. M. Follick \(Loughborough\)](#) rose——

Hon. Members

Give way.

[§ Mr. Speaker](#)

Order. If the Minister does not give way, the hon. Member should not possess the Floor.

[§ Mr. Macmillan](#)

Those old dreams have been succeeded by a sounder concept of the true partnership of effort. The natural wealth cannot be claimed from such a country unless large supplies of capital investment are brought in from outside, and such a partnership between us and that Colony will be established by doing just that thing.

Of course, it has made other difficulties. There is a mixed population of different races and a dark history of slavery followed by the confusion immediately following emancipation. The principal source, the sugar industry— [HON. MEMBERS: "Get on with it."] I am only showing all these reasons which I think the right hon. Gentleman will agree with. He spoke of the bad old days. Of course, the good old days were when the sugar industry flourished before the withdrawal of preference. I say that all these difficulties are part of the background and must be borne in mind. We must bring sympathy and understanding to them, because of our knowledge of the difficulties. We must not abandon the task to which we have set our hand.

At this point I think there is emerging a certain measure of agreement. I thought the Leader of the Opposition [2274](#) rather indicated that, or tried to. We are agreed that charges against the leaders, or some of the leaders—and leaders who are not only leaders of a party, but Ministers — are not disputed. According to the terms of the Amendment, they are to be deplored. The tendency to establishing Communism is also admitted—I suppose by all the party opposite. The actions taken by Her Majesty's Government for law and order are not attacked.

So what remains? What remains of this Motion of censure? I suppose that is an internal question inside the party opposite—[HON. MEMBERS: "Cheap!"] I suppose some price had to be paid for the first part of this Amendment. To deplore the P.P.P.'s leaders, to deplore the tendency to Communism—that was pretty strong meat for some hon. Members of the party opposite. It did not go well with the tribunes of the people. And so, having said a certain amount of sense in the first part of the Amendment, they had to put in some weak, vacillating, washy words in the second part. At least they had to get some reason for going into the Lobby to vote. The Amendment is, therefore, willing to wound, but hardly willing to strike. It admits a critical and almost revolutionary situation, but it yet attacks the only effective means of controlling it.

The right hon. Gentleman the Member for Llanely ended his speech with a particularly bitter attack upon my right hon. Friend which was deeply resented on this side of the House. I do not think he really meant to say it, because he never really knows what he is going to say and probably never says what he means. [Interruption.] When the right hon. Gentleman starts to say offensive things, he must expect a reply.

He was asked two questions. He was asked, "Had the Socialist Party been in power, would they have transferred the troops from Jamaica to Georgetown to ensure law and order?" He was asked a second question, "Would they have kept the Ministers of the P.P.P. in office?" To the first question he gave a perfectly straightforward answer. He said that he would have sent them to Georgetown. Does all the party opposite stand by that?

As to the second part, I thought that he was a little confused. As I understand it, he said that first he would have sent for the members of the P.P.P.—the [2275](#) Ministers—himself. He said, "I would have sent for them, talked to them in a friendly way and tried to appeal to them to change their habits." If he had failed to do that, I understand that then the Governor was to dismiss the Ministers. I thought that was his solution. But the trouble about this, of course, is that under the Constitution the Governor cannot dismiss the Ministers except with the consent of the Executive Council. Then that would be one by one. But the Executive Council has a majority of P.P.P. Ministers, so that does not really seem to be a very helpful suggestion.

[§ Mr. J. Griffiths](#)

It is true that the Governor has to submit a proposal to dismiss the Ministers, but the Governor also has power to act contrary to the advice and on his own initiative.

[§ Mr. Macmillan](#)

Not on this matter.

[§ Mr. Griffiths](#)

Yes.

[§ Mr. Macmillan](#)

I state categorically that he cannot dismiss the Ministers except with the consent of the members of the Executive Council. I challenge any contradiction. Technically he can do this—perhaps this was the suggestion. He can remove their portfolios, and then they all become Ministers without Portfolio. There is something to be said for a few Ministers without Portfolio in a Cabinet, but it is rather a pity to have all Ministers without Portfolio.

What would happen would be that the ex officio members of the Council would take over the work and so there would be an Executive Council of three Ministers who had all the jobs—and did all the work—that is the officials—and six Ministers who would be prevented from going to their offices but who would still be members of the Cabinet or Executive Council.

