

BRITISH GUIANA (SUSPENSION OF CONSTITUTION)

HC Deb 07 December 1953 vol 521 cc1624-763 [1624](#)

§ 3.52 p.m.

§ [Mr. Ede \(South Shields\)](#)

I beg to move,

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the Draft British Guiana (Constitution) (Temporary Provisions) Order in Council, 1953, a copy of which was laid before this House on 5th November, be annulled.

We are very lucky to be able to have a discussion on this Order at all. Four Orders have been made during the current year dealing with the British Guiana Constitution. Two of them were not laid at all and this, although it was laid, made a very tardy appearance in the Vote Office. In fact it was not until my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Hale) asked your guidance, Mr. Speaker, on a certain matter that the Order appeared in the Vote Office.

That was as late as 18th November. That has entailed considerable difficulty in getting an appropriate consideration of the Order, not merely by the House, but by the special Select Committee which deals with Statutory Instruments. They had not received a copy of the Order and had to make inquiries about it. When they considered it, they had certain questions which they desired to put to the Department and it was not until 30th November that the officers of the Department appeared before the Select Committee to give their answers to the points that had been raised by the Committee.

When one considers the Report from the Committee, it is quite evident that the attitude of this Department to this [1625](#) House leaves a very great deal to be desired. My hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Test (Dr. King) asked the legal officer of the Department two points on the question of delay. My hon. Friend said that one was: the delay in the Committee receiving these copies, and the other the delay in copies reaching Honourable Members of the House. Is he aware that the copies reached the House only after an Honourable Member had asked the Minister in the House for copies; so that the delay is not simply a matter of delay between the 5th and the 18th, but it is a fact that until an Honourable Member had raised the matter on the floor of the House copies were not available? I hope I made it clear that I am quoting, and that I was dealing with the question of the Vote Office. It is true that there was a copy in the Library, but that is no very satisfactory way of providing information for hon. Members because an Order that excites a great deal of interest is in fairly general demand. It is not unknown, when the copy is not in the Vote Office, for hon. Members to have to queue for it. This is the answer which was given by the legal adviser to the Colonial Office when that question was put to him by my hon. Friend: I am bound to say I had not heard this complaint before—about Honourable Members

requesting copies—before I came here this afternoon. I had not seen this Minute from which I have been reading giving details of when copies were provided. The first batch was sent very soon after the request was made. I am not suggesting that the officers in the Colonial Office should not have known that further copies were required, but they got in touch with the printers at once and had further copies run off and sent them along as soon as they could after receiving the request for more copies. The Chairman of the Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, East (Mr. E. Fletcher), having listened to that flow of words, put the matter more shortly in Question 14: Dr. King's question, I thought, was whether you were aware that that had been raised in the House? The answer was: I was not aware of that until now, Sir. So all these stories about civil servants living in dread of what this House does when matters relating to their Department come before the House are all moonshine. This legal officer, responsible for advising the right hon. Gentleman, had not heard that the right hon. Gentleman had been [1626](#) asked for these papers and that he had given an answer in this House.

This is a very serious Order. It comes at the end of a very serious series of events. From the making of the Order No. 586 on 1st April, 1953, at Windsor Castle until now there has been a succession of events which culminates, at any rate for the present, in the draft Order that we have in front of us today. Curiously enough, when I went into the Library this afternoon and asked whether I could see Statutory Instrument No. 586 of this year, I consulted two members of the staff in the Library and not one of them could find it. When the file was produced, for some reason or other, No. 586, the basic Order on which the whole of the flow of events has depended, was not in the Library. I did manage to get a copy by going to the Vote Office. This was an occasion when it was better to consult the Vote Office than the Library. I hope that those responsible for seeing that documents are available in the places where they are supposed to be will investigate this matter.

Order No. 586 was formulated under the [British Guiana Act, 1928](#), and the three other Orders, including the one before us this afternoon, since then also depend on that Act. The Act of 1928 is concerned with the establishment of a Legislature. It is a very short Act of two Sections, one of which states the name by which it may be cited, while Section 1, which is in two subsections, deals with the formulation of a Legislature. The operative words in Section 1 (1) are: It shall be lawful for His Majesty in Council to create and constitute, in substitution for the existing legislature, a legislature for the Colony of British Guiana... and so on. Subsection (2) states: Before such Order in Council creating and constituting such legislature or altering the constitution or powers thereof is made, a draft thereof shall be laid before each House of Parliament for a period of not less than twenty-one days on which that House has sat,... That 21 days' period has been extended by the [Statutory Instruments Act](#) to 40 days.

From the answers that were given before the Select Committee on Statutory Instruments, it is clear that for some reason or other the Department does not regard some actions that have been taken [1627](#) during the period since 1st April as having anything to do with a Legislature. There is no definition in the Act of what a Legislature is. There is no definition in any of these Orders as to what a Legislature is.

The only place where I can find a definition of a Legislature is in Erskine May, which I understand is quite above controversy and is generally accepted in the House. It states: The

Parliament of the United Kingdom is composed of the Sovereign, the House of Lords and the House of Commons; these several powers collectively form the legislature;... We know that when we go to hear the Royal Assent given to Bills, the Commission recites that there have been certain Acts passed by both Houses which become good and perfect Acts of Parliament after the Royal Assent has been given. "The Legislature," apparently, is a description of the whole apparatus of Government.

In this country it is not the Commons or the Lords, or the Commons and the Lords, but the Commons, Lords and Sovereign together who form the Legislature. I cannot read the Act of 1928 in any other way than as proposing a Legislature which would consist of three parts. There would be the lower House, the upper House and the Governor, acting for His Majesty—it was "His Majesty" when the Act was passed.

Therefore, I cannot understand why it has been held that the two Orders which come between No. 586 and the one now in front of us, inasmuch as they alter very considerably the relationships between the constituent parts of the Legislature, can be regarded as other than altering the Legislature. When one considers that one wipes out the Legislature altogether, one cannot imagine a much more complete alteration than that.

[§ Mr. Ronald Bell](#) (Bucks, South)

The Order before us has been laid in draft under the terms of the 1928 Act.

[§ Mr. Ede](#)

Really, I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving me information which I have already given to the House. I do not quite know what the point of the interruption was.

Certain of my hon. and learned Friends will develop this point in the course of [1628](#) the debate. I would not myself think of crossing swords with the Attorney-General on a point of constitutional law, but it would not be fair of me in opening the debate on this matter to do other than point out that we regard as very serious—and I am supported by two of my hon. Friends who served on the Select Committee on Statutory Instruments—the fact that these two Orders were not laid, which places us at a very serious disadvantage in discussing the Order which we have before us today.

[§ The Attorney-General \(Sir Lionel Heald\)](#)

Would the right hon. Gentleman allow me to clear up this point? Would he agree that the two not laid were No. 1478 and No. 1564?

[§ Mr. Ede](#)

That is quite correct. Apparently the hon. and learned Gentleman has not been able to discover any other Orders than the ones which I have so far discovered. We are very seriously

handicapped in our discussion today because such a big gap exists in the history of the consecutive process.

Under Order No.586 a Constitution and a Legislature were granted to British Guiana: and at the end of April a general election was held in which about 73 per cent. of the electorate voted. One party received 51 per cent. of the votes and managed to get 75 per cent. of the seats. I imagine that in future that will be pointed out by the Proportional Representation Society as one of the glaring examples of the way in which the system of single-member seats works.

The astonishing thing about that election was that the Independent candidates polled 49,981 votes as against 77,695 votes cast for the P.P.P., which was the party that secured a majority of Members. An interesting commentary on the views of those people who think that what we require are more independent candidates and more independent Members of this House is the result that can flow when the second largest group of votes in a general election goes to Independent candidates. There were apparently three other parties in the election. The Independents between them polled 49,981 votes, the National Democrats 20,032, less than half the number secured by the Independents, the People's National Party secured 3,000 votes, and the United Farmers' and Workers' Party 1,523 votes.

[1629](#) The result was that the carefully devised balances and checks in the Constitution just did not work. There had been an arrangement by which there would be a joint meeting of the two Houses. Quite obviously that was designed to secure that there should be a real opportunity for second thoughts if the two Houses came to conflict. But so sweeping was the result of this election that when the two Houses met the majority in what I will call the lower House was so great that it wiped out the majority which might have voted the other way in the other House.

For the first time a Conservative Government in this country was faced with the problem of a lower Chamber having a strong Leftward tenancy which could not be controlled by the upper Chamber—and that, of course, is a thing which no Conservative Party can ever contemplate. Incidentally, one does wish that for once we could have here a Government of the Left with a second Chamber so composed that, even with a joint meeting, this House would control the situation.

This was undoubtedly a very difficult situation. It is from that point that, somehow or other, history seems to be silent. In his speech on 22nd October the Colonial Secretary said: 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. May I say that I am not dissenting from that point of view? The right hon. Gentleman then used a metaphor which strongly appealed to me. Having given the rider the reins, we are not absolved from responsibility for the horse."—[Official Report, 22nd October, 1953; Vol. 518, c. 2165.] I have often watched a rider being given the reins, and I have noticed that just before it happens he receives certain advice, or instructions. I have often wished that I could know what were those instructions or that advice. It would enable one to make one's investments with a greater feeling of security than generally accompanies such an operation. For the present I accept the view put forward by the right hon. Gentleman in that metaphor.

What did occur between the date of the election and the date when the Government took office, during the process of [1630](#) handing over the reins? There was the right hon. Gentleman, looking at his horse and at the jockey, and feeling that he had some responsibility for the horse. What happened? Here there was a new Constitution, a Government which had no previous experience of government taking office in a position where, according to the Constitution—if it continued in existence—they could carry their policy without any very great difficulty.

I should have thought that it was an occasion for the right hon. Gentleman, or those who represented him, to discuss with this new Government the course they intended to pursue, because, although democracy appears to be a simple form of government, as a matter of fact it involves very considerable responsibilities and a recognition of the rights of all the people who live under the Government. I cannot find in anything that the right hon. Gentleman has said, or in any documents which have since been published, that there was any such consultation or giving of advice. I should have thought that that was an essential. But in the documents published about this suspension of the Constitution, not a word is said which indicates that any such consultation or advice took place.

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

There was the Governor's broadcast.

[§ *Mr. Ede*](#)

The Governor's broadcast was after the Constitution had been suspended.

[§ *Mr. Lyttelton*](#)

But it refers to what he said before. I think it would be convenient if I did not interrupt the right hon. Gentleman, but I shall deal with this point. The point I was making was that I think the right hon. Gentleman will find that in the Governor's broadcast reference was made to past actions, in an endeavour to impress upon the Ministers their responsibilities in undertaking any democratic form of government.

[§ *Mr. Ede*](#)

I shall await with interest what the right hon. Gentleman has to say on that point. From our point of view, that is a very important issue which ought to be cleared up.

Now we come to a point, somewhere late in September, or in October, when the right hon. Gentleman made up his [1631](#) mind; although up to that stage, if there was any criticism of the Government formed under the Constitution, I gather from the White Paper it was their inactivity rather than their activity which was causing misgiving. On 5th October the right hon. Gentleman, the Home Secretary and Sir Sidney Abrahams flew to Balmoral where an Order was made—one of those Orders which was not laid—and this was the Order which abolished or suspended the Constitution granted by Order No. 586. They went to Balmoral and came back, and this is the report in "The Times." Among those present yesterday were the Home Secretary, Sir David

Maxwell Fyfe, the Colonial Secretary, Mr. Oliver Lyttelton, and Sir Sidney Abrahams, senior legal assistant to the Commonwealth Relations Office and the Colonial Office. All had flown to Dyce Airport yesterday morning and then gone by car to Balmoral. They flew back to London last night. At London Airport the Home Secretary said, 'There was no special significance in the visit.' Not a mention elsewhere in "The Times," so far as I can discover—and I have read it carefully—of anything relating to British Guiana. There was "no special significance in the visit"—nothing except that a free Constitution had been wiped out.

We had the White Paper to which the right hon. Gentleman has just alluded, and in the speech that he made to us paragraph 30 was given special significance. It dealt with what the Minister of Housing and Local Government, I think more adroitly, described as the alleged arson plot. This White Paper is supposed to give the reasons which led to the suspension of the Constitution.

§ Mr. Lyttelton

The sending of troops.

§ Mr. Ede

Yes. Let us examine the position. The Order was made on 4th October, but in reply to a question by my hon. Friend the Member for Eton and Slough (Mr. Fenner Brockway) the right hon. Gentleman said that the Governor himself got information about the alleged arson plot on 6th October, two days later. The news did not reach the right hon. Gentleman until the morning of the 7th. Therefore, to have included that in the White Paper as one of the reasons either for suspending the Constitution or sending the troops, who did not get to Guiana [1632](#) until 6th October, was really piling something into the case for which there was no justification.

As the Constitution is still suspended, and in view of the description the right hon. Gentleman gave of the way in which news about the arson plot reached him, I should like to know whether anything further has been revealed. He said: 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."—[Official Report, 22nd October, 1953; Vol. 518, c. 2171.] This tempts one to ask, has anything further been discovered about this plot? Has any arrest been made? We were told that considerable quantities of petrol and kerosene had been purchased by people who did not usually buy such articles or who bought them in excess of normal requirements. Who sold that petrol and kerosene? Did they sell it all to people whom they had never seen before and whom they have not seen since? Has any action been taken which tends to pin any responsibility for this alleged plot on any one person?

If there is anything at all in this story, the Government over there must know who sold some of the petrol, who bought it and what action, if any, has been taken against any one of these persons. In fact, in connection with the whole episode, although a number of people have been detained, I should like to know whether one single person has yet been charged with any offence either against common law or against the Defence Regulations.

[§ Mr. Lyttelton](#)

That is not so.

[§ Mr. Ede](#)

But I asked a question.

[§ Mr. Lyttelton](#)

I thought that the right hon. Gentleman was making a statement, not asking a question. I will give him the answer.

[§ Mr. Ede](#)

I am told that the two people were charged last week. I shall be glad to listen to any explanation that the right hon. Gentleman can make. All I know is that the Government were faced with a difficult position. I understand that there has been no disorder in the island. There was none before the troops arrived.

[1633](#)

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

It is not an island.

[§ Mr. Ede](#)

It is as well that one should be accurate in these matters—if I used the word "island," I apologise.

The Order contains no democratic element at all. This is government entirely by bureaucracy. It represents, for the time being at any rate, the complete abandonment of democratic government in a Colony to which it had been granted. Even if one could regard it as absolutely necessary one would still regard it with considerable disappointment.

Everybody in this House wished this Constitution well when it started. Therefore, to find that it had to be abandoned after so short an experiment I should have thought would have been a disappointment even to those who supported the action of the Government. We do not believe that the course which was followed was that which was best in the permanent interest not merely of this Colony but of the gradually developing series of responsible experiments which are being tried in all parts of the British Empire.

I shall listen with great attention to what the right hon. Gentleman has promised to say about the advice tendered and the help offered to these Ministers to get them to discharge their duties responsibly. One cannot expect that there will always be complete agreement between a Governor and his Ministers when a developing Constitution is being brought into effect. But I am certain that in what might be a legitimate dispute between Ministers and the Governor, or

between the lower House and the upper House in a bicameral system, it would be regarded as a very bad precedent which has been set here.

It is plain that in the years that lie immediately ahead world opinion and our own consciences will compel us to have many experiments of this nature in different parts of the British Empire. We hope that by a process of evolution we shall steadily replace even paternal government administered with the best motives by a system of self-government for the various parts of the Queen's Empire as they become ripe for such treatment.

[1634](#) I sincerely hope that the Committee which has been sent out to British Guiana will be able to report to the right hon. Gentleman with reasonable speed. I sincerely hope that, after an examination on the spot of all the causes that led up to the present position, the Committee will be able to make to him such recommendations as will enable a democratic Constitution to be speedily restored to the Colony. I think that the figures I gave at the outset about the voting in the election indicate one or two of the root causes of this difficulty.

It appears to me—all I have read and heard about the matter confirms it—that there was one organised group, which was dealing with a rather loosely knit group of independents, many of whom, I understand, stood mainly on personal grounds and not on any definite issue of policy, and other parties who were not nearly so well organised. After all, we have seen big majorities one way or the other in this House. I recall the General Elections of 1906, 1931 and 1945. We managed to survive all three. The only one which I regarded with any apprehension was that of 1931, but that view would not be shared by hon. Gentlemen opposite.

Democracy is not so much a system of government as a way of life. It means the application of a good many virtues in public life which are not too well distributed over the inhabitants of the globe, and some countries which claim to be democracies appear to me sometimes to show them least. I well recollect entertaining a distinguished American politician when I was Home Secretary. Sitting opposite me at the luncheon party was my Permanent Under-Secretary. Towards the end of the meal the American politician put his mouth very close to my ear and said, "What did he do for your party to get that position?"

During my term as Home Secretary, I had to meet numerous persons from Germany who were trying to establish a democratic police system, something which, as it happens, is very much bound up with the issue which we are discussing today. They invariably said, "Do you mean to tell us that you do not know what the politics of the Commissioner of Police for the Metropolis are?" I assured them that I did not know. They said, [1635](#) "Does he never discuss politics with you?" I replied, "No, he does not." They asked me, "What would happen if he did?" I replied, "It is so impossible to imagine that I have never thought what I would do, but I am certain that it would be something pretty drastic."

The people engaged in this experiment, who have incurred the penalty of being driven from office and having their Constitution suspended, had no experience in the handling of a democracy. I still feel that it would have been the wisest course for the right hon., Gentleman, as soon as he had word that practical difficulties were developing which were likely to become very acute, to have sent for these people, or some of them, to discuss with them the proper course to

pursue. I regard them not so much as jockeys on a horse but more as the crew of a boat. I have no doubt that the right hon. Gentleman has gone along the towpath at Cambridge, even if he was not the official adviser suggesting to the crew in tones which could be heard what course they should steer and perhaps suggesting to individual members of the crew that their rowing should be improved if the crew as a whole were to achieve the result they desired.

I accept what the right hon. Gentleman said, that when a Constitution of self-government is granted to one of these peoples our responsibility does not end, but it is our first responsibility, as it is theirs also, to try to make the show work and to get the best possible result. It must always be regarded as something to be deplored that a Constitution which was granted on 1st April—a better date might have been chosen for it—had to be withdrawn on 5th October. It is because we are not convinced that proper action was taken and because some of the stories which have been told have not been borne out by subsequent events that I have moved the Prayer.

§ 4.37 p.m.

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

It would be seemly if I began by apologising for any inconvenience which may have been caused to hon. Members by the absence of copies of the Statutory Instrument from the Vote Office. I put the matter right as soon as it was brought to my [1636](#) attention. I am, of course, solely responsible, and I do not think that any of my officials should be censured for it.

I also wish to say with sincerity how much we are indebted to the Select Committee on Statutory Instruments for the Report which it has published concerning the Statutory Instruments before the House today. I do not think the House would wish me, as a layman, to embark upon a discussion of the somewhat delicate legal points which the right hon. Gentleman the Member for South Shields (Mr. Ede) has mentioned, but my hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General is here and is prepared to show, to the satisfaction of the House, I hope, that in these matters the Colonial Office and I have acted with perfect propriety.

I should like to say, as a Minister, that the assiduous care which the Select Committee on Statutory Instruments devotes to these matters gives us a greater sense of security when embarking on these rather uncharted legal seas. It is broadly true to say that the Committee made no criticism, except that of inconvenience, against my officers.

I want also to take the opportunity of saying how deeply gratified I am to the right hon. Gentleman the Member for South Shields. He has made one of his rather rare appearances—since the war, at any rate—in a debate upon Colonial affairs. He has already imparted to the debate some of his characteristic humour and some very entertaining anecdotes, and for the general atmosphere which he has engendered, which is known in France as *détente*, my hon. Friends and I are duly grateful to him. It has not always been exactly the tone in which these matters have been discussed.

When I have finished—I feel it necessary to go rather wider than the right hon. Gentleman did in opening the debate—even if I have not persuaded hon. Gentlemen opposite of the correctness of

the course which Her Majesty's Government have pursued in this matter, I hope that I shall at least have been able to impress upon the House the fact that the course that we followed was taken only after the most careful consideration of all the alternatives.

I think it will be for the convenience of the House if I were to start from where [1637](#) I think we left off in the first debate on British Guiana. In that debate, it was said: 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."—[Official Report, 22nd October, 1953; Vol. 518, c. 2187.] Those were not my words. They were the words of the right hon. Gentleman the Member for Llanelly (Mr. J. Griffiths), and I think they were a forth right statement. I do not say this in any taunting spirit, but any attempt to say that the account of the proceedings in the White Paper was a tissue of unsupported lies would really not be appropriate, since the right hon. Gentleman has come down so definitely upon the side of what that White Paper showed.

I wish to suggest to the House—and I shall not make any debating points—that those words of the right hon. Gentleman must signify his agreement that some action had to be taken by the Government. Indeed, the right hon. Gentleman who opened this debate talked about responsibility for the horse, and I suggest that, if we read these words— We condemn your policies, we condemn the methods you employed. We deplore the action you took"— they are equivalent to saying that the Government must take some action. Of course, that was not all. I am only going to deal here with the point that the security of the Colony, and I use that word in its widest sense, was in mortal danger, and that we discerned in the actions of these Ministers the sinister facts set out in 11 headings in the White Paper.

Any Secretary of State sitting in my chair and reading the telegrams from the Governor soon after the Ministers took office, must have been driven to one unavoidable conclusion, and that was that action had to be taken sooner or later; but, when these telegrams appeared to speak, for example, of the fear of disaffection amongst the police and the danger of widespread disorders—and these telegrams have the effect of a crescendo—it was clear not only that action, but immediate action, had to take [1638](#) place. All through this period, I received personal telegrams from the Governor underlining the danger of disorder and widespread violence and disturbance. I was looking through these telegrams this morning. The first was on 2nd September, and there were two on the 6th, one on the 16th, one on the 17th, one on the 25th, another on the 29th September, and the final one on the 1st October.

To return to the main course of my argument, I am suggesting that no responsible Minister or Government could have remained inactive in the face of reports such as I had received, and I stand first upon that. Indeed, if I remind the House again of what the right hon. Gentleman for Llanelly said, I think the need for action found complete support from the official Opposition during the previous debate, in which the right hon. Gentleman said that he condemned our actions.

Since the suspension of the Constitution, I have received a great many messages from various sections of the population, representing different shades of opinion, suggesting that our action

came only just in time to avoid serious disorder, and I should like again to refer to the letter written by the Archbishop of the West Indies to the right hon. Gentleman the Leader of the Opposition, who kindly sent me a copy. It is a weighty letter, and I feel that, if I had to refer to any of this correspondence, this letter would be the one to choose, rather than those from other individuals in more private capacities.

I think I may start my argument from the agreed foundation that action had to be taken, and taken quickly. As I understand it, and after listening to the words used by the right hon. Gentleman the Member for South Shields today, there is no serious disagreement on this point. We had a responsibility, and we had to act. What the Opposition are now saying is that the action we took was the wrong action, and it is to that proposition that I must address myself, and not to subsidiary points.

The whole matter engaged the very deep and earnest thought of myself and my advisers before I decided upon this drastic step for recommendation to my colleagues. I now wish to put the arguments and set before hon. Members with- [1639](#) out any political bias what the alternatives were. [Laughter.] I fail to see that there is anything humorous in what I have just said.

[§ Mr. Sydney Silverman \(Nelson and Colne\)](#)

How does the right hon. Gentleman know what I am laughing at?

[§ Mr. Lyttelton](#)

Perhaps I do not, and perhaps it is just as well that I do not.

The first of these alternatives would be to instruct the Governor to make use of his reserve powers over what admittedly would have had to be a wide field. The second was to suggest that the Governor should dismiss the Ministers. The third was that, failing the dismissal of the Minister, he should have removed their portfolios from them. The fourth—and this was touched upon by the right hon. Gentleman—was that I should have visited British Guiana, or should have sent for the Ministers to come over here. The fifth was the suggestion that a commission of inquiry should have been sent out before we took action. The sixth was that the Governor should have dissolved the Legislature and forced a general election. The last alternative open to us was that the Constitution should be suspended under the procedure and under the safeguards which Parliament had laid down. I hope I shall not weary the House if I go through these alternatives, because I think they will throw considerable light on the whole of this question.

First of all, the suggestion that the Governor should have used his reserve powers. Those who are acquainted—and most hon. Members are—with current policy in colonial affairs, will know that the Governor's reserve powers are very seldom used. We avoid using them wherever we can. If we are set upon a course in which we are trying to build up self-governing constitutions, it is quite clear that the Governor's reserve powers must be used very sparingly; otherwise, we shall be accused of carrying on direct rule behind a façade.

I should like hon. Members to consider what the words "reserve powers" mean. They mean that the powers are not to be used widely for the ordinary and current transaction of business, but are to be held in reserve in case, for example, some [1640](#) legislation either strikes at the roots of good government or that some legislation passed in a Colony might transgress the provisions of some international agreement which we are bound to fulfil. Those are instances of how those powers may be used, but then they are negative powers.

The reserve powers also enable the Governor, in the interests of public order, public faith or good government, to give effect to a Motion or legislation rejected by the Legislature, but the use of these powers, with Ministers in undisturbed possession of their portfolios and, I add, nominally carrying the full responsibilities, would have been quite impossible. In short, to use reserve powers as a day-to-day method of Government while the Ministers remain nominally responsible, is at least wholly impracticable, and if carried a very short way is the equivalent of a suspension of the Constitution; I repeat a de facto but not a de jure suspension of the Constitution. Once embarked upon this course, in any case, the reserve powers would be inadequate to counter all the Ministers' activities; for example, those mentioned by the right hon. Gentleman in relation to the police.

The charge has also been laid at the door of the Governor and myself that the reserve powers were not used right at the beginning in order to pull up the Ministers roundly when they entered upon their responsibilities. The right hon. Gentleman did not make exactly this point, but I should have thought that such a course would have been wrong. We did not use the reserve powers at the beginning of this administration because we were trying to build up a sense of Ministerial responsibility amongst members of a newly-elected party with a large electoral majority.

To have pulled them up roundly upon their first pieces of legislation would have provoked an immediate crisis. They would have claimed—and with some justification—that they had not been allowed any period in which to frame a legislative programme or to prove themselves as the leaders of the whole Colony and not merely of the party. The relations between the Governor and the Ministers would at the outset have become so strained that it would have been impossible to build up any co-operation between the Governor and the Ministers.

[1641](#) The right hon. Member for South Shields asked what we were doing in the way of education. He wanted to know what the Governor was doing. These are two matters into which I cannot go very deeply at the moment, but of course there is a document, which was explained to these Ministers at great length by the Governor, which sets out their responsibilities and disabilities under which Ministers have to work under a democratic system. I have it here in my hand. In a telegram the Governor says that he had been at great pains to explain all the things in this document.

Again, if the right hon. Gentleman will refer to the broadcast which the Governor made, although admittedly it was after the Constitution was suspended, nevertheless it refers to some of his actions before. He said—and this is to be found on page 18 of the White Paper: I have done everything I could to meet the wishes of the Ministers elected by the House of Assembly and to induce them by good will, by tact, by patience and by tolerance to carry out their responsibilities.

Hon. Members who know the Governor will know how sincere those words are. He really has done everything he could.

I pass to another point. The moment he decided not to use these reserve powers, he had in fact committed himself right at the beginning to what I am certain was the right and proper course. His aim was to try, by co-operation and by counsel, to lead the Ministers to a more responsible view of their tasks, in the hope, which he expressed to me on 12th May, that as time went on more moderate opinions would prevail. All through these experiments in self-government or partial self-government, these kinds of situations are familiar, and our general experience is that by shutting our eyes to something which is undesirable at the beginning one can very often build up the responsibility and get a reasonably competent Government.

Should he have used the reserve powers later on? That suggestion was made in the previous debate. I do not think so, because once the whole trend of the policies of the P.P.P. Ministers became clear, the Governor would have had to use reserve powers on such a wide scale, for reasons which I have just given to the House, that it would have amounted to a de facto suspension of the Constitution. I rejected this course.

[1642](#) Next, could the Ministers have been dismissed? I would remind the House that this was, in fact, impracticable because under the Constitution the Governor could not have dismissed the Ministers without the consent of the Executive Council, a body upon which the Ministers had an absolute majority. Nor could the Governor have used his reserve powers to set on one side this actual provision of the Constitution. I need not quote it, although I have it here.

I think I can illustrate this point by quoting some remarks made in the course of a speech in my constituency by the hon. Member for Rugby (Mr. J. Johnson) on 20th November.

[§ Mr. S. Silverman](#)

Could the right hon. Gentleman tell me whether the Governor would have had the power to dissolve the Legislative Assembly and to have had a new election?

[§ Mr. Lyttelton](#)

The point is important; if the hon. Member remembers, it is one of the points that I set out and to which I shall come in a moment.

I was about to quote some words of the hon. Member for Rugby. He takes a continuous and constructive interest in Colonial affairs and gives helpful advice for which I am grateful. I naturally attach great weight to what he says. He is reported in the local Press in my constituency to have said—dealing with what he was good enough to call my gunboat diplomacy— If I had been the Governor I would have used powers to have taken each Minister one by one and sacked him. He could not have done that because of the Constitution. I would have said to Jagan, or any of them, 'You are going too far. You are not doing your job and, as the Governor, I am going to suspend you.' I would pick them off one by one. It is easy to be clever after the event, but I would have had a few companies of Highlanders there with their pipe band, then I would have

been tough and made the Ministers toe the line, instead of, like a bombshell out of the blue, suspending the Constitution.

Mr. Johnson

I am not a lawyer, nor is the Minister, and I have taken legal advice about this. Would the right hon. Gentleman consult Article 11 on page 7 of the Constitution? This is the Constitution under which the Governor was [1643](#) working during June, July, August and September. It says: All questions which may arise as to the right of any person to be or remain a Member of the Executive Council shall be referred to the Governor and shall be determined by the Governor acting in his discretion. Then if the Minister will turn to Article 7 he will find there disposed of his contention which he made a moment ago that the Governor shall refer his decisions to a majority of the Executive Council. Article 7 says: The Governor shall...consult with the Executive Council in the exercise of all powers conferred upon him by this Order other than powers which he is by this Order directed or empowered"— and here are the operative words—to exercise in his discretion.

[§ Mr. Lyttelton](#)

I have taken legal advice upon what I am going to say. I am sure the House would not enjoy the spectacle of two laymen discussing the same point, but my legal advice is that at no time had the Governor any power of dismissing these Ministers, which is specifically provided for in the Constitution, without the authority and consent of the Executive Council. We will certainly take into account anything that the hon. Member says. In his other statement I think he put forward a manly point of view, but it was not a possible one.

The hon. Gentleman also used the expression "suspended," and I think that what he was thinking of then was the Governor removing the portfolios of some of the Ministers, which of course he had powers to do. All I am saying is that he had no power to dismiss them. The hon. Member, in his agreeable remarks, said "suspended" when I think that what he had in mind was taking the portfolios away. If the Governor had removed the portfolios of the Ministers one by one and "picked them off," he would, after a certain time, have found himself with six Ministers without portfolios—a sort of system of "Underlords," if I may say so, and entitled, I suppose, to a large flow of official information, entitled to draw their salaries and to attend meetings of the Executive Council, without the responsibilities attaching to any office, and at the same time with powers to vote upon any Measure before the Executive Council.

[1644](#) I suggest in all sincerity to the hon. Gentleman that that would have created what, in fact, would have been a suspension of the Constitution by the back door, and it would have created an almost Gilbertian situation. It would have been official government by the Governor and his officials, being maintained with great embarrassment behind simply a façade, and no more, of partial self-government.

Mr. Johnson

Would that not have been at least a half-way house—an attempt to discipline the Ministers before this final and inevitable step of suspending the Constitution?

[§ Mr. Lyttelton](#)

The hon. Member is quite entitled to that point of view, with which I profoundly disagree and which I have tried to show would have led to a situation which was absolutely Gilbertian. These Ministers without portfolio would have had the right to attend the Executive Council, the right to vote and the right to block anything which the officials were doing. That really is not a device to which we could possibly agree.

I feel it necessary to turn aside for one moment before leaving this point to ask what would have been the attitude of Her Majesty's Opposition if they had learned that the Governor of a British Colony had taken away the portfolio of the Prime Minister—the first Minister—and of all the elected Members, even if he had picked them off one by one. Would there not have been an outcry, and a justifiable one, that we had without giving the House of Commons an opportunity, as it is now given, of pronouncing upon the matter, set aside the Constitution and all the safeguards laid down in it, and had ridden roughshod over them without consulting with this House?