Alternatively, it was suggested—I am coming to the suggestions of the Leader of the Opposition last—that the Governor could dissolve the Legislature. I thought that the answer of the hon. Member for Shettleston was a complete reply to that. First, instead of suspending the Constitution the Governor should have dissolved the Legislature. But the suspension of the Constitution is done on the responsibility of the home Government and with the support of Parliament. A [2276](#) dissolution, of course, would be the sole responsibility of the Governor.

Look, then, at the position of the Governor. An election is held. What would be the subject of the election? Do hon. Gentlemen suppose that it would be the merits of the parties and their programme? Not a bit. It would be the action of the Governor. That would be the only question discussed at the election. The Governor would in fact have announced in advance that he was unwilling and unable to co-operate with the leaders of one of the parties, and that the larger party. That would be the most complete interference with the whole spirit of the Constitution. It seems to me that these are really methods of what amounts to suspending the Constitution, but doing it by devious, dangerous and not too straightforward methods. I think the only honest course is the course which my right hon. Friend has taken.

Finally, how are the Government to carry on while all these processes are being carried out? The Governor has certain positive powers under the Constitution. He can authorise taxation, and he can take other measures necessary for good government; he has certain negative powers to veto anything the Ministers could do or the Legislature proposed. There would, therefore, be a sort of permanent deadlock. The Governor would actually be acting upon the two worst principles of government which together have brought many monarchies to their end. He would be acting solely by these particular powers—the first one prerogative and the second veto. One can hardly imagine a worse system by which to carry on good administration.

[§ Mr. Glenvil Hall \(Colne Valley\)](#)

What happens now?

[§ Mr. Macmillan](#)

Not this confusion of having Ministers who can be overridden in every single thing they do.

Next, the right hon. Gentleman said he would send out and see what was happening and then come to a decision. I do not think that would be a very good plan. The Governor and Ministers were in conflict, such as I have been describing, and the whole Colony would have been in a state of permanent apprehension and alarm which certainly would not [2277](#) have been resolved by sending out a constitutional Commission. In fact, the very fact of sending out the commission would have been proof that the original Constitution had in fact failed. I do not think it is a very good plan. If there is a fire, then one gets hold of a fire extinguisher or a fireman, but, after the fire has been extinguished, then it seems to me is the time to inquire into the cause and possible measures for its prevention in the future.

I say, therefore, that anyone who impartially examines, with careful inquiry into the character of this Constitution, all the other courses which my right hon. Friend might have taken, must agree that he took the only practicable course that was available. If that is the sole thing between us, if it is agreed that the accusations were grave and that the tendency to Communist propaganda had to be stopped, if the sole thing between us is whether we should suspend the Constitution openly with the approval of Parliament or whether the Governor, bit by bit and by using his special powers, should reduce the Constitution to a farce, then that is really not so grave a difference—although we feel strongly that our view is right—as to justify a Division on a great Colonial issue.

There were references to the third question, not only in this House but in the discussions and thought given to this matter in many quarters outside, for I feel that this is a very great issue which did raise many disappointments and has caused many thinking people to be wondering how the future is to go. The third question can be put fairly in this way. Even if the evil records and evil intentions of these Ministers are clear beyond reasonable doubt, and even if the action taken has proved to be both efficacious and merciful, have we the moral right to take preventive action to see that democracy, as we understand it and as the free world understands it, is not overthrown and extinguished, even in a small area, to be succeeded by a totalitarian or Communist state? I know that there are some people who argue that a democratically-elected Government, once they achieve a Parliamentary majority, have a right to use the processes and the forms of law to override any minority, however large, and to alter the spirit as well as the letter of the Constitution. That way [2278](#) would destroy, in effect, all opposition, and would set up in the end an authoritarian state.

Many references have been made today, and very deservedly, to an article which has appeared by Dr. Rita Hinden, one of the members of the constitutional Commission. I thought it was both interesting and profoundly wise. She posed the question and did not shrink from the answer. She made it clear that, in her view, every constitutional advance in the Colony furthered by Great Britain is an act of faith on the part of the British Parliament and British people. Surely, therefore, we must not betray that faith. In her words: When that trust is perverted, we become partners to the betrayal if we take no action while we can. I think the effective words are "while we can."

Parliamentary Government, as we know so well, depends upon a high degree of mutual forbearance and good will. We differ often in this House and disagree on many things; but the

only reason our system works is because we know that in the last analysis we agree about a great many more—and these more important and fundamental.