I have dealt with three points—the use of the Governor's reserve powers, the dismissal of Ministers, or, alternatively, the removal of their portfolios while still leaving them Members of the Government. The right hon. Gentleman opposite suggested that this crisis might have been averted by my having gone to British Guiana and delivering a warning to the Ministers or by summoning the Ministers to this country in order to give them a warning. I am afraid that, looking back, I cannot agree that either of those courses would have had any chance of success.

[1645](#) The Governor, who is Her Majesty's representative in the Territory and a man of wide and liberal views, acted in all these matters with the full force and authority of Her Majesty's Government, and had several times issued the warnings to which he referred in, I think, rather moving terms in his broadcast. I think that had I taken either of those courses it would have been of no avail. The trend and policy of the Ministers were, I fear, only too plain.

The next suggestion—made by the right hon. Member for Llanelly—was that we should have sent out a commission of inquiry before we acted. But, I ask, what would have been its terms of reference? It could only have inquired how the Ministers were carrying out their duties and how they were behaving. In this context, a commission would, I think, have been a mere excuse for inaction. Moreover, it would have been beyond even my gunboat diplomacy to have persuaded the majority of Ministers in the Government to accept or to invite a commission of this kind to inquire into their actions. Perhaps it was intended that the commission should be sent from here whether the Government in British Guiana liked it or not. Surely, that would be regarded as a very ham-fisted way of carrying on.

[§ Mr. James Griffiths](#) (Llanelly)

Am I to understand that, now that the Constitution and the Ministers have been suspended, the Ministers will not have an opportunity of meeting and that the Commission will not have an opportunity of examining them, or will the Commission have the right to examine them?

[§ Mr. Lyttelton](#)

The Commission has the right to examine whomever it thinks fit. I was not dealing with that point. I quite admit that the right hon. Gentleman threw out in the course of the debate the suggestion that we ought to have sent a committee to inquire into the Ministers' action before we ourselves took action. I was controverting that point of view because I thought that immediate action was necessary and because no responsible Ministers in any Government are going to accept a court of inquiry appointed by another Government to inquire into their action.

[§ Miss Jennie Lee \(Cannock\)](#)

I have been waiting very anxiously for a phrase [1646](#) such as, "The trend of policy of the other Ministers," to be reduced to a specific case. I hope that, in addition to these constitutional Territories, the right hon. Gentleman will at some point in his speech be more specific, because many of us are still living in an atmosphere in which we have had little except generalisations.

[§ Mr. Lyttelton](#)

I agree that the hon. Lady is in difficulties, because she may be in opposition to the official Opposition in this matter. But she will realise, I am sure, that I start my argument from the basis of the official Opposition, of the right hon. Member for Llanelly when he said, "We condemn their policy and action."

[§ Mr. S. Silverman](#) rose—

[§ Mr. Lyttelton](#)

I really must continue my speech.

[§ Miss Lee](#) rose—

[§ Mr. Lyttelton](#)

If the hon. Lady wants to interrupt me, I will give way to her.

[§ Miss Lee](#)

I thank the Minister for his courtesy. I do not interrupt him frivolously. I am quite sure that my right hon. Friend on the Opposition Front Bench will agree with me that it is not enough for a Minister of the Crown to put forward a statement, even by a Member of the Opposition, as evidence in dealing with a situation like this.

[§ Mr. Lyttelton](#)

That is a very agreeable point of view which the hon. Lady puts forward, but I am sure she will realise my difficulty that during the last debate a large measure of agreement was reached between the two principal parties in this House on the point that the actions of the Ministers in British Guiana were intolerable. We published a White Paper, which is a fairly substantial document, to prove why those Ministers were irresponsible, and the right hon. Member for Llanelly agreed with it.

The right hon. Gentleman and his right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition complained, very properly, that we ought to have dealt with the situation other than by suspending the Constitution. That is the point. It is impossible for us on this side of the House to do more than take the official view. We cannot follow all the threads [1647](#) that make up the complicated pattern of Labour policy on these matters. We have to take the official view, and I am sure the hon. Lady will agree that I am not making an unfair point.

The next point—and one which the hon. Member for Nelson and Colne (Mr. S. Silverman) mentioned—was, I think, the course advocated by the right hon. Gentleman the Leader of the Opposition. He said that I dealt with this point rather sharply, and no doubt through my mistake he misunderstood what I was trying to say. The point was, should the Governor have dissolved the Legislature and resorted to another general election? I said that it was undesirable that the Governor should get into politics. We did not pursue the point any further then, but I want to do so now.

Inevitably, of course, the Governor in a small country like British Guiana cannot be kept out of the arena of politics. He is the President of the Executive Council, so that the fact that he cannot be kept out of politics goes without saying. The Governor, however—and I hope the right hon. Gentleman will forgive me, because this is the point—could not have dissolved the Legislature upon the advice of his Ministers since, clearly, they would not have given that advice. Had he done so, he would have been bound to give some reason for acting without the advice of the Ministers.

[§ Mr. S. Silverman](#)

He could have done it?

[§ Mr. Lyttelton](#)

Yes, he could have done it under his reserve powers, but what would the reason have been for so doing? The reason would have been that the Ministers were unacceptable to him; that they were not doing their job, and were damaging the interests of the Colony. That, I think, would have prompted a storm even in the calm atmosphere of this Chamber. The Governor would not have been descending into the arena of politics—which he cannot help doing—but into the arena of party politics, which, clearly, he must not do.

I think it will not have escaped hon. Members that such an action would have given an ideal rallying cry to the supporters of the P.P.P. in the impending elections. Even I could have written an election manifesto for them. The [1648](#) Governor would have played straight into their hands. They would have said that, with centuries of practice to draw upon in these matters, he had dissolved the Legislature without the advice of the Ministers, and he would have had to use his reserve powers to do so. I think there is little doubt, and this is a field in which I am chary to prophesy, that only five months after their previous electoral victory and armed with this ideal piece of electoral artillery the P.P.P. would have been elected again.

And what would have happened had the same Ministers appeared again? Would the Colony have had to go through another period of three or four months while this one party tried once again to get control of every aspect of the Colony's life? Or would it have been the intention that the Legislature should be dissolved again and election after election have taken place until eventually a set of Ministers having some kind of responsibility might be thrown up?

[§ Mr. S. Silverman](#)

I think the right hon. Gentleman will agree that this is really the crux of the argument. I understand that the right hon. Gentleman's case against the Government was not that the Ministers were unacceptable to him on other grounds, not that he disagreed with this, that or the other policy, but that the whole complex of their behaviour in the previous four months had been to show that they had not the interests of British Guiana at heart at all, but were guided by dangerous and subversive ideas of a totally different kind. If the right hon. Gentleman now says he despaired of convincing the British Guiana electorate that that was true, it does not matter very much that he convinced my right hon. Friend the Member for Llanely.

[§ Mr. Lyttelton](#)

I do not think that has any particular significance in the context I was discussing. The hon. Member forgets the parts the Ministers were taking over the trade unions. I think it extremely difficult, when dealing with the actions of the Government, to make these fine distinctions between what is political and what is something else.

[§ Mr. C. R. Attlee](#) (Waltham stow, West)

There were two points raised. First of all, I always understood that where we have not absolute full Government but a kind of half-way house like this, one of [1649](#) the central safeguards is this power of dissolving Parliament without the advice of Ministers. It is only in the case of a long standing democracy such as ours that it is always done on the advice of the Ministers, and even there that power is held in the background. As I clearly understood from the right hon. Gentleman, and from the White Paper, the point was that, in fact, these Ministers were totally incompetent and that there was a general uprising of opinion against them. I do not see why a dissolution, which would give the people an opportunity of voting again, was more likely to rally the people behind the P.P.P. than was the suspension of the Constitution, which would give them a far stronger rallying ground.

[§ Mr. Lyttelton](#)

There are two points there, one of which has some substance in it. Here we are dealing with a very immature democracy. It is perfectly true that the Governor had the power to dissolve the Legislature. When the right hon. Gentleman says this was a very immature democracy, I think he is right. But I would remind him that there are Ministers elected from universal adult suffrage and the figures—I do not think the right hon. Gentleman was in the House when they were given—rather demolish the other part of his case because, although the electoral system may be altered, if it has to be altered, or something else happens, there was every probability that the single organised party would once again appear with the same people, and the same problems would reappear.

[§ Mr. Attlee](#)

Am I not right in thinking that the Government of the day did get a very large majority in the Legislature but that, in fact, it commanded only a very small majority, actually, of the electorate? I was putting this. I gathered from the right hon. Gentleman that there was a general and rising feeling against these people because they were running the show badly. Was there not a chance that some other party might have arisen?

[§ Mr. Lyttelton](#)

Of course there was, but, under the present electoral system, I do not judge it a very strong one. The right hon. Gentleman is really reinforcing my point by saying that since the P.P.P. got a very large majority and there was [1650](#) no other organised party, I think that all the evidence so far as one can judge, and it is a matter of judgment, is that the same party would have been elected again the same problem would have arisen again and it would have been said, "We only want Government if we can have self-government."

[§ Mr. Frank Bowles \(Nuneaton\)](#)

Might I ask that, if it so happened that in every constituency in the country one party gets 51 per cent., and therefore has a 100 per cent. in the House that is not democratic, but that that party has to organise an alternative party before it can be recognised as the Government?

[§ Mr. Lyttelton](#)

The hon. Member ignores the realities of the situation. Here was a Government which was obviously trying to subvert and bring down the government of the country. By dissolving the Legislature and reverting to another general election—and the right hon. Member for South Shields (Mr. Ede) has already expressed some substantial fears about the system which threw them up at the last general election—it is a reasonable assumption, with which I do not ask the Members opposite to agree, that the Governor would have given them an ideal piece of electoral artillery and the same thing would have happened again.

[§ Mr. Silverman](#)

What would have been wrong with that?

[§ Mr. Lyttelton](#)

We would have had the same Ministers about whom the right hon. Gentleman, speaking for the official Opposition, said "We condemn their policies, we condemn their methods, we condemn their actions." The point has been completely demolished, and I hope the hon. Gentleman will not ask me to indulge in any fandangos in the dust.

I have dealt with all the matters except the dissolving of the Constitution. With the greatest sincerity, and without desire to be either priggish or "high falutin," I do impress upon the House that this was the only straightforward, honest or open course which we could pursue in the circumstances. As I have said, this House had laid down certain safeguards for changes in the Constitution, so that both Houses of Parliament could be given an opportunity for free discussion and an opportunity for voting upon the proposals. That is the fact, and the [1651](#) cause of this debate this afternoon. We have set aside none of the Parliamentary safeguards. On the contrary, by our action we have invoked them, and it is for this reason that later on, and I shall not keep the House much longer, I propose to ask the House to reject the Prayer moved by the right hon. Gentleman.

I just want, very shortly, to give some rough chart of the future, because this is highly important, as a result of this draft Order in Council.

[§ Mr. Michael Foot \(Plymouth, Devonport\)](#)

The right hon. Gentleman says he is going on to deal with the future. Is he not going to say something about the alleged arson plot, which was referred to at length by my right hon. Friend?

[§ Mr. Lyttelton](#)

I apologise. I had promised the right hon. Gentleman that I would refer to it, but I had forgotten.

He said, or asked—I thought he made a statement—that there had been no prosecutions. Prosecutions have been initiated against Bowman and Nazradeen, two leaders of the P.P.P., and charges also laid against Lachhman Singh and Adjodha Singh for holding meetings against the emergency order.

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

Is that the arson plot?

[§ Mr. Lyttelton](#)

I have already informed the House, in a long answer, that no prosecutions can take place in relation to the arson plot because the witnesses will not come forward, and in this particular state of the Colony —

[§ Mr. S. Silverman](#)

You cannot prove them?

[§ Mr. Lyttelton](#)

We could prove the existence of a plot to such an extent that the Governor had to take action.

[§ Mr. Foot rose—](#)

[§ Mr. Lyttelton](#)

I cannot give way. I have been continually interrupted, and I should like to be allowed to remain on my feet for two minutes without interruption. In dealing with the future, I hope that nobody thinks that the Commission which is to go out needs to recommend interference either with adult suffrage or the beginnings of what amounts to a Ministerial system. I do not want [1652](#) in any way to cramp the Commission's actions or to pre-judge its conclusions, but it would be quite wrong to imagine that alterations in the Constitution necessarily involve alterations either in the franchise or the Ministerial system.

[§ Mr. J. Griffiths](#)

I should like to raise one point with the Secretary of State for guidance in the future. One day last week, when he announced the decision to set up the Commission, I asked him whether, under its terms of reference, the Commission could report, if it saw fit, that in its view no change should take place in the old Constitution. If the Commission is to go out with these terms of reference and is able to make this kind of recommendation, are we not to be allowed to discuss it until we have heard the Secretary of State's suggestions as to how the Constitution might be amended?

[§ Mr. Lyttelton](#)

I am very doubtful how far I can go on that point. I fully expected that you might have intervened, Mr. Hopkin Morris. What the right hon. Gentleman has said is putting me in a position of rather greater difficulty. If he will listen to what I have to say I think I can keep in order and, at the same time, give him some assurance on this point. The terms of reference of the Commission would apparently seem to be rather wide of a Motion to annul an Order in Council. The terms of reference do not necessarily mean that there must be alterations in the franchise or in the Ministerial system. I hazard the guess that every possibility will be explored before we are driven back upon such a step.

I must explain that some of the troubles in British Guiana might have been avoided if there had been an official majority on the Executive Council. It would not have been democracy in all its mature purity, but it would still have been a considerable step forward, to have had a number of Ministers, though in a minority, elected by popular vote. It would still have allowed those who have never carried the burden of Ministerial responsibility—

[§ Mr. Griffiths](#)

What we have before us this afternoon is a new Constitution, which is described as a temporary provision, against which we are praying. The Secretary of State has announced to Parliament that a Commission is to visit British Guiana and has been appointed [1653](#) by him, first, to examine the circumstances which led to the suspension of the old Constitution and, secondly, to consider a new Constitution. In reply to my question the Secretary of State indicated that the Commission is at liberty to recommend, when it has made its investigation, that the old Constitution should be brought back into operation.

Mr. Deputy-Speaker (Mr. Hopkin Morris)

The recommendations of the Commission, whatever they might be, would not be in order in a debate upon this Motion. This is a Motion to annul an existing Order, and the discussion of recommendations, whatever they might be, are not in order here.

[§ Mr. Griffiths](#)

We want to get it clear. If the right hon. Gentleman is to make suggestions to the Commission as to what it might recommend, surely we are also perfectly entitled to make suggestions as to what it should not recommend?

[§ Mr. Lyttelton](#)

I was only trying to say something which I thought would be agreeable to the right hon. Gentleman and to the House. I said that in appointing this Commission there was nothing which pre-judged the matter of universal adult suffrage or the Ministerial system. The right hon. Gentleman has got me into difficulties with you, Mr. Deputy-Speaker, and I must now leave the point. I cannot pursue it any further than to say that I have no doubt that there are many variations which are possible without touching either of those matters.

There can be an equal number of official and unofficial members with the Governor having the casting vote. There can be six Ministers, without them all being drawn from one party, and so on. I apologise for having kept the House for so long, but in a matter of this gravity, after the right hon. Member for South Shields had touched upon only a very few points, I thought it necessary for us to examine these matters in some detail, and over a wide field.

I should regard it as a constructive and statesmanlike action if the Opposition would refrain from voting against this Order today. No political consequences would then flow. I must say, quite bluntly, that a good deal of harm has been done by dividing the House on a previous occasion. The niceties of our [1654](#) procedure are not always understood abroad. Any wrong impressions would be largely removed if the House did not divide this evening.

[§ 5.25 p.m.](#)

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

I am quite sure that the speech the Colonial Secretary has made has failed to satisfy hon. Members on this side of the House. I want to take some of the points which he has put forward as justification for this very extreme action of the Government in suspending the Constitution. He urged that this action was necessary because there was disorder, or a great danger of disorder, in British Guiana. All the newspaper correspondents who went to British Guiana after the troops had landed there were unanimous in their view that there were no signs of disorder in the Colony. Indeed, they said that there was perplexity among the population as to why the troops had been sent. That was the view not only of the correspondent of the "Daily Herald"

[§ Mr. F. A. Burden \(Gillingham\)](#)

The hon. Member has said that the newspaper reporters stated that there was no sign of disorder after the troops had gone in? If that is so might not that in itself be a complete and absolute justification for the course of action taken by my right hon. Friend?