There are many subjects on which during the next few weeks or days we shall have an opportunity of dispute and debate with each other. There will, I hope, soon come a time when, after this setback, it will be opportune to make a fresh advance. I hope that the Commission that will be sent out will be able to report to us the ways and means of doing so. But meanwhile I ask the House, in all sincerity, because we have had a good debate and given and taken our blows, not to treat this as one of the matters on which we may properly enjoy our party differences and disputes, and, above all, not to insist on a party Division, which we shall understand in this House, but which will not be so well understood in the West Indies.

To force this issue on so slender a difference as that between anaesthetising the Constitution by pinpricks or suspending it—that is all it is—is really not justifiable. Of course, if hon. Members insist upon it, we shall accept the challenge, and if by any chance they should be successful in the Lobby, we shall be ready to take the issue to the [2279](#) nation to judge. Meanwhile, we are still the Imperial Parliament. We boast that we are the Mother of Parliaments, and I suggest that we should be true to our trust.

[2280](#)

§ Question put, "That the words proposed to be left out stand part of the Question."

§ The House divided: Ayes. 294; Noes, 256.

[2283](#)

Division No. 226.]	AYES	[10.0 p.m.
Allan, Ft. A. (Paddington, S.)	Eccles, Rt. Hon. Sir D. M.	Lambton, Viscount
Alport, C. J. M.	Eden, Rt. Hon. A.	Lancaster, Col. C. G.
Amery, Julian (Preston, N.)	Elliot, Rt. Hon. W. E.	Langford-Holt, J. A.
Amory, Heathcoat (Tiverton)	Erroll, F. J.	Law, Rt. Hon. R. K.
Anstruther-Gray, Major W. J.	Fell, A.	Leather, E. H. C.
Arbuthnot, John	Finlay, Graeme	Legge-Bourke, Maj. E. A. H.
Ashton, H. (Chelmsford)	Fisher, Nigel	Legh, Hon. Peter (Petersfield)
Assheton, Rt. Hon. R. (Blackburn, W.)	Fleetwood-Hesketh, R. F.	Lennox-Boyd, Rt. Hon. A T
Astor, Hon. J. J.	Fletcher, Sir Walter (Bury)	Lindsay, Martin
Baker, P. A. D.	Fletcher-Cooke, C.	Linstead, Sir H. N.
Baldock, Lt.-Cmdr. J. M.	Ford, Mrs. Patricia	Llewellyn, D. T.
Baldwin, A. E.	Fort, R.	Lloyd, Rt. Hon. G. (King's Norton)
Banks, Col. C.	Foster, John	Lloyd, Maj. Sir Guy (Renfrew, E.)

Barber, Anthony	Fraser, Hon. Hugh (Stone)	Lockwood, Lt.-Col. J. C.
Barlow, Sir John	Fyfe, Rt. Hon. Sir David Maxwell	Longden, Gilbert
Baxter, A. B.	Galbraith, Rt. Hon. T. D. (Pollok)	Low, A. R. W.
Beach, Maj. Hicks	Galbraith, T. G. D. (Hillhead)	Lucas, Sir Jocelyn (Portsmouth, S.)
Bell, Philip (Bolton, E.)	Gammans, L. D.	Lucas, P. B. (Brentford)
Bell, Ronald (Bucks, S.)	Garner-Evans, E. H.	Lucas-Tooth, Sir Hugh
Bennett, Dr. Reginald (Gosport)	George, Rt. Hon. Maj. G. Lloyd	Lyttelton, Rt. Hon. O.
Bennett, William (Woodside)	Godber, J. B.	McAdden, S. J.
Bevins, J. R. (Toxteth)	Gough, C. F. H.	McCallum, Major D.
Birch Nigel	Gower, H. R.	McCorquodale, Rt. Hon. M. S.
Bishop, F. P.	Graham, Sir Fergus	Macdonald, Sir Peter
Black, C. W.	Gridley, Sir Arnold	Mackeson, Brig. H. R.
Boothby, Sir R. J. G.	Grimond, J.	Mackie, J. H. (Galloway)
Bossom, Sir A. C.	Grimston, Hon. John (St. Albans)	Maclay, Rt. Hon. John
Bowen, E. R.	Grimston, Sir Robert (Westbury)	Macleod, Rt. Hon. Iain (Enfield, W.)
Boyd-Carpener, J. A.	Hall, John (Wycombe)	MacLeod, John (Ross and Cromarty)
Boyle, Sir Edward	Harden, J. R. E.	Macmillan, Rt. Hon. Harold (Bromley)
Braine, B. R.	Hare, Hon. J. H.	Macpherson, Niall (Dumfries)
Braithwaite, Sir Albert (Harrow, W.)	Harris, Frederic (Croydon, N)	Maitland, Comdr. J. F. W. (Horncastle)
Braithwaite, Lt.-Cdr. G. (Bristol, N. W.)	Harris, Reader (Heston)	Maitland, Patrick (Lanark)
Bromley-Davenport, Lt.-Col. W. H.	Harrison, Col. J. H. (Eye)	Manningham-Buller, Sir R. E.
Brooke, Henry (Hampstead)	Harvey, Air Cdre. A. V. (Macclesfield)	Markham, Major Sir Frank
Brooman-White, R. C.	Harvey, Ian (Harrow, E.)	Marlowe, A. A. H.
Browne, Jack (Govan)	Harvie-Watt, Sir George	Marples, A. E.
Bullard, D. G.	Hay, John	Marshall, Douglas (Bodmin)
Bullus, Wing Commander E. E.	Head, Rt. Hon. A. H.	Marshall, Sir Sidney (Sutton)
Burden, F. F. A.	Heald, Sir Lionel	Maude, Angus