[§ Mr. Brockway](#)

I suggest not. As a matter of fact, some of those statements were made immediately before the arrival of the troops, but even if the troops had already arrived the opinion which the reporters canvassed was that of the general population of British Guiana, who had been there before the troops had arrived. Not only the representative of the "Daily Herald" but, even more emphatically, the representative of "The Times" denied that there was any indication of disorder.

[§ Mr. Beresford Craddock \(Spelthorne\)](#)

If that is so, will the hon. Member give his opinion of the passage contained in page 10 of Command Paper 8980, paragraph 32, which states that from 1st September to 9th October there were a very large number of applications for cover against riot and civil commotion? There must have been a reason for that.

[1655](#)

[§ Mr. Brockway](#)

I shall be dealing with that matter before I conclude. It was my intention to do so.

I want to challenge the whole basis on which the Government have acted in this matter.

[§ Mr. Lyttelton](#)

Is the hon. Member challenging the statement made by his right hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Mr. Ede)?

[§ Mr. Brockway](#)

No, and if the right hon. Gentleman will wait a little, that will be made clear from the remarks which I wish to make.

The picture which the Government have tried to give the House and the country is that a party seized power, or was elected to power, in British Guiana, and intended to use that power to build up a police State and totalitarianism. The right hon. Gentleman has said publicly that a Communist State must not be allowed within the British Commonwealth. That has been the whole principle on which the serious action of suspending the Constitution in British Guiana has been taken.

The situation in British Guiana at the time of the election was not dissimilar from the situation in other British Colonies. It was not dissimilar from the situation in the Gold Coast, when the Convention People's Party was elected to power three years ago. We have had very similar charges. When Nkrumah was a student in London he was charged with being under the influence of the Communists. He had a party in the Gold Coast which was a combination of Nationalists, Socialists and Communists.

There were parties in both British Guiana and the Gold Coast whose main concern was to win self-government and independence for the people, and the very limitations upon the Constitution of British Guiana which have been cited in the debate, namely, a second chamber in which the elected majority only have two representatives, the retention in the hands of British officials of complete control over the police and law and order—a point which was not mentioned by the right hon. Gentleman—the power of veto by the Governor, those were the grounds why, in British Guiana, the People's Progressive Party was demanding full self-government in exactly the same way [1656](#) as the Convention People's Party was demanding it three years ago in the election in the Gold Coast.

How is it that, in the case of the Gold Coast, the Convention People's Party won their victory and have been able to go forward with such success that the right hon. Gentleman recently said that agreement had been reached between the Government and the party regarding the development of independence there.

[§ Mr. Braine](#)

The hon. Gentleman is putting a very interesting argument, but there is no real analogy between British Guiana and the Gold Coast. Since his victory, Nkrumah and his associates have shown a sense of responsibility in internal government matters, whereas in five or six months in British Guiana the Ministers brought their country to the verge of economic disaster.

Mr. Deputy-Speaker

I would appeal to hon. Members not to make interventions which are really debating points, but to reserve them for their own speeches.

[§ Mr. Brockway](#)

I was asking how it was that of two similar parties in very similar conditions in the Colonies, one in the Gold Coast could go forward to a point where even the right hon. Gentleman recognises

that they can proceed to independence, while the other, in British Guiana, a situation could have arisen even within six months of office in which the Constitution has been suspended.

I suggest that the answer is that in the Gold Coast Dr. Nkrumah and his party were working from the first in a sympathetic atmosphere and with the full co-operation and help of the Civil Service and the population there. They were in an atmosphere which was encouraging them to advance in that constructive way. In British Guiana, there is the difference that political and economic control have been entirely in the hands of a small European minority.

In British Guiana there are the business interests of a white settler population. There was a feeling among the African population that they were in a struggle not only to secure their own political rights, but to overthrow the economic domination from which they were suffering. There was a situation in which 70 per cent. of the production of the sugar [1657](#) plantations was in the hands of one British company and where, when the second chamber had to be appointed, it was filled with representatives of white big business in that Colony. Because of that situation there was a completely different atmosphere, in which the People's Progressive Party operated, from what existed in the Gold Coast, conditions that I have already described.

I say at once that I would greatly have preferred the People's Progressive Party in British Guiana to have followed the kind of policy which was pursued by Dr. Nkrumah and his Convention People's Party in the Gold Coast, but the White Paper which has been produced as justification for the suspension of the Constitution does nothing to prove that a conspiracy existed to overthrow the Government and to establish a police State and totalitarianism, as the right hon. Gentleman has suggested.

Foolish utterances—yes; foolish actions—yes; but the only evidence of a coup or of any attempt to overthrow democratic self-government was this arson plot, the evidence of which was not in the hands of the Government when the decision to suspend the Constitution took place. When charges of that kind are to be included in a White Paper for the very grave step of suspension of a Constitution, they should not be included if the Government cannot bring the men against whom those charges are levelled to public trial, so that they can give their answer.

The next point to which I want to reply to the right hon. Gentleman is the argument that he could not have taken this, that or the other action, and could only take the action of complete suspension of the Constitution. He argued that if there had been a general election the People's Progressive Party would have been returned again. One of the things which the right hon. Gentleman has succeeded in doing is to make many more Communists in British Guiana and other Colonies than all the Communist propaganda in those countries. [Hon. Members: "Oh."] He says that there would have been a general election after the suspension of the Constitution. There has been a municipal election—

[§ Mr. Lyttelton](#)

The hon. Gentleman really ought not to take such large [1658](#) drafts on his imagination. I said nothing of the kind. I said that if the Governor had dissolved the Legislature there would have been a general election, which is a quite different thing from suspending the Constitution.

[§ Mr. Brockway](#)

And in that general election the P.P.P. would have won a victory.

[§ Mr. Lyttelton](#)

In that case the Governor would have had to confess he had dissolved the Legislature because Ministers were not agreeable to him.

[§ Mr. Brockway](#)

Exactly, and the argument I am now putting before the House is that, believing that a general election would have given more support to the P.P.P., the graver step of the suspension of the Constitution was taken, which has given it greater support still. There has been a municipal election in British Guiana since the Constitution was suspended, and in that municipal election the P.P.P. won four seats out of six. The right hon. Gentleman is not preventing an increase in strength of the People's Progressive Party by suspending the Constitution. The time must come when the Government will have to go to the people of British Guiana again, and the severe step which has been taken will only increase the support of the People's Progressive Party.

We are discussing now an Order which has suspended the Constitution. There fore, I assume that the events that have followed that suspension can be debated. Those events include the arrest of five members of the British Guiana Parliament. When, in the days of Charles I, the King attempted the arrest of five Members of this House the whole House resisted, and no representative of the Monarch has been allowed in this House since—

[§ Dr. H. Morgan \(Warrington\)](#)

He lost his head.

[§ Mr. Brockway](#)

—and the Speaker was the first to defend the rights of this House then; and yet now in British Guiana five elected members of its Parliament are arrested, and the right hon. Gentleman is not even going to give them the opportunity to answer in a public trial the charges that have been made against them.

[1659](#)

[§ Mr. Lyttelton](#)

May I suggest to the hon. Member that he should look less far back than Charles I, that he should look back to the days of the Labour Party, when 7,900 people were detained in Malaya without trial, over 5,300 being on personal order?

[§ Mr. Brockway](#)

The right hon. Gentleman should address that interruption to someone other than myself. He knows perfectly well that in 1929, when we then had a Labour Government in office, I was suspended from this House for protesting against the arrest of Mr. Jawaharlal Nehru and Mr. Gandhi and 60,000 Indians. He knows perfectly well I am not concerned here with merely party political points. I am concerned with personal liberties and the rights of colonial peoples, and, equally, when Labour were in office on that side and these points were raised, my voice was raised in this House in support of those rights.

The point is that the right hon. Gentleman, who is in this House as an heir of the traditions of the time when the Speaker protested against the arrest of five of our own Members, is himself today imprisoning elected members in British Guiana, and when he has arrested them he is declining to allow them to go to public trial and to answer, to the people who elected them, the charges that have been made against them. [An Hon. Member: "They have not been made."] As a result of a Question I put there have been placed in the Library the rules which are to apply to this secret tribunal, meeting in private, before which those members have the right to express their complaints. Those rules do not include any provision that they shall even know the charges that have been made against them.

In this House we on this side will not only protest against the suspension of the Constitution, but also against the conduct of the right hon. Gentleman since that Constitution has been suspended. I hope he will have appealed to us in vain in asking us not to divide the House. I hope we shall divide the House, because a great wrong has been done against a democratic Constitution, against a colonial people, and against the principle of liberty.

[1660](#)

[§ 5.45 p.m.](#)

[§ *Mr. Beresford Craddock \(Spelthorne\)*](#)

The hon. Gentleman the Member for Eton and Slough (Mr. Fenner Brockway) emphasised, as he has done on many occasions when I have had the opportunity of listening to him in this House, that he stands for liberty; but on all those occasions I have wondered whether he stood for liberty or for licence. I believe that in the illustration that he gave tonight of what has happened on the Gold Coast under Mr. Nkrumah, and what has happened in British Guiana under Dr. Jagan, he gave a perfect example of responsibly exercised liberty by Mr. Nkrumah and an example of licence as exercised by Dr. Jagan and his People's Progressive Party.

I find myself in some further difficulty when I consider what the hon. Gentleman has said, because it seems to me that what he has said is diametrically opposed to what his right hon. Friend the Member for Llanelly (Mr. J. Griffiths) said in October, when we discussed British Guiana before, because—and my right hon. Friend commented on that today—the right hon. Member for Llanelly agreed that the People's Progressive Party under Dr. Jagan had, indeed, abused its powers. The hon. Member for Eton and Slough does not agree with that view. Which are we to accept when we are considering this very important topic? I agree with the right hon. Member for Llanelly.

The past two years, since the present Government have been in power, has been a period of unrest and turmoil in many of the Colonies of the British Empire. Some right hon. and hon. Gentlemen opposite take the view that the major part of the blame for this unfortunate state of affairs lies at the door of the Secretary of State for the Colonies. I at once say that I do not subscribe to that opinion. No; on the contrary, I come, not to bury Caesar, but to praise him.

I do not think anyone will deny that during the last two years the Secretary of State has had many difficult, and, indeed, dangerous situations with which to deal—Malaya, Kenya, the difficulties of Central African Federation—and now British Guiana is a further example. I believe that he has had to make very disagreeable decisions, and I take the view, and I think we ought to say emphatically, as I know that it will be said by all my [1661](#) hon. Friends on this side of the House, that the Secretary of State has made those decisions, disagreeable as they are—

[§ Mr. G. R. Mitchison \(Kettering\)](#)

Brutus?

[§ Mr. Craddock](#)

—with characteristic courage and determination. Certainly, I believe that with regard to the suspension of the Constitution, all the evidence shows that he was thoroughly justified in the action he took. What has happened in British Guiana is no new phenomenon in the history of the world. Since time began we have seen examples of men imbued with power wanting to establish power and dominion over the persons and property of others. That is what Dr. Jagan and his People's Party tried to do in British Guiana.

But there is this difference. In days gone by, men imbued with this lust for power did at least have the courage to lead their followers into battle and face death for what they wanted. Today, the gentleman who wants power generally tries to get it by sitting at the back and urging on his followers with his glib tongued and "smart Alec" orations. That is what I believe Dr. Jagan and his henchman were doing.

The issue we are discussing today is a narrow one in certain ways, but it does have wider implications in the government of the Colonial Territories. The immediate point at issue this afternoon is: were the Government justified in suspending the Constitution of British Guiana, or, as has been suggested by hon. and right hon. Gentlemen opposite, should they simply have asked the Governor to use his reserve powers and other measures and not take the extreme step of suspending the Constitution? That, I think, is a fair statement of the narrow issue which we are discussing.

[§ Mr. Ede](#)

If the hon. Gentleman is looking at me, may I tell him that I did not mention the Governor's reserve powers in the whole course of my speech.

[§ Mr. Craddock](#)

I am much obliged to the right hon. Gentleman.

[§ Dr. Morgan](#)

The hon. Gentleman is confused.

[§ Mr. Craddock](#)

What I was saying is perfectly right in a general way. I know [1662](#) the right hon. Gentleman did not mention the Governor's reserve powers, but other hon. Members have done so. The main issue between the two sides of the House is that we on this side think the Government were right in suspending the Constitution rather than just allowing the Governor to use his reserve powers, whereas hon. and right hon. Gentlemen opposite say that the Constitution should not have been suspended. I hope the right hon. Gentleman will agree that that is a fair expression of the immediate point we are discussing.

I should have thought that an impartial examination of the White Paper which was published in October would have led to the view that there was only one thing to do in the circumstances, and that was to suspend the Constitution. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Colonies has emphasised once more the various things that were happening in that territory. They are listed on page 3 of the White Paper and include the fomenting of strikes; attempting to oust established trade unions by legislative action; spreading of racial hatred; neglect of administrative duties; undermining of the loyalty of the police; and threats of violence.

[§ Mr. Brockway](#)

Would the hon. Gentleman not agree that law and order and the control of the police were entirely in the hands of British Ministers?

[§ Mr. Craddock](#)

That is undoubtedly right, but, nevertheless, it is on record here—and I accept the evidence as given in the White Paper; I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman does or not—that the People's Party were attempting to undermine the loyalty of the police.

[§ Mr. S. Silverman](#)

There is no evidence of that in the White Paper.

[§ Mr. Craddock](#)

I am coming to that. The People's Party were trying to set up a separate police force independent of the established police force.

[§ Mr. Silverman](#)

That is not in the White Paper.

[§ Mr. Craddock](#)

If the hon. Gentleman wants to interrupt I will give way.

[§ Mr. Silverman](#)

If the hon. Gentleman says that the White Paper makes the charge that the People's Party were trying [1663](#) to set up a separate police force, independent of the administration, I think the House would be greatly indebted to him if he would read that passage out.

[§ Mr. Craddock](#)

Page 4, paragraph 9, of the White Paper deals with that matter. I will read it. The heading is, "Under-mining of the Loyalty of the Police."

[§ Mr. Silverman](#)

That is not what the hon. Gentleman said.

[§ Mr. Craddock](#)

It says: Ministers intended to organise a 'People's Police'. That is exactly what I said.

[§ Mr. Silverman](#) rose—

[§ Sir Richard Acland \(Gravesend\)](#)

Has the hon. Gentleman looked at some of the questions and answers that have been given since the publication of that Report, for example, on 24th November, when my hon. Friend the Member for Deptford (Sir L. Plummer) asked for particulars of this People's Police Force? To save time, I will just read the last part of the reply: No recruitment, therefore, has taken place."— [Official Report, 24th November, 1953; Vol. 521, c. 25.] There has been no recruitment whatever into any voluntary People's Police Force.

[§ Mr. Craddock](#)

I am in some difficulty, because the hon. Member for Nelson and Colne (Mr. S. Silverman) challenges me, and then his hon. Friend the Member for Gravesend (Sir R. Acland) interrupts me before I start replying to him. I repeat what I said. Answering the hon. Member for Eton and Slough (Mr. Brockway), who asked me if I would agree that the police force was under the control of the Governor and the Administration—

[§ Mr. Silverman](#)

No, British Ministers.

[§ Mr. Craddock](#)

Very well, British Ministers. I said "Yes," but I also said that the People's Party under Dr. Jagan were trying to establish another police force, which did not accept loyalty to the administration, the Governor or the Crown, but to the People's Party.

[§ Mr. Silverman](#)

Where does it say that?

[§ Mr. Craddock](#)

I am now drawing the attention of hon. Members to page 4, paragraph 9, of the White Paper.

[1664](#)

[§ Mr. Silverman](#)

It does not say that.

[§ Mr. Craddock](#)

It says: Ministers intended to organise a 'Peoples' Police'. What does that mean if it does not mean organising a separate police force from the one already existing?

[§ Mr. Silverman](#)

It is not the most important point in the debate, but since it has been raised let us get the facts quite clear. There is all the difference in the world between saying that we are not satisfied with the constitution of the police force and we are going to change it, which may be described by those who do not agree with it as undermining the loyalty of the existing force; and saying, as the hon. Gentleman said just now, that we are going to set up a separate and distinct police force side by side with it and opposed to it.