Butcher, Sir Herbert	Heath, Edward	Maydon, Lt.-Comdr. S. L. C
Campbell, Sir David	Henderson, John (Cathcart)	Medlicott, Brig. F.
Carr, Robert	Higgs, J. M. C.	Mellor, Sir John
Cary, Sir Robert	Hill, Dr. Charles (Luton)	Molson, A. H. E.
Channon, H.	Hill, Mrs. E. (Wythenshawe)	Monckton, Rt. Hon. Sir Walter
Churchill Rt. Hon. Sir Winston	Hinchingbrooke, Viscount	Moore, Lt.-Col. Sir Thomas
Clarke, Col. Ralph (East Grinstead)	Hirst, Geoffrey	Morrison, John (Salisbury)
Clarke, Brig. Terence (Portsmouth, W.)	Holland-Martin, C. J	Mott-Radclyffe, C. E.
Cole, Norman	Hollis, M. C.	Nabarro, G. D. N.
Colegate, W. A.	Holmes, Sir Stanley (Harwich)	Neave, A. M. S.
Conant, Maj. R. J. E.	Hope, Lord John	Nicholls, Harmar
Cooper, Sqn. Ldr. Albert	Hornsby-Smith, Miss M. P.	Nicholson, Godfrey (Farnham)
Cooper-Key, E. M.	Horobin, I. M.	Nicolson, Nigel (Bournemouth, E.)
Craddock, Beresford (Spelthorne)	Horsbrugh, Rt. Hon. Florence	Nield, Basil (Chester)
Crookshank, Capt. Rt. Hon. H. F. C	Howard, Gerald (Cambridgeshire)	Noble, Cmdr. A. H. P.
Crosthwaite-Eyre, Col. O. E.	Howard, Hon. Greville (St. Ives)	Nugent, G. R. H.
Crouch, R. F.	Hudson, Sir Austin (Lewisham, N.)	Nutting, Anthony
Crowder, Sir John (Finchley)	Hudson, W. R. A. (Hull, N.)	Oakeshott, H. D.
Crowder, Petre (Ruislip—Northwood)	Hulbert, Wing Cdr. N. J.	Odey, G. W.
Cuthbert, W. N.	Hurd, A. R.	O'Neill, Phelim (Co. Antrim, N.)
Darling, Sir William (Edinburgh, S.)	Hutchinson, Sir Geoffrey (Ilford, N.)	Ormsby-Gore, Hon. W. D.
Davies, Rt. Hn. Clement (Montgomery)	Hutchison, Lt.-Com. Clark (E'b'rgh, W.)	Orr, Capt. L. P. S.
De la Bère, Sir Rupert	Hutchison, James (Scotstoun)	Orr-Ewing, Charles Ian (Hendon, N.)
Digby, S. Wingfield	Hylton-Foster, H. B. H.	Orr-Ewing, Sir Ian (Weston-super-Mare)
Dodds-Parker, A. D.	Jenkins, Robert (Dulwich)	Peake, Rt. Hon. O.
Donaldson, Cmdr. C. E. McA.	Jennings, R.	Perkins, W. R. D.
Donner, Sir P. W.	Johnson, Eric (Blackley)	Peto, Brig. C. H. M.