[§ Mr. Craddock](#)

Surely the hon. Gentleman is splitting hairs. If an attempt is made to set up another police force side by side with the existing one, it means to replace the existing one? But let me carry on. I have been asked to read further in this paragraph and I will do so, because there is plenty of time. It says: Ministers intended to organise a 'People's Police.' On 3rd May, Dr. Jagan said 'Comrades, in the past when we asked for bread we were given bullets and those who fired at workers were honoured by the masters. But when the P.P.P. gets into power the same bullets which were fired on those poor people will be fired on our oppressors. We shall organise a Police Force; it will be known as the People's Police'. Surely that is a serious attempt to undermine the established laws and law and order in the Colony.

[§ Mr. Silverman](#) rose—

Mr. Deputy-Speaker

I hope hon. Members will reserve these interventions which are really debating interventions for their own speeches.

[§ Mr. Craddock](#)

I shall be happy to give way to the hon. Member for Nelson and Colne, subject to your approval, Mr. Deputy-Speaker.

[§ Mr. Silverman](#) rose—

Mr. Deputy-Speaker

It is not in order for the hon. Gentleman to continue to interrupt.

[§ Mr. Craddock](#)

Other evidence is contained in the White Paper.

[1665](#)

[§ Mr. Harold Davies \(Leek\)](#)

It is not based on evidence. Why does the hon. Member keep calling it evidence?

[§ Mr. Craddock](#)

I accept it as evidence. I shall try to explain why, if hon. Members will give me a chance. I am not going to be put off by these interruptions; I shall just carry on quietly.

A good deal of play has been made by hon. Members opposite about the evidence with regard to attempted arson and the buying of petrol in small quantities. I must say that if I were a commissioner of police and it came to my knowledge that, quite suddenly, and for no apparent reason, a large number of people in a locality such as this were starting to buy petrol in small quantities when they possessed no cars or other motor vehicles that required petrol, I should think that it was a remarkable thing if they went on doing so, to say the least of it. I know from my own experience in other parts of the Colonial Empire that we have had the same sort of thing happen, and I should have thought that was fair evidence that something in the nature of arson was afoot.

[§ Mr. Ede](#)

The hon. Member has quite mistaken the point which was made. The Constitution was suspended on 4th October. The first day on which the Governor himself knew anything about

this petrol wangle was 6th October. The Colonial Secretary did not hear about it until 7th October, and he had suspended the Constitution on the 4th. Therefore, there can be no reason for his having suspended the Constitution before anything arose.

[§ Mr. Craddock](#)

With great respect to the right hon. Gentleman, there is no basis for that assumption.

[§ Mr. Ede](#)

When I made my speech, I gave the authority, which was not challenged by the Colonial Secretary. He himself gave those dates.

[§ Mr. Craddock](#)

It is not unlikely that although perhaps a specific date was given when the Governor informed the Secretary of State, this had been going on for quite a long time.

[§ Mr. Ede](#) rose—

[§ Mr. F. M. Bennett \(Reading, North\)](#)

On a point of Order. Does your Ruling, Mr. Deputy-Speaker, about interventions apply only to back benchers?

[1666](#)

Mr. Deputy-Speaker

This is nothing of the kind. I objected to the interventions which had been made because they were debating points. This is an intervention to clear up an ambiguity.

[§ Mr. Ede](#)

The Secretary of State has never challenged the fact that he made his order before he knew anything about the petrol.

[§ Mr. Craddock](#)

I am not in a position to know when the telegram arrived at the Colonial Office. All I am saying is that it is peculiar, shall I say, for want of a better expression, that the sale of petrol in small quantities had been going on for a long time.

Let me come to my next point. What about the evidence with regard to the alleged plot of arson? I am sure certain that every hon. Member who has had experience of living in the Colonies of the British Empire would agree that it is almost impossible to get the natives to come into open court

to give evidence against their fellow countrymen. The same thing used to happen in the old days in India. There was the greatest difficulty in getting people to give evidence on these points.

That was not surprising because often when they came forward and gave evidence—I have had experience of this myself—very strange things happened to them. Their houses went on fire for no apparent reason, goods were stolen and their families were injured by mysterious assaults. Therefore, it is not surprising that the Governor in British Guiana could not get the evidence to support what undoubtedly were very grave and suspicious circumstances. I do not think that that is a real point against the Governor at all in a territory of this description.

§ Dr. Morgan

I lived the whole of my youth in the tropics and in the Caribbean and I have never known of a case in any island—

Mr. Deputy-Speaker

What is this intervention?

§ Dr. Morgan

A challenge, Sir. The hon. Member is afraid of his remark being challenged.

§ Mr. Craddock

I shall not discuss the point which has already been dealt with by my right hon. Friend, as to whether the Governor should have used his reserve [1667](#) powers rather than suspend the Constitution. I think that has been fully dealt with, and I shall not detain the House on that matter.

I end on this note. If I may respectfully do so without being thought presumptuous, because I have been in this House for only four years, I should like to make an appeal to the Opposition, as had already been done, not to divide the House on this matter this evening. As many hon. Members know, I have had the privilege of living in many of our Colonies. I believe that there is a tremendous amount of great work still to be done in that sphere. I believe that the majority of hon. Members on this side of the House share the views of the majority of hon. Members on the other side of the House that it is our duty here so to regulate affairs in the Colonial Territories that we can bring the natives of those territories forward as quickly as possible in order to play their full part in the development of their own particular territory. But where we may differ is on the emphasis of time: whether it should be done quickly or whether it should be done more slowly.

While I agree with a great deal of what was done by the previous Government, from 1945 to 1950—and I say this with very great respect, as a result of a fair amount of experience of these matters—I think that the mistake which might have been made was trying to do things too quickly. I do not believe that leading these people on to play a proper part in the administration

of their own affairs should be hurried. It is our duty in this House to show them the fullest measure of trust, to approach all their problems with sympathy and understanding, but in the ultimate issue, if we are to make real progress, we cannot afford to approach these matters in the spirit of allowing our hearts to rule our heads.

We have to approach these problems in a realistic way, and I believe that the real difficulty and why all this trouble has arisen in British Guiana is largely due to the fact that we have given them a full measure of self-government too quickly, before they were really ready for it. I believe that some hon. Members opposite are too inclined, when anything goes wrong, not to wait for the evidence but to blame this Administration. In fact, I [1668](#) have sometimes wondered, when we have been discussing the colour bar in this House, whether a colour bar is not being raised against the whites rather than against the blacks. That is the impression which I get, and in my view it is not a proper or helpful attitude to help these people.

I sincerely hope, therefore, that the House will not divide on this issue, that after reflection hon. Members will agree that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Colonies did right in suspending the Constitution, and that, in the long run, it will prove to the advantage and well-being of British Guiana.

§ 6.10 p.m.

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

The hon. Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Beresford Craddock) said that the last two years had been years of great turmoil and disturbance in the Colonial Empire, a statement which will command agreement in every part of the House, even on the Government Front Bench. Of course, it is true—I say it before any hon. Member opposite attempts to say it for me—that all the years since the war have inevitably been years of great ferment and difficulty in the Colonial Empire, not only of this country, but of all countries with overseas responsibilities. That was to be expected, partly through the inevitable development of human life in the 20th century, and partly as a result of the war.

What we notice, however, is that while both the present Government and their predecessors had to deal with that situation of ferment and difficulty, and while both, inescapably and tragically, had to face some events which involved the use of force and the loss of life, none the less although there were difficulties during the six years that preceded the present Government's term of office, at the end of those six years one could point to a net advance in self-government throughout the Colonial Empire and an increase in the amount of trust—or, to put it less optimistically, a decrease in the amount of mistrust—that there was between white and coloured peoples throughout the Commonwealth.

In the two years of the present Government's administration, however, our charge against them is, not that they have run into difficulties here and there, [1669](#) which might well have happened whatever Government had been in power, but that the net effect of their administration has been a reduction in the amount of liberty throughout the Colonial Empire and a new wave of mistrust between the Government of this country and the coloured peoples for whom we are responsible.

[§ Mr. Beresford Craddock](#)

Surely the hon. Member cannot say that about Malaya. Is there not a larger measure of liberty in Malaya today, as a result of the actions of my right hon. Friend, than was enjoyed in 1945–50?

[§ Mr. Stewart](#)

No; that is extremely doubtful. The present Government are faced—

Mr. Deputy-Speaker

In any event, it would be straying beyond the subject of this debate to discuss Malaya.

[§ Mr. Stewart](#)

I am sorry to hear that, Mr. Deputy-Speaker, as I should be happy to reply to the hon. Member. [Interruption.] Does the right hon. Gentleman wish to say something?

[§ Mr. Lyttelton](#)

The hon. Member has been called to order, and so I cannot intervene.

[§ Mr. Stewart](#)

The hon. Member for Spelthorne also suggested that the error in colonial administration had been that we on this side of the House wanted to go too fast. These things, the hon. Member said, meaning self-government and the economic and political advance of colonial peoples, cannot be hurried. I say to him that they cannot be delayed, and that if methods are not found for giving peaceable expression to those desires, they will express themselves in some other and uglier form. The whole history of the Imperial responsibilities of this country, and of any other country which has held them, is that far more disastrous errors arise from being too late in the grant of self-government than from being too early.

The relevance of what I have said to the matter before us is this. We have now in Guiana another addition to the list of restrictions of liberty. In each particular case it is possible to argue nice points of evidence and of legal procedure, but what we see going on every month [1670](#) that this Government remain in power is a progressive driving back of the colonial peoples from the hopes to which the administration of my right hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli (Mr. J. Griffiths) had led them. The Secretary of State for the Colonies gets happier and happier each week as we hear this news of continuing distress and distrust. [Hon. Members: "Withdraw."] I am fully entitled to make that remark. I had not intended to make it if the Secretary of State had not provoked me.

[§ Mr. Braine](#)

On a point of order. Is it in order, in a debate of any kind, for derogatory remarks of that nature to be addressed by one hon. Member to another?

Mr. Deputy-Speaker

It is certainly not in order to attribute motives from one side to the other.

[§ Mr. Stewart](#)

I assure you, Mr. Deputy-Speaker, that no word which I have used could by the wildest stretch of imagination be said to be imputing a motive. I was describing the way in which the Secretary of State for the Colonies appears to regard these matters and to treat the House. If the hon. Member for Billericay (Mr. Braine) takes offence at that kind of thing, he ought to listen to some of the things that his hon. Friends say from time to time. People who live in thin skins should not shoot so many poisoned arrows.

The reason I hope the House will agree to the Prayer to annul the Order is that the circumstances in which the Order appears before the House are unfortunate, that the previous events that have led up to it leave an unpleasant taste in the mouth, and that the future which it foreshadows for the Colony is dark and uncertain.

My right hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Mr. Ede) made a good deal of reference to the circumstances in which the Order comes before the House. The Colonial Secretary did not deal with those matters, but I think that the Attorney-General, as is proper, may perhaps refer to them later. But what worries me about this matter of the delay in putting this important Order before the proper authorities and in making it properly available to Members of the House is that, as far as we can see from the evidence which is before us in the [1671](#) Report, there was no intention of putting the matter right until an hon. Member raised it in the House, as my right hon. Friend pointed out when referring to question 14 in the Minutes of Evidence of the Special Report of the Select Committee on Statutory Instruments.

What appears from that question and the answer to it is that a Question could be raised in the House asking why the Order had not been available to hon. Members and that at a very high level in the Colonial Office there was, apparently, the most blissful ignorance that such a Question had been asked. It is reasonable to expect that public servants who are responsible for this kind of thing should be aware of the reactions of the House of Commons to these matters; and we are obliged to ask what is the general standard of respect for the House of Commons that prevails in the Colonial Office under the present Administration.

Added to that extraordinary casualness in treating the House of Commons, we have the further suggestion that the House should forgo its right to vote against the Prayer. This is an extremely dangerous doctrine. If the House is to be told over and over again, "You must not criticise Ministers too harshly. You must not embarrass the Government, because that would create difficulties overseas," I should say quite plainly that if the price of our having a Colonial Empire is the abandonment of the liberties of this House, that price is too high. It is an argument that has

been used over and over again in the history of this country and an argument that people who have had regard for the liberties of this country have repeatedly rejected.

Nor is that argument in the best interests of the colonial peoples. If they came to the conclusion that this House had a sort of conspiracy of silence, in which we all agree to say that the Government of the day are right, in order that they shall not have difficulties in governing the Colonial Empire, the colonial peoples would quite rightly say to themselves, "This whole business of democracy, liberty and Magna Carta and all the rest that the British talk about is a sham, and we will seek our road to liberty along other lines."

These arguments and the way in which the House has been treated about the [1672](#) laying of the Order do not encourage us to regard the Order with any enthusiasm. Indeed, the offhand way in which the House is treated in the matter suggests that somebody has been telling the Colonial Secretary that he should not discriminate between men of different races and that he can treat the House of Commons with the same brusquerie as he would a deputation from Rhodesia. Those are the defects of the laying of this Order; now about the events preceding it.

I do not think we ought to repeat too much the arguments which were rehearsed very fully on both sides of the House in the debate in October, but I am bound to underline this: the Colonial Secretary's reply to day was largely concerned with urging that alternative methods of dealing with the situation, other than the suspension of the Constitution, were inappropriate, and particularly that he felt they were inappropriate because they would have thrown even more support into the hands of the P.P.P. than it already had. That was certainly the argument he used, if I understood him correctly, as a reason why the Legislature should not be dismissed. I gather that the Colonial Secretary now finds that I was listening rather better than he supposed I was. But if the argument is that we ought not to adopt that way of dealing with the situation because it would have thrown support on to the side of the P.P.P., what is the result?

[§ Mr. Lyttelton](#)

I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way. He has given only one argument, and that a subsidiary argument. The main reason the Governor could not have dissolved the Legislature was that he would in that way have had to take part in party politics and to have said, "This party is not carrying out its duties." That is the point.

[§ Mr. Stewart](#)

What is the Governor's position now? Is it supposed that the suspension of the Constitution has nothing to do with him? Does the right hon. Gentleman suppose that the population of British Guiana distinguish between the Governor and the act of suspending the Constitution? This is exactly the argument I am trying to get the right hon. Gentleman to seize. The action which he has taken of suspending the Constitution goes a great deal further in throwing support on to the side of the P.P.P. than [1673](#) the alternative lines of action, which he rejected for that very reason, would have done. All the arguments which he used against the alternative lines of action are equally effective against the action which he has taken.

I mentioned that there were certain episodes in connection with this matter which left a bad taste in the mouth, and in that respect I refer to certain allegations in the White Paper. I draw the attention of the hon. Member for Spelthorne to the difference between allegations and evidence. There are some things charged against the P.P.P. Ministers which are not now disputed, I believe—that they made foolish and reckless speeches, for instance; although I think some allowance must be made for a rather different idiom in elections. The hon. Member for Spelthorne said that the fact that they said at election time that they were going to organise a people's police is clear proof that they would have done so. He might just as well say that it is clear proof that the Conservative Party would not have cut the food subsidies. We cannot test the P.P.P. by a higher standard than that which the party opposite has itself attained.

It is also true that they maintained a very improper relationship with the trade union movement, and the handling of the trade union question was, to use the words of my right hon. Friend the Member for Llanely, unwise and deplorable. I do not think anyone disputes that, but what is interesting in the White Paper is that the far graver allegations—allegations not merely of unwise and deplorable, but of wicked and criminal conduct—stop short at the stage of allegations. After all, if constitutions are to be suspended and Governments turned out of doors merely because their actions are unwise and deplorable, what Government of mankind is likely to be safe?

For these graver charges there is nothing which we can properly call evidence, and I am bound to say that in my opinion the introduction of the allegation of an arson plot has been a thoroughly undesirable episode in the whole business, particularly for this reason—that not the Governor of the Colony, nor the Colonial Secretary nor the Government as a whole apparently consider the existence of the arson plot [1674](#) to be a necessary part of their case for suspending the Constitution. On the information which we have before us, the decision to suspend the Constitution was made before the arson plot was known. It was not necessary, therefore, to bring it in as justification.

Should it, therefore, have been brought in at all until it could be brought in as an incontrovertible fact? For what is the position we are in now? Because it has been brought into the White Paper, we are obliged to refer to it in the debates in the House, yet for all we know it may become sub judice at any time. All sorts of remarks are being made about it, and yet men may or may not be brought to trial for this alleged offence. If there was a bona fide suspicion that this plot was being prepared, those responsible should not have gone round making public statements to that effect but should diligently have pursued their search for evidence which would bring the criminals to justice. There was no need to bring it out at this time. Now that it has been brought out it makes it difficult for us to view with enthusiasm the general atmosphere of smear and accusation which has surrounded this suspending of the Guiana Constitution.

Finally, where is this leading us? It is quite clear that the actual text of the Order suspending the Guiana Constitution is, in effect, providing a purely autocratic form of government for the time being. I dare say lawyers know the reason it has to take so many sheets of paper to produce a result which one could describe in a few sentences. It creates a situation in which all powers stem from the Governor. That may well be necessary—if the necessity exists for suspending the Constitution at all; until the Commission has done its work and we can make a long-term policy, we may have to accept autocratic government of that kind.

But I notice that whereas there is an immediate proposal that the power of legislation shall reside in the Governor himself, that is to operate apparently for a time and then is to be succeeded by a later provision for legislation by a Legislative Council which is itself the creature of the Governor. Apparently there are three stages—an immediate position during which the Governor legislates; a [1675](#) later situation during which the Council which is his creature legislates; and a later situation—how much later?—when the Commission has done its work and perhaps something more democratic may appear.

I wish we could have had some indication of what hopes and prospects the Government can hold out about how long this purely autocratic form of Government will last. Already two stages are provided—not merely the immediate emergency but a continuation of it into the more elaborate stage when the Governor's legislation comes to an end and when Part IV of the Order replaces Part III. How much longer will this go on and what is being done in the meantime to give the people of British Guiana any opportunities of learning the arts of self-government and the democratic way of life? The only justification for suspending a Constitution would be if we could prove beyond doubt that they were incapable of managing a democratic form of government and if we were devoting our best energies to helping them to get to a position where they could operate the democratic form of government.

But here there is nothing at all about what is planned for the future to make it any easier. Is there anything? There is nothing in this Order which gives them even the most microscopic opportunity of exercising any power of self-government or choice at all. There is nothing either in the Order or in any speeches so far made from the other side of the House. I see that the right hon. Gentleman disagrees with me. I think it is legitimate to say that, since we are being asked to approve an Order to suspend the Constitution of British Guiana, it might be reasonable to inquire what the effects of suspending that Constitution will be.

What I am suggesting is that it has put the people who have been deprived of self-government, on the ground that they are not fit for it, in a position where they will get no experience or training in self-government. I want to know whether I am right in that supposition, and it seems to me that I am in order in putting forward that as an objection to this Order. Any hon. Member who has an answer to my objection would surely also be in order in making it but, as the evidence [1676](#) stands at present, I repeat that the circumstances surrounding the laying of this Order, the events that led up to it, the atmosphere of wild and unproved allegation which surrounded the suspending of the Constitution, and the blank wall which the Order is itself, all provide us with every justification for pressing this matter to a Division.

[§ 6.31 p.m.](#)

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

I could not help contrasting, as I am sure other hon. Members have done, the moderate and statesmanlike way in which the right hon. Gentleman the Member for South Shields (Mr. Ede) introduced this subject with some of the speeches that have followed from the other side of the House, in particular the sincere but nevertheless passionate denunciation made by the hon. Member for Eton and Slough (Mr. Fenner Brockway) who said that he was concerned with the

liberties of the colonial peoples. So are we all. I hope to show that, but for the action of the Government in suspending the Guiana Constitution, there was grave danger that the real, fundamental liberties, the natural hopes and aspirations of the Guianese, would have been severely jeopardised. I would remind the hon. Member for Fulham, East (Mr. M. Stewart) that the Government's action has resulted in the complete avoidance of any bloodshed or disorder.

I join with my hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Beresford Craddock) in regretting that we seem to be getting into a partisan frame of mind on colonial questions. I regret that this Prayer has been moved, because, if it is pressed to a Division, it could have the unhappy and unhelpful result of dismaying and disheartening our friends overseas and delighting our enemies.

As I see it, the argument of the Opposition is that this grave step of suspending the Constitution should not have been taken. We are entitled to ask what, then, should have been done. The right hon. Gentleman the Member for Llanelly (Mr. J. Griffiths) told us that he would have sent for the offending Ministers, would have talked to them round the table, and tried to persuade them of the error of their ways. Not everybody has the same touching faith in the power of eloquence and of ordinary human kindness. For [1677](#) example, the hon. Member for Shettleston (Mr. McGovern) told us in the October debate 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."—[Official Report, 22nd October, 1953; Vol. 518, c. 2237.] At least that is a point of view many of us would accept. Certainly it was sincerely advanced.

What we are entitled to ask is what the Governor himself was doing all this time. My right hon. Friend quoted from the Governor's broadcast. I think he could have quoted further. I have had the privilege of meeting Sir Alfred Savage. I number among my friends some of those who served with him in Palestine. He was appointed to the Governorship of Barbados by the previous Government. He is a man of the most liberal views, of the most kindly disposition, with a deep feeling of responsibility towards the mixed communities in which he has found himself since he was appointed Governor. He is a fine and noble man. He said that he had pressed on the P.P.P. Ministers— at every opportunity, collectively and individually, ways and means of making progress in the economic field but with few exceptions most of their time has been spent in building up a political dictatorship, even stating that they are prepared to use violence to obtain their ends. I suggest that to send for Ministers who had been disregarding the advice of a wise and patient Governor, who had been stirring up racial strife and preaching sedition, would hardly have improved matters. On the contrary, I should have thought it would have demonstrated the most appalling weakness and infirmity of purpose. What is more, it would have been a slap in the face of the man charged with responsibility on the spot.

At what point, then, should Her Majesty's Government have intervened in this steadily declining situation? I agree that the fact that Dr. Jagan is a Communist, that he and some of his associates have been behind the Iron Curtain, was no excuse for intervention. After all, there are many people nearer home who have held Communist views, but time and a sense of responsibility have made them wiser. I dare say that the [1678](#) Governor thought that in the course of time a sense of responsibility would have dawned upon these Ministers, though, in passing, it is fair to say that

one of the lessons our generation should have learned is that totalitarian Governments use the democratic processes in order to destroy democracy. The fact that a so-called democratic party wins an election is no guarantee that it will remain democratic. Indeed, all the evidence in the White Paper shows that these men were determined at the earliest moment to establish a one-party, totalitarian rule in their country.

[§ Sir R. Acland](#)

The hon. Gentleman says, "All the evidence," but will he read some the passages of the evidence?

[§ Mr. Braine](#)

I shall make my speech in my own way and if the hon. Baronet wishes to controvert anything I say, I am sure he will have a reasonable chance of catching your eye later, Mr. Deputy-Speaker.

Then again the fact that these Ministers neglected the job of day-to-day administration was no reason for taking violent action only a few months after a new Constitution had been put into force. After all, they were young and inexperienced and I dare say the Governor thought that time would work a transformation. The moment, however, that it became clear to the Governor in the Colony and to Her Majesty's Government that the actions of Dr. Jagan and his associates were leading to the possibility of disorder, violence and bloodshed, and at the same time were running down the economy of the country to the point where the Guianese people themselves might be faced with chronic unemployment and starvation, then it was the duty of Her Majesty's Government to act, and to act swiftly.

Were the Government to wait until murder and arson had taken place? If so, how many murders and how much arson? Surely the House has not forgotten the sad story of Malaya? Months, indeed years, before drastic action was taken to meet the situation there, the party which now sits on these benches demanded debates and made requests for action. I do not want to make a party point about it. [Laughter.] If hon. Gentlemen find this a laughing matter, let me remind them that action was only taken after British subjects had been murdered—

[1679](#)

[§ Mr. M. Stewart](#)

On a point of order. I was called to order when attempting to reply to what I considered a quite inaccurate statement of the policy of the late Government towards Malaya. I was called to order on the ground that we could not discuss that in this debate. Are hon. Members opposite to have the opportunity of making these statements to which we cannot reply?

[§ Mr. Speaker](#)

We are not dealing with Malaya but with British Guiana.

[§ Mr. Braine](#)

I leave the point, because I think that it has been well taken by the House. But is it to be said about us that the only thing that we have ever learned from experience is that we learn nothing from experience. Of course not. The right hon. Gentlemen on the Front Bench opposite would have sent troops to British Guiana in the present circumstances. They admitted it in the debate on 22nd October.

The right hon. Member for Llanelly did not criticise that aspect of Government policy. His difficulty was that not all of his hon. Friends would have supported him in that. I should like to quote again the hon. Member for Shettleston, who said, "...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 the Labour Party in this House for the action which he was taking in order to preserve the Constitution."— [Official Report, 22nd October, 1953; Vol. 518, c. 2237-8.] It is quite clear from some of the things that have been said that there are some people who believe that we in this country have no right to deprive colonial peoples of the benefits of chaos. I do not believe that of all right hon. Gentlemen opposite, but I ask what sort of action they would have taken. Their answer appears to be twofold. First, the Governor should have dismissed the offending Ministers. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Colonies has dismissed that argument this afternoon, because it is clear that the Governor could not dismiss offending Ministers without the consent of the Executive Council.

[§ Mr. James Johnson \(Rugby\)](#)

Where in the Constitution can the hon. Member find evidence that the Governor must 1680 have a majority of the Executive Council to dismiss any Minister? It was significant that when I asked that question earlier, when I interrupted the Secretary of State for the Colonies, the Attorney-General sat silent on the Front Bench opposite, and he is silent there now.

[§ Mr. Braine](#)

I cannot answer that at the moment, but when my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State says that it is not possible for the Governor to dismiss the Ministers without the approval of the Executive Council, I am satisfied that that is the right answer. The right hon. Gentleman the Member for Llanelly based his case on 22nd October on that assumption. It was an erroneous assumption, and that was one of the reasons he made such a bad case. It would have meant that the Governor would have had to govern despite his Ministers, and is not that a suspension of the Constitution in fact if not in theory? Failing that, it is suggested that the Governor should have dissolved the Legislature, but does anyone really think that proper elections could have been held in an atmosphere of that kind?

Let us consider the situation in the fortnight before the suspension of the Constitution. I have in my possession a cutting from the "Daily Argosy" published in the Colony, a paper which was quoted in aid by the hon. Member for Rugby (Mr. J. Johnson) in our previous debate. A fortnight before the suspension of the Constitution, this paper said: Here, events are being made to follow the same grim pattern with which we should now be all too familiar, for we have seen it work out in Italy, in Germany, in Russia and all her satellites, in China, and everywhere where the modern

hand of dictatorship has seized power. First the democratic processes are used to gain a degree of power, then those processes are subverted, the means of force and the administration of justice taken over and used for political ends, then finally the dissentients are 'liquidated' and the young moulded to a pattern through the seizure and misuse of the education system and youth organisations. That was the atmosphere which existed in British Guiana a fortnight before the suspension of the Constitution. There is evidence of widespread intimidation.

§ *Mr. S. Silverman*

Where is it?

§ *Mr. Braine*

If the hon. Member challenges me on that point I refer him to the letter, which was quoted by my 1681 right hon. Friend in the debate on 22nd October, from no less a person than the Archbishop of the West Indies.

§ *Mr. Silverman*

He does not live there.

§ *The Minister of State for Colonial Affairs (Mr. Henry Hopkinson)*

He certainly lives there. His cathedral is in British Guiana.

§ *Mr. Braine*

I am quite well aware of the fact that he is resident in the Colony. The Archbishop of the West Indies was describing a journey which he was making in the Colony from Berbice to Georgetown. He says in his letter: ...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.' "[Official Report, 22nd October, 1953; Vol. 518, c. 2172.]

§ *Mr. M. Stewart*

Does not that look as though, if there had been a dissolution of Parliament and another general election, the P.P.P. might very well have been defeated?

§ *Mr. Braine*

I do not think that that would have been so. I realise that that point has puzzled quite a number of hon. Members opposite. A high proportion of the electorate of British Guiana are illiterate. That does not mean to say that they are unintelligent and incapable of making up their minds on

important issues. They are a fine people. But the only way in which the masses can be influenced is by word of mouth.

It so happens that the P.P.P. won the election because it was the only properly organised party with funds and any organisation in the constituencies. One can say what one likes about the incapacity of the opposition in the Colony, but the fact was that a very large number of people were unable to read the newspapers. They could only form an opinion from what they heard by word of mouth from P.P.P. agitators, so there was the risk that if there had been an election the same result would have emerged.

On the question of fear and intimidation, it must be remembered that, as is shown in the White Paper, Dr. Jagan in an unguarded moment had said that In Kenya the Africans are not only killing white men who took away their land, but are [1682](#) killing their own people who turn stooges and that should be done to stooges [here]...who are fighting the cause of the Government and not the people. There is plenty of evidence to suggest that the people were getting fearful of what these Ministers would do. There was much intimidation during the strikes on the sugar estates and there was some arson there. A great deal of sugar was lost as a result of deliberate burning in the fields.

I find it very difficult to understand the attitude of hon. Members opposite. They believe quite sincerely that our task in the Colonial Territories is to improve the lot of the colonial peoples, to raise their living standards and so provide them with a richer and fuller life and enable them to stand on their own feet in the conditions of the modern world. I quite agree and I think the task we have set ourselves in the Colonial Empire is an exciting one, an inspiring one, a challenging one, and one which will tax all our capacity for leadership and understanding in the years ahead. But there is only one way in which the living standards of the colonial peoples, particularly in a territory like British Guiana, can be raised. That is by intensive economic development.

The truth of the matter, although it is often forgotten, is that the Colonies, particularly territories like British Guiana, are not poor because they are dependencies. They are dependencies because they are poor, so far lacking the skill and capital to develop what limited resources they have to enrich the lives of their people. If the social and economic development which hon. Members on both sides of the House want to see in the Colonies is to be brought about, conditions must be established which will allow for the substantial inflow of investment and expertise from overseas. There can be no inflow of investment at all if there is disorder and if government is unstable.

Surely that is generally accepted.—[Interruption.] If some hon. Members opposite below the Gangway do not understand that, I would point out that the wiser, cooler heads among colonial leaders do recognise it. For example, Dr. Nkrumah does. It is because of the sense of responsibility that he and [1683](#) his colleagues have brought to the government of their people that the constitutional experiment in the Gold Coast has been such an outstanding success. I quote in aid of my argument the statement of Mr. Norman Manley, a Socialist and a much-respected figure in the West Indies, the statement which he and the Jamaican People's National Party issued in which they condemned the P.P.P. Ministers for their betrayal of the cause of coloured people the world over and their reckless and stupid betrayal of the people who voted for

them. I also quote Mr. Grantley Adams, the President of the Barbadoes Workers' Union, a Socialist, and a man who has earned respect. [Laughter.] I do not see why hon. Members should laugh, because Mr. Grantley Adams, at the invitation of their right hon. Friends who occupied the Government Front Bench up to the last Election represented this country at the United Nations. He has said: However much we must regret the suspension of any constitution we should deplore far more the continuance of any government which put Communist ideology before the good of the people. It will interest hon. Members opposite to know that I am quoting from "Labour," the T.U.C. magazine for November, 1953. I believe we have a trust in the Colonial territories and in British Guiana, a trust we must exercise with devotion, understanding, patience—

[§ Mr. Harold Davies](#)

And with honesty.

[§ Mr. Braine](#)

And with honesty. But it is no part of that trust to permit anarchy. I am convinced that that was precisely what Dr. Jagan and his associates wished to achieve. I am sustained in that belief again by the views of the "Daily Argosy." This is from a leading article on 14th October, after the suspension of the Constitution: Make no mistake, the P.P.P. leaders—unless they are bigger fools than we think they are—knew full well that the carrying out of their programme would mean the loss of credit, the flight of capital, the abandonment of development plans, the fading of prosperity, widespread unemployment, and, finally, the breakdown of social services and of administration itself.

[§ Mr. S. Silverman](#)

Every word of that was said about the Labour Government of this country.

1684

[§ Mr. Braine](#)

Unlike the hon. Member, I am trying to be objective about this issue, I am trying to be constructive about something which affects the lives and destiny of half a million people. I do not believe that the hon. Member for Nelson and Colne (Mr. S. Silverman), and some of his hon. Friends who take such an irresponsible line on this subject, realise how swiftly this Colony could be brought to disaster, if it suited the purpose of determined men.