Doughty, C. J. A.	Johnson, Howard (Kempton)	Peyton, J. W. W.
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord Malcolm	Jones, A. (Hall Green)	Pickthorn, K. W. M.
Drayson, G. B.	Joynson-Hicks, Hon. L. W.	Pilkington, Capt. R. A.
Dugdale, Rt. Hon. Sir T. (Richmond)	Kaberry, D.	Pitt, Miss E. M.
Duncan, Capt. J. A. L.	Kerr, H. W.	Powell, J. Enoch
Duthie, W. S.	Lambert, Hon. G.	Price, Henry (Lewisham, W.)
Prior-Palmer, Brig. O. L.	Spearman, A C. M.	Tweedsmuir, Lady
Raikes, Sir Victor	Speir, R. M.	Vane, W. M. F.
Rayner, Brig. R.	Spens, Sir Patrick (Kensington, S.)	Vaughan-Morgan, J. K.
Redmayne, M.	Stanley, Capt. Hon. Richard	Vosper, D. F.
Rees-Davies, W. R.	Stevens, G. P.	Wade, D. W.
Remnant, Hon. P.	Steward, W. A. (Woolwich, W.)	Wakefield, Edward (Derbyshire, W.)
Renton, D. L. M.	Stewart, Henderson (File, E.)	Wakefield Sir Wavell (St. Marylebone)
Roberts, Peter (Heeley)	Storey, S.	Walker-Smith, D. C.
Robertson, Sir David	Strauss, Henry (Norwich, S.)	Ward, Hon. George (Worcester)
Robinson, Roland (Blackpool, S.)	Stuart, Rt. Hon. James (Moray)	Ward, Miss I. (Tynemouth)
Robson-Brown, W.	Studholme, H. G.	Waterhouse, Capt. Rt. Hon., C.
Roper, Sir Harold	Sutcliffe, Sir Harold	Watkinson, H. A.
Ropner, Col. Sir Leonard	Taylor, Charles (Eastbourne)	Webbe, Sir H. (London & Westminster)
Russell, R. S.	Taylor, William (Bradford, N.)	Wellwood, W.
Ryder, Capt. R. E. D.	Teeling, W.	Williams, Rt. Hon. Charles (Torquay)
Savory, Prof. Sir Douglas	Thomas, Rt. Hon. J. P. L. (Hereford)	Williams, Gerald (Tonbridge)
Schofield, Lt.-Col. W.	Thomas, Leslie (Canterbury)	Williams, Sir Herbert (Croydon, E.)
Scott, R. Donald	Thomas, P. J. M. (Conway)	Williams, Paul (Sunderland, S.)
Scott-Miller, Cmdr. R.	Thompson, Kenneth (Walton)	Williams, R. Dudley (Exeter)
Shepherd, William	Thompson, Lt.-Cdr. R. (Croydon, W.)	Wills, G.
Simon, J. E. S. (Middlesbrough, W.)	Thorneycroft, Rt. Hn. Peter (Monmouth)	Wilson, Geoffrey (Truro)

Smithers, Peter (Winchester)	Thornton-Kemsley, Col. C. N.	Wood, Hon. R.
Smithers, Sir Waldron (Orpington)	Tilney, John	York, C.
Smyth, Brig. J. G. (Norwood)	Touche, Sir Gordon	
Snadden, W. McN.	Turner, H. F. L.	TELLERS FOR THE AYES:
Soames, Capt. C.	Turton, R. H.	Mr. Buchan-Hepburn and Sir C. Drewe.

NOES

Acland, Sir Richard	Edelman, M.	Jenkins, R. H. (Stechford)
Allen, Arthur (Bosworth)	Edwards, Rt. Hon. John (Brighouse)	Johnson, James (Rugby)
Allen, Scholefield (Crewe)	Edwards, Rt. Hon. Ness (Caerphilly)	Jones, David (Hartlepool)
Anderson, Alexander (Motherwell)	Edwards, W. J. (Stepney)	Jones, Frederick Elwyn (West Ham, S.)
Anderson, Frank (Whitehaven)	Evans, Albert (Islington, S. W.)	Jones, Jack (Rotherham)
Attles, Rt. Hon. C. R.	Evans, Edward (Lowestoft)	Jones, T. W. (Merioneth)
Awbery, S. S.	Evans, Stanley (Wednesbury)	Keenan, W.
Bacon, Miss Alice	Fernyhough, E	Kenyon, C.
Baird, J.	Fienburgh, W.	Key, Rt. Hon. C. W
Bartley, P.	Finch, H. J.	King, Dr. H. M.
Bellenger, Rt. Hon. F. J	Follick, M.	Lee, Frederick (Newton)
Bence, C. R.	Foot, M. M.	Lee, Miss Jennie (Cannock)
Benn, Hon. Wedgwood	Forman, J. C.	Lever, Harold (Cheetham)
Benson, G.	Fraser, Thomas (Hamilton)	Lever, Leslie (Ardwick)
Bevan, Rt. Hon A. (Ebbw Vale)	Freeman, John (Watford)	Lewis, Arthur
Bing, G. H. C.	Freeman, Peter (Newport)	Lindgren, G. S.
Blackburn, F.	Gaitskell, Rt. Hon. H. T. N.	Lipton, Lt.-Col. M
Blenkinsop, A.	Gibson, C. W.	Logan, D. G.
Blyton, W. R.	Glanville, James	MacColl, J. E.
Bottomley, Rt. Hon. A. G.	Gooch, E. G.	McGhee, H. G.
Bowles, F. G.	Gordon Walker, Rt. Hon. P. C.	McInnes, J.
Braddock, Mrs. Elizabeth	Greenwood, Rt. Hn. Arthur (Wakefield)	McLeavy, F.
Brockway, A. F.	Grenfell, Rt. Hon. D. R.	McNeil, Rt. Hon. H.
Brook, Dryden (Halifax)	Grey, C. F.	MacPherson, Malcolm (Stirling)
Broughton, Dr. A. D. D.	Griffiths, David (Rother Valley)	Mainwaring, W. H.

Brown, Thomas (Ince)	Griffiths, Rt. Hon. James (Llanelly)	Mallalieu, E. L. (Brigg)
Burke, W. A.	Griffiths, William (Exchange)	Mallalieu, J. P. W. (Huddersfield, E.)
Burton, Miss F. E.	Hale, Leslie	Mann, Mrs. Jean
Butler, Herbert (Hackney, S.)	Hall, Rt. Hon. Glenvil (Colne Valley)	Manuel, A. C.
Callaghan, L. J.	Hall, John T (Gateshead, W)	Marquand, Rt. Hon. H. A
Carmichael, J.	Hamilton, W. W.	Mason, Roy
Castle, Mrs. B. A.	Hannan, W.	Mayhew, C. P.
Champion, A. J.	Hardy, E. A.	Mellish, R. J.
Chapman, W. D.	Hargreaves, A.	Messer, Sir F.
Chetwynd, G. R.	Harrison, J. (Nottingham, E.)	Mikardo, Ian
Clunie, J.	Hastings, S.	Mitchison, G. R
Coldrick, W.	Hayman, F. H.	Monslow, W.
Collick, P. H.	Herbison, Miss M.	Moody, A. S.
Corbet, Mrs. Freda	Hewitson, Capt. M.	Morgan, Dr. H. B. W
Cove, W. G.	Holman, P.	Morley, R.
Craddock, George (Bradford, S.)	Holmes, Horace (Hemsworth)	Morris, Percy (Swansea, W.)
Crosland, C. A. R.	Houghton, Douglas	Morrison, Rt. Hon. H. (Lewisham, S.)
Crossman, R. H. S	Hoy, J. H.	Mort, D. L.
Cullen, Mrs. A.	Hubbard, T. F.	Moyle, A.
Daines, P.	Hudson, James (Ealing, N.)	Mulley, F. W
Dalton, Rt. Hon. H.	Hughes, Cledwyn (Anglesey)	Murray, J. D.
Darling, George (Hillsborough)	Hughes, Emrys (S. Ayrshire)	Nally, W.
Davies, Harold (Leek)	Hughes, Hector (Aberdeen, N.)	Neal, Harold (Borsover)
de Freitas, Geoffrey	Hynd, J. B. (Attercliffe)	Noel-Baker, Rt. Hon. P. J.
Deer, G.	Irvine, A. J. (Edge Hill)	O'Brien, T.
Delargy, H. J.	Irving, W. J. (Wood Green)	Oldfield, W. H.
Dodds, N. N.	Isaacs, Rt. Hon. G. A.	Oliver, G. H.
Donnelly, D. L.	Janner, B.	Orbach, M.
Dugdale, Rt. Hon. John (W. Bromwich)	Jay, Rt. Hon. D. P. T.	Oswald, T.
Ede, Rt. Hon. J. C.	Jeger, George (Goole)	Padley, W. E.
2282		
2283		
Paling, Will T. (Dewsbury)	Simmons, C. J. (Brierley)	Viant, S. P.