Those of us who have had the privilege of visiting British Guiana in recent years know that it is poor and undeveloped, that its potentialities are greatly exaggerated and that it is in more senses than one extremely vulnerable. Perpetual war has to be waged against the sea and against the waters of the rivers. All this requires the continual inflow of capital and expertise. This is a man-made environment entirely dependent on help from outside. The wonder is that so much has been done in this Colony. It is phenomenal that sugar is produced there at all because, owing to the fact that the water table is so high, I am told it takes 14 tons of cane to make one ton of sugar as

opposed to six to eight tons in other sugar-producing countries. This makes for high cost production. It is extraordinary that the Colony is able to pay its way in the world at all.

These are realities which no amount of political argument, no amount of sentiment or emotion, can whisk out of sight. When the P.P.P. took office in April last year, the prospects for the Colony were good. Overseas capital was beginning to come in. The International Bank had indicated that it was willing to take a hand in the development of the Colony. That did not interest Dr. Jagan and his associates. They chose, instead, deliberately to embark upon activities designed to drive away capital, destroy confidence and bring misery and disaster to the very people they had been pledged at the election to support.

For that reason, if for no other, the suspension of the Constitution was fully justified. Any step short of that would have failed to restore that confidence without which there cannot be the investment to provide the people of the Colony with the standard of living and social services they desire. I say the step was justified because we dare not risk letting [1685](#) a situation develop in which the Guianese themselves would be brought to the point of starvation.

I agree with those who have said that it is perfectly right for Members of Parliament to pray against an Order so as to extract from the Government of the day information about their intentions. That is the purpose of opposition. But I do urge on hon. Members who really have the interests of the Colonies at heart—in particular the interests of the people of Guiana at heart—not to press this matter to a Division tonight. However well we might understand the matter in this country, it would be misunderstood abroad; it would dismay our friends and enhearten our enemies.

[§ 6.59 p.m.](#)

[§ Mr. Harold Davies \(Leek\)](#)

I want to bring the House back to the real nub of the problem of the suspension of Guiana's Constitution. None of the requests from right hon. and hon. Members opposite will stop me from going into the Lobby tonight, even if I have to go in alone, because the story of the British Colonies since the present Government have been in power is a very sad one indeed.

I remember reading a few weeks ago how in history, when Sheridan stood in this famous Chamber at a time when Warren Hastings was cheating the Princes in India, he made a speech in just and righteous indignation. [Interruption.] If we believe in the continuity of the House as such, I am perfectly correct in using the expression that he stood in this House of Commons. We see the flippant way in which people opposite, who move pieces of paper and write on little bits of parchment, deal with the lives of backward men and women in the Colonies and who then try to make a cheap joke out of any serious position in the history of their Constitutions.

There was a similar position when Sheridan spoke in the same kind of Government as those opposite today who, like bouncing balls without any colour on them, bounce up and down at the express wish of Ministers. Even in those days there was more feeling in hon. and right hon. Gentlemen who occupied the benches opposite for the repressed classes of India than I can find

anywhere within the heart of the Colonial Secretary or any hon. Member or right hon. Gentleman opposite today. When we have had [1686](#) before us these colonial issues, such as the shooting in Kenya, how many hon. and right hon. Gentlemen have stood up to try to bring out for the world to know that they also stand for the freedom of the individual and our Constitutional liberties?

In the case of British Guiana, I believe that delegated legislation is being used in such a way that the House is being hurried unnecessarily into the acceptance of Orders and draft Orders which do not allow a true and quiet analysis of an important change of Constitution. All of us will remember that last week, or the week before, we had the Special Report of the Select Committee on Statutory Instruments. There is a growth of delegated legislation. We on both sides of the House are responsible for many Protectorates and Colonies and we have a right to look into the legislation which influences those Territories. We therefore set up in this House a scrutiny committee.

The object of that committee, which ultimately became known as the Select Committee on Statutory Instruments, was to consider whether the special attention of the House should be drawn to a Statutory Instrument or draft on any of the following grounds: (1) That it imposes a charge. (2) That it excludes challenge in the courts. (3) That it purports, without specific authority in the parent Act, to have retrospective effect.

(4) That there has been any unjustifiable delay in publication or laying before Parliament or in sending a notification to Mr. Speaker when the Instrument comes into operation before it has been laid. (5) That its form or purport calls for elucidation. (6) That it appears to make some unusual or unexpected use of the powers conferred by the statute under which it is made.

I contend that two Statutory Instruments might probably be challenged in the courts. I contend that Statutory Instrument No. 1478 and Statutory Instrument No. 1564 may be, and probably could be, challenged in the courts on the ground, as admitted in the evidence which hon. and right hon. Gentlemen have in their hands as a result of the Special Report of the Select Committee on Statutory Instruments, that they were never laid.

[1687](#) The Report contains the Question: Why were Statutory Instruments, 1953, Nos. 1478 and 1564 not laid? The answer was that they were not of the kind which are required to be laid. The [British Guiana Act, 1928](#), subsection (2) of section 1, provides that an Order in Council creating and constituting a legislature for the Colony of British Guiana or altering the constitution or powers thereof must be laid in draft before both Houses. Neither of these Instruments was concerned with the legislature of British Guiana. Thus, apparently, thought the Legal Adviser of the Colonial Office when he came to report to us. He, Sir Kenneth Roberts-Wray, who gave evidence which appears in the Report, did not believe that there was any need to lay Statutory Instruments Nos. 1478 and 1564.

The [British Guiana Act, 1928](#), is a very small Act, to make provision for the Government of the Colony of British Guiana. Section 1 (2) states: Before any such Order in Council creating and constituting such legislature or altering the constitution or powers thereof is made, a draft thereof shall be laid before each House of Parliament for a period of not less than twenty-one days on which that House has sat, and if either House of Parliament before the expiration of that period

presents an address to His Majesty against the Order or any part thereof, no further proceedings shall be taken on the draft, without prejudice to the making of a new draft Order. The only difference now from what is stated in the Act of 1928 is that under the [Statutory Instruments Act, 1946](#), these Orders have now to be laid for 40 days.

It has not been made clear to me that Orders Nos. 1564 and 1478 mentioned in the special Report should not have been laid. The Explanatory Note to Order No. 1478, which is dated 4th October, states: This Order in Council revokes certain provisions of the British Guiana (Constitution) Order in Council, 1953, relating to the functions and proceedings of the Executive Council established by that Order, and replaces the provision in that Order concerning the salaries of Ministers by a new provision. Therefore, it grew out of the parent Statutory Instrument of April, 1953, No. 586, but that itself arose from the [British Guiana Act, 1928](#). The Explanatory Note to Statutory Instrument No. 1564 states: This Order in Council revives subsection (2), except paragraph (b) thereof, and subsection (3) of section 7 of the British Guiana (Constitution) Order in Council, 1953. [1688](#) In other words, all we were doing there was taking away the salaries of the Ministers and, I contend, changing, as was said in the Act of 1928, the powers within the Guiana Constitution. Because it says clearly, ...or altering the constitution or powers thereof.... I would like this point dealt with seriously by the Attorney-General, for it would seem that there are some constitutional lawyers who believe that Dr. Jagan could bring an action against Her Majesty's Government because of the way in which these Orders were laid.

Let me deal with the general trend of the laying of the Orders, even the one we are discussing tonight. The question was asked, When was the draft Order in Council laid? The answer to that is, 5th November. When were copies circulated to the House? The answer is, 18th November. Then there is the question, Why was there a delay in submitting these copies? The answer is, It is greatly regretted that the requirement that these copies should be submitted to the Committee was overlooked. Steps have been taken to ensure that no delay of this sort occurs in the future. On a vital and important matter dealing with the lives of men and women who allegedly, according to the hon. Member for Billericay (Mr. Braine) are very backward and illiterate, and where in the last analysis this Mother of Parliaments supposedly stands for their liberty, why could not a little extra care have been taken in the Colonial Office to ensure that the House is made aware of these changes at the proper time? Or is what has now happened symptomatic of the rough-shod way in which the party opposite overrides the desires and the wishes of backward people? Despite the so-called logic, and chop-logic, I have heard from hon. Members opposite, despite the reasons they have tried to evolve, logic and reason have not been applied to the development of the Colonies.

Here we see the Government trying to hold back the tide of desire on the part of Colonial peoples to evolve their own system of Government. They have the [1689](#) right to make their own mistakes and to learn from them. Unless they have their own system of government and the opportunity to learn from their mistakes, we cannot expect the development of Constitutions which are either democratic or which will give the people the opportunity of taking their place eventually in the comity of nations.

[§ Mr. David Renton \(Huntingdon\)](#)

Will the hon. Gentleman allow me—

[§ Mr. Davies](#)

I cannot give way. If the hon. Gentleman is fortunate enough to catch Mr. Speaker's eye, he will be able to put the point he wishes to make.

Because of the way in which the two Orders were laid, I believe a case may be brought against Her Majesty's Government in a court of law by Dr. Jagan and the other Ministers on the ground that they have been wrongly dismissed, because the Government did not act according to the [Guiana Act](#). Secondly, I believe that the delay in submitting this draft Order in Council is typical of the way the Government tries to deal with backward nations.

The cheapest trick which hon. Members opposite have tried tonight is to appeal to some hon. Gentlemen on this side of the House not to go into the Division Lobbies. If the Opposition fail to go into the Lobbies on this issue their action will be completely misunderstood in the country. If the Opposition fail ultimately to put down a Motion of censure on the Secretary of State for the Colonies—or rather on the Government, because the Government are ultimately responsible—over action which has been taken in the Colonies, they will be betraying their trust.

I assure right hon. and hon. Gentlemen opposite that we do not intend to allow this Prayer to go without a Division. I hope I am speaking for the whole of my party when I say that we do not intend to allow hon. Members opposite to escape without a Motion of censure on the conduct of the Government in regard to colonial problems.

[§ 7.15 p.m.](#)

[§ Mr. Clement Davies](#) (Montgomery)

I approve of the last portion of the speech of the hon. Gentleman the Member for Leek (Mr. Harold Davies). I am sorry that the Secretary of State for the [1690](#) Colonies and the hon. Member for Billericay (Mr. Braine) made their appeal to the House not to divide.

[§ Mr. Ede](#)

If the Government accept the Prayer, we need not divide.

[§ Mr. Davies](#)

The whole strength of this House, the whole basis of democracy, rests upon the right of every hon. Member to express his views. It is the duty of every hon. Member to express his views and, if they are strongly held, to carry them to the Division Lobby, even against all other hon. Members, especially on a matter such as this which concerns the government of a people far away and for whom we are responsible.

I wish to deal with the point raised by the hon. Member for Eton and Slough (Mr. Fenner Brockway) regarding the attitude of this country to those countries and peoples for whom we are responsible. I take it that the policy of this country throughout has been that we should act as the guide and teacher of those peoples, so that when the time comes we may say to them, "It is now time for you to take care of yourselves politically, economically and in every other way, and we surrender the right of government to you."

The way we do that is always to ask them to copy the methods that we apply in this country. I take it that the only difference between some of us is that some would be ready to grant the right of self-government earlier than others. We decided to say to the people of British Guiana, "The time has now come when you can choose your own form of Government and elect your own representatives"; and it is a matter which we all deplore deeply that, within a few weeks, what was granted was taken away. Such a course should not have been taken without extraordinarily good reasons.

It would not be a good reason if those people adopted a policy contrary to the policy of the majority in this House, or indeed of the House itself, or if they chose their own form of Government. The essence of democratic government is that they should choose their own form of Government. There should exist the right of the minority to criticise what has been done by the majority and if, in course of time, the minority can become the majority, then they should be able to turn [1691](#) out the former majority. We have no right in those circumstances, to say to the people of Guiana, "Because you are taking a different view from the one we take in this country, or the one we would like you to take, we are now depriving you of that freedom which we gave you."

Therefore, I ask myself, what is the position here? We are asked to say that the Government were absolutely wrong in withdrawing the Constitution granted to British Guiana. It was not withdrawn because the elections did not go in the way in which people in this country expected or wanted them to go. That was made perfectly clear. So long as the Constitution granted to them is exercised in a proper constitutional way, we have no right to withdraw it.

Then comes the question: have they acted in an unconstitutional way? I have listened to the whole of the debate. Challenges have been thrown across the Floor asking for the evidence of this and of that. I am not in a position to affirm or deny that that evidence exists. I am not in a position to challenge it. There is a world of difference between our holding an inquiry now, in the calm and safety of this House, and the position occupied by the Governor at the time when he must have been asking that the very powers which have been exercised by the Government should be exercised.

That is all that I have to go upon. Am I in a position to challenge what he says? I have not the privilege of knowing the Governor, but from all I have heard from both sides of the House it appears that he is a man worthy of the highest respect. He is a man of great integrity who apparently in all his past has shown a real desire to assist the people among whom he has found himself in an official capacity. Either we trust the man on the spot, or we say, "You are unfit to be there," and we call him back and send somebody else in his place.

I have not seen the telegrams which have been referred to. I only heard the right hon. Gentleman read a whole list of dates on which messages had been sent to him by the Governor. Is there anybody here who would say that when he received those telegrams the right thing for the Secretary of State to do was to send for the Governor and to say, "Look here, [1692](#) you are unfit to handle this. I will send somebody else"? Apparently, the unanimous opinion is that the Governor was a person to be trusted and, therefore, one must support what he does. How am I to challenge what he did in view of his own statements and the evidence that he puts forward? Can it be said—

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

Like myself, the right hon. and learned Gentleman has been reared in the law. I should like to put it to him that what he is saying might be dangerous doctrine. I cannot imagine that he believes that the mere fact that a Governor of some Colony had performed some act, which is now a fait accompli, makes it useless for this House later to raise the matter or to have an inquiry into it. That would be a dangerous doctrine.

[§ Mr. Davies](#)

I did not say that. If the hon. and learned Gentleman had listened, he would have known that I said that not only were we right in inquiring into the matter but that there was a duty upon those who felt strongly to vote tonight.

I was saying that I am not in a position to challenge the Governor and to say that he was wrong, especially when I assume that he must have been informing the Secretary of State of certain matters which appear in the White Paper. For example, what happened on 24th September when the strike ended and the House of Assembly met? Instead of there being a proper debate, the Ministers went out and called the mob into the Chamber, which was wrecked. It ceased to be a deliberative Chamber, and the mob was called in. Was that exercising the Constitution in a proper way? Can anybody say that that was proper?

The Governor says that statements were made by these Ministers about the police. These were statements that they intended to form their own police force, and so on. If that information comes to a Governor, whom is he to trust? Can he say, "I can send for the inspector or the chief of police, whoever he may be, and find out exactly what is taking place?" Can he do that when his own Ministers have been making public statements that they are altering their views and their loyalty toward the Government of the day? What is the Governor to do?

[1693](#) I did not see Dr. Jagan or any of his colleagues, but the right hon. Gentleman the Member for Llanelly (Mr. J. Griffiths) saw them on the day before our last debate. I accept what the Leader of the Opposition and the right hon. Member for Llanelly said. The right hon. Member for Llanelly turned upon them and said, "You are disappointing; I disapprove of your action; I disapprove of your policy; I disapprove of your ideas." I am not sure whether the word "ideas" was the one he used, but he showed strong disapproval and said, "I condemn them." That was said by the right hon. Gentleman when these men were in this country in quietness and safety.

What was the position of a Governor responsible for the safety of the people out there? If I remember rightly, in the last debate there was no challenge by the Leader of the Opposition or the right hon. Member for Llanely that it was not right to send troops. The only point on which there was a challenge was that the Government should not have suspended the Constitution. How could we have sent troops without suspending the Constitution?

[§ Mr. J. Griffiths](#)

I am sure that the Secretary of State will agree that he does not want anyone to accept the doctrine that if the Government think it necessary to send forces in order to ensure good order, they cannot do it unless the Constitution of the Colony is suspended. That would be an extraordinary doctrine.

[§ Mr. Davies](#)

This was a situation where the Governor had reserve powers and he decided that this was not the moment to use them. I shall not repeat all the arguments evolved by the Secretary of State about them; but here was the Governor sitting in Council, and he was responsible. He had sitting with him as an Executive Council his Cabinet, the majority of whom were the people whom he had done his best to try to teach and to work with.

The Governor said to them, "All kinds of information is coming to me about the way in which the police are being tampered with and about the fact that they are not being loyal. I do not know whether it is true or not, but information has come to me about an arson plot. I [1694](#) do not know what may happen. I propose to ask the Government in Britain to send in troops."

[§ Mr. Foot](#)

That was before there was talk about arson.

[§ Mr. Davies](#)

That may be, but the Governor was putting the position to them and said, therefore, that he had to send for troops. At once the majority said, "Sir, we are against you; we do not need troops."

[§ Mr. Fenner Brockway](#)

Is it not the case that in British Guiana the entire control of defence and troops was in the hands of a British Minister and, therefore, it would not have been necessary for the Governor to discuss the matter with the majority in the Executive Council?

[§ Mr. Davies](#)

I should have expected better than that from the hon. Member. If the Governor was going to do it without suspending the Constitution, it was a matter which ought to be dealt with within the

Executive Council. He could not do that behindhand and say, "I have done it, and there was no need to consult you."

[§ Mr. Brockway](#)

That is a criticism of the Constitution.

[§ Mr. Davies](#)

That may be a criticism of the Constitution, but I am trying to determine what would be the position of any one of us who was face to face with the difficulties which confronted the Governor at that time.

If the Governor in his speech said what has been stated—I have not seen the speech—I should have thought that he was a man whom I could respect and would back for the time being until I had made the fuller inquiry which I understand is now being made. It may well happen that, as the result of the inquiry, the views expressed by hon. Members about the Governor may have to be withdrawn, and it may turn out that the inquiry will condemn him, but on that statement of his, what else could he have done. He said: I believed and still believe that much can be done in the next few years to encourage the economic development of the country so that as many of you as possible who are unemployed or under-employed could be given work and so improve your standards of living. [1695](#) I understand from everyone who has been there that conditions have been absolutely disgraceful, and I am not a bit surprised that Communism has appealed to the people. Communism will not be met by force or defeated by guns; it can only be defeated by the provision of a better policy which will do more for the people who are suffering. The statement said: I and my officials have done our utmost to make this constitution work. I have done everything I could to meet the wishes of the Ministers elected by the House of Assembly and to induce them by good will, by tact, by patience and by tolerance to carry out their responsibilities. If that had been said to any one of us, what would we have done except to say, "We trust this man"?

The statement went on: The experience and advice of the whole public service was at their disposal and as you know I made no use of my reserved powers to prevent them acting as they wished. I have pressed on them at every opportunity, collectively and individually, ways and means of making progress in the economic field but with few exceptions most of their time has been spent in building up a political dictatorship, even stating that they are prepared to use violence to obtain their ends.

[§ Mr. Turner-Samuels rose—](#)

[§ Mr. Davies](#)

I cannot give way. There is the crux of it. If they had used their time to build up a political form in which they believed, nobody could have objected. Even if, in the long run, that might have meant a political dictatorship, I would have said, "I have taken the risk. It has to be accepted. It is their choice, not mine." But then the Governor went on to say: ...even stating that they are

prepared to use violence to obtain their ends"— that is, acting unconstitutionally. If, in those circumstances, that represented the views and opinion of the Governor, who am I to disagree with him? That being so, the Secretary of State had no option but to follow the advice tendered to him.

I hope that good will come from all this. A Commission is now going out to Guiana to inquire into the matter. I hope it will inquire into the underlying causes of the disaffection and ascertain what ought to have been done years ago to remedy the state of affairs which now exists.

[1696](#) On these matters of liberty, I always take the same views as the hon. Member for Eton and Slough. I am perhaps rather inclined to rush in and give the people the right to choose their own Government. I had a lesson in that about a fortnight ago. There happened to be over here representatives from the various Colonies to which a certain amount of self-government has been given. They came from the Gold Coast, Nigeria, Guiana, Jamaica, Grenada and so on. I asked one of them something about his own country, and he said, "You are not carrying out your moral responsibility and obligation." It took me a long time to discover what he was after. It was, apparently, that we have done a great deal to teach the people economics and health matters and have brought education and a great deal of knowledge to them, but we have omitted from our teaching a most important matter, perhaps the most important matter of all—how democracy functions.

All those people have had hitherto has been rule by a chief or a governor or by a chief plus a governor. Suddenly we come along and say, "The time has now come. You can form your own government. You will have it in exactly the same way as we have it in Britain. You will have an elected House of Commons, and you will carry on everything as we do." These men pointed out to me that, unfortunately, those appointed to the majority were inclined to adopt the view that they were now occupying the position of the former chief and that the minority had no rights. They urged upon me that further attention should be paid to this aspect, and that we should carefully watch the territories and help them in building up what they knew had taken us centuries to build.

I should like a discussion to take place in the House upon our liability towards these people in the various Colonies, and our discussion should be on the high level of each one of us doing his best to contribute to the common good.

It is because I feel that a case has not been made for saying that the Governor was wrong in asking for the suspension of the Constitution and that the Secretary of State had no option to do other than he did, that I feel that I must vote tonight, and I shall vote with the Government.

[1697](#)

§ 7.39 p.m.

§ [The Attorney-General \(Sir Lionel Heald\)](#)

I feel almost as if I ought to apologise for intervening at this moment merely on a legal question, but the House may be thankful for a few moments to think over, whether they agree with it or not, the very weighty speech which has just been made. I hope it will be for the convenience of the House if I try to clear up the legal points which have been raised. One point was raised by the hon. Member for Rugby (Mr. J. Johnson), and other points were raised by the hon. Member for Leek (Mr. Harold Davies).

The point raised by the hon. Member for Leek related to Clause 11 of the British Guiana (Constitution) (Temporary Provisions) Order in Council, 1953. The hon. Gentleman said that that Clause gave overriding power, but it says: All questions which may arise as to the right of any person to be or to remain a Member of the Executive Council shall be referred to the Governor and shall be determined by the Governor acting in his discretion. Then, very rightly, the hon. Gentleman referred to questions where the matter is in the discretion of the Governor, and said that he was under no obligation to consult the Executive Council. As I understand the matter, and nobody can be dogmatic about it, although I am bound to say that I am quite clear about it, the answer is provided by Clause 10 (2), which says: The Governor, acting in his discretion, may at any time propose to the Executive Council that any person who is a Minister shall cease to be a Minister; and if the Executive Council shall so resolve, the seat of that Minister in the Executive Council shall thereupon become vacant. I do not like to be dogmatic, but I should have thought—and I should advise the House—that Clause 11 cannot possibly overrule Clause 10 (2). Under Clause 11, all that I understand is to be dealt with there are some disputed technical questions as to whether a man has been properly elected or whether there has been some defect in the procedure; that is to say, under Clause 10 (2), after the Council has been consulted, some question arises on which the Governor has this discretion. As I understand it, Clause 10 (2) is the overriding provision, and the Governor, before he acted, must make a proposal to the Executive. I would draw the attention of the hon. Member for Leek to the fact that there [1698](#) is a specific reference to that discretion whether the Governor does make the proposal or not. He is not bound to consult anybody on it, but, as I see it, Clause 10 (2) cannot be overruled. That is, at any rate, my view, and it is the view upon which the Government have acted.

[§ Mr. R. T. Paget \(Northampton\)](#)

If the interpretation which the learned Attorney-General has put upon the Clause is the right one, is it not rather curious that in Clause 11 matters have been left to the Governor to decide in his discretion, instead of leaving it to him to decide judicially, whereas in Clause 10 it is left to his discretion whether to refer it to the Executive Council or not? Is it not provided here as an alternative means of getting rid of Ministers if the Governor felt that that is so important that he must act even against his Executive Council?

[§ The Attorney-General](#)

I would not say that that is not a possible view, but I would say that I do not think it is the right one. Clause 11 deals with quite minor matters, and I would draw the attention of the hon. and learned Member to the fact that Clause 11 deals not only with the question of removal but covers the right of any person to be or to remain a Member. Certainly, the kind of thing contemplated by

his question, on whether the election is in order or not, no one here, at any rate, can decide. I do not think the Division tonight will turn on the difference between the hon. and learned Gentleman and myself.

§ Mr. Paget

I entirely agree, but it is very difficult when we used the word "discretion," which seems so inappropriate and when the word "judicial" is much more likely to be the right word to use.

§ The Attorney-General

All I can say is that, apparently, that is the view that was acted upon by the Governor.

§ Mr. J. Johnson

I cannot compete with the legal jargon of my hon. and learned Friend and the learned Attorney-General, but I did take advice upon this matter outside the House, and the authority I consulted said that this was a slight maze and that it could be determined either way.

§ The Attorney-General

I think we are all in agreement that it cannot be a decisive factor in the discussion. [1699](#) I am sorry that the hon. Member for Leek is not here, but I shall try to deal with the points he raised. I should like to say that he and I have been very good friends in one or two exciting matters in Committee upstairs, and that I hope he will not regard me as being in any way discourteous to him if I suggest that he has really got hold of the wrong end of the Order in this case.

In the first place, the House is entitled to be reminded of what is already known to some hon. Members of the Committee before whom this matter came up. The point was raised about the alleged invalidity of the proceedings in relation to a previous Order, and the Committee considered it, and heard evidence from a distinguished expert; in fact, from two. There was Sir Cecil Carr—though perhaps we should not call it evidence—who was advising the Committee, and there was Sir Kenneth Roberts-Wray, a very experienced legal adviser to the Colonial Office. After hearing this advice and evidence, the Committee reported: Your Committee,...decided that the draft British Guiana (Constitution) (Temporary Provisions) Order in Council, 1953, did not call for the special attention of the House on any of the specific grounds set out in their Order of Reference. They also stated, however, that it would be for the convenience of the House if they presented these documents. They merely set out the facts—the evidence which caused that delay in connection with this Order.

I venture to think that they did not indicate Statutory Instruments Nos. 1478 and 1564, and no one has taken objection to their being discussed today, though it is rather difficult to see how a Motion objecting to an Order could allow us to spend much time discussing two other Orders which have not been laid. It is desirable that the House should not be left in any dubiety regarding the propriety of not having laid these Orders, and as the hon. Member for Leek has already pointed out, there is only a limited requirement in regard to the laying of Orders under

the [British Guiana Act, 1928](#). I think I must read the relevant passage, though not the whole of the Section, to the House. Section 1 (1) says this: It shall be lawful for His Majesty in Council to create and constitute, in substitution [1700](#) for the existing legislature, a legislature for the Colony of British Guiana in such form and with such powers as His Majesty in Council may determine, and from time to time to alter and amend the constitution of the legislature and any powers thereof; and any such Order in Council may provide that, notwithstanding the powers conferred on the legislature thereby, there shall be reserved to or conferred on His Majesty full power by Order in Council from time to time to make laws for the peace, order, and good government of the Colony of British Guiana. The first part of the Order in Council deals with the setting up or amending of the Legislature, and the second with what are called the reserve powers. It says: Before any such Order in Council...thereafter is made, a draft thereof shall be laid before each House of Parliament. The distinguished expert who gave evidence and advice to the Committee, and whose view was accepted by the Committee, thought that Statutory Instruments Nos. 1478 and 1564 were not Orders within the first part of subsection (1) and therefore did not require to be laid. As I understand it, he was clearly right in doing so, because one has only to look at the terms of the Orders. If one looks at Statutory Instrument No. 1478, one finds that the recital begins as follows: Whereas by Part II of the British Guiana (Constitution) Order in Council...provision is made for the constitution and functions of an Executive Council for British Guiana: Now, therefore. Her Majesty,— and so on. It is quite clear that that is under the second half of subsection (1) and not under the first half. The same thing applies with even greater force in the case of Order No. 1564, because I do not think there could be any suggestion of any alteration in the powers of the Legislature.

The only point was that raised by the right hon. Member for South Shields (Mr. Ede), namely, that the Executive Council should be regarded as part of the Legislature. With the very greatest respect to him—and I hope I always speak about him with adequate respect, as I would never attempt to do anything else—I notice that under Order No. 586, that is to say, the British Guiana (Constitution) Order in Council. 1953, made on 1st April, this year, we find that under the recitals a distinct separation is made [1701](#) between the two things. Perhaps I may read out shortly from the document: Whereas by the [British Guiana Act, 1928](#), Her Majesty in Council is empowered to create and constitute a Legislature for the Colony of British Guiana. Then: And whereas by the said Act it is provided that any such Order in Council may provide that, notwithstanding the powers conferred on the Legislature thereby, there shall be reserved to or conferred on Her Majesty full power...to make laws for the peace, order and good government of the Colony. And whereas by the Orders in Council mentioned in Part I of the Schedule to this Order provision is made for a Legislature. And finally: And whereas by the Letters Patent mentioned in Part II of the Schedule to this Order there is established in and for the Colony an Executive Council. It is clear that those two things are being regarded as different. I think that one can say that according to this legislation there is no doubt that the Legislature and the Executive Council are separate things and that the Legislature cannot comprehend the other.

The right hon. Member for South Shields said that in our Constitution it was different in that the Legislature included the Sovereign and the two Houses of Parliament, but he would agree with me that this is quite a different matter. We can hardly compare the Executive Council in British Guiana with the other place, any more than we can compare the House of Commons with the

British Guiana Legislature. Certainly one could not attempt to suggest that the Executive Council performs any function of the same kind as the other place.

§ Mr. Ede

Does the hon. and learned Gentleman say that the Executive Council is not a part of the Legislature?

§ The Attorney-General

It is more equivalent to the Cabinet than to the other place.

§ Mr. J. Griffiths

This Cabinet is appointed from the Legislature, and if there were no appointment from the Legislature there could be no Cabinet, which is therefore dependent upon the Legislature.

§ The Attorney-General

The expression "legislature" is used by us in a much wider sense than in the legislation that we are talking about, "Legislature" [1702](#) is used in this country to describe the whole structure of King or Queen and Parliament, but in this case it is used in a very limited form. I do not want to delay the House but I know the House wants to be satisfied, and I hope I will not waste time if I look at the wording again. We shall find that there is a separate part of the Order which deals with Legislature. It has a separate heading. There is a separate part which deals with the Executive Council. On page 21 is Part VI, and it says: Legislation and Procedure in Legislature. All the articles under that heading are limited to one council. In the other case, there are separate provisions under the heading Executive Council, from page 4 onwards. I am not disputing Webster's Dictionary, but when one has to construe legislation one has sometimes to give a word a more limited construction.

§ 7.54 p.m.

§ Sir Frank Soskice (Sheffield, Neepsend)

Will the hon. and learned Gentleman agree with me about this, at any rate? I am sure he will agree that this is a very important point. The question is whether these Instruments should have been laid or not. Therefore, I do not apologise for taking a little more time and just following up what the hon. and learned Gentleman has said. Will he not agree that there is, at the very least, very considerable doubt whether the views that he has expressed and the views that were expressed before the Select Committee are right?

Does not doubt arise in this way: We can use the word "legislature" in a wide sense as meaning the whole apparatus of government and we can use the word "legislature" in a narrow sense as meaning merely a deliberative assembly or State Council? I am sure that he will agree that, if it is used in the former and wider sense, then the Executive Council is part of the Legislature. If

that is so, then it is common ground amongst everybody on both sides of the House that in annulling paragraph 6 of Order 586 the subsequent Orders were clearly altering the powers or the constitution of the Legislature. There is at least very considerable doubt which view is right. The question comes down to whether the word "legislature" is used in the wide or narrow sense.

1703 I put it to the hon. and learned Gentleman that at the very least it would appear that in Section 1 of the [British Guiana Act, 1928](#), the word is used in a wide sense and not in the narrow sense. If it is, after all, used in the narrow sense and not the wide sense, then Order 586, setting up, as it does, not only the deliberative assembly and State Council, but also the Executive Council, is ultra vires Section 1 of the [British Guiana Act, 1928](#). It is not an unreasonable presumption and reading of the Orders in this case to construe the word "legislature" as used in the same sense as it is used in Section 1 of the [British Guiana Act, 1928](#).

If that is so, it follows that these two Orders should certainly have been laid. That is the point to which I would direct the attention of the hon. and learned Member. I put it no higher than that there is a very real doubt whether "legislature" is used in the wide or narrow sense, and if it is used in the wide sense clearly these Orders ought to have been laid.

There is a subsidiary point. Even if it is used in the narrow sense I should have submitted to the House that it was at least arguable, and possibly more than arguable, that if the situation is that, until Order No. 1478 was made, the deliberative assembly and the State Council had the power to man the Executive Council, which itself