	Hill)	
Palmer, A. M. F.	Skeffington, A. M.	Wallace, H. W
Pannell, Charles	Slater, Mrs. H. (Stoke-on-Trent)	Warbey, W. N.
Pargiter, G. A.	Slater, J. (Durham, Sedgfield)	Watkins, T. E.
Parker, J.	Smith, Ellis (Stoke, S.)	Webb, Rt. Hon. M. (Bradford, C.)
Paton, J.	Smith, Norman (Nottingham, S.)	Weitzman, D.
Peart, T. F.	Snow, J. W.	Wells, Percy (Faversham)
Plummer, Sir Leslie	Sorensen, R. W.	Wells, William (Walsall)
Popplewell, E.	Soskice, Rt. Hon. Sir Frank	West, D. G.
Porter, G.	Sparks, J. A.	Wheatley, Rt. Hon. John
Price, Joseph T. (Westhoughton)	Stewart, Michael (Fulham, E.)	Wheeldon, W. E.
Proctor, W. T.	Strachey, Rt. Hon. J.	White, Mrs. Eirene (E. Flint)
Pryde, D. J.	Strass, Rt. Hon. George (Vauxhall)	White, Henry (Derbyshire, N. E.)
Pursey, Cmdr. H.	Stross, Dr. Barnett	Whiteley, Rt. Hon. W.
Rankin, John	Summerskill, Rt. Hon. E	Wigg, George
Reeves, J.	Swingler, S. T.	Wilkins, W. A.
Reid, Thomas (Swindon)	Sylvester, G. O.	Willey, F. T.
Reid, William (Camlachie)	Taylor, Bernard (Mansfield)	Williams, David (Neath)
Rhodes, H.	Taylor, John (West Lothian)	Williams, Rev. Llywelyn (Abertillery)
Richards, R.	Taylor, Rt. Hon. Robert (Morpeth)	Williams, Ronald (Wigan)
Robens, Rt. Hon. A.	Thomas, George (Cardiff)	Williams, Rt. Hon. Thomas (Don V'll'y)
Roberts, Albert (Normanton)	Thomas, Iorwerth (Rhondda, W.)	Williams, W. R. (Droylsden)
Roberts, Goronwy (Caernarvon)	Thomas, Ivor Owen (Wrekin)	Williams, W. T. (Hammersmith, S.)
Robinson, Kenneth (St. Pancras, N.)	Thomson, George (Dundee, E.)	Wilson, Rt. Hon. Harold (Huyton)
Rogers, George (Kensington, N.)	Thorneycroft, Harry (Clayton)	Winterbottom, Ian (Nottingham, C.)
Ross, William	Thornton, E.	Winterbottom, Richard (Brightside)
Royle, C.	Timmons, J.	Woodburn, Rt. Hon. A.

Shackleton, E. A. A.	Tomney, F.	Wyatt, W. L.
Shinwell, Rt. Hon. E.	Turner-Samels, M.	
Short, E. W.	Ungoed-Thomas, Sir Lynn	TELLERS FOR THE NOES:
Shurmer, P. L. E.	Usborne, H. C.	Mr. Bowden and Mr. Pearson.
Silverman, Julius (Erdington)		

Question put, and agreed to.

§ Main Question put.

§ The House proceeded to a Division. Mr. BUCHAN-HEPBURN and Sir CEDRIC DREWE were appointed Tellers for the Ayes but, no Member being willing to act as Teller for the Noes, Mr. SPEAKER declared that the Ayes had it.

§ Resolved: That this House approves the action of Her Majesty's Government in British Guiana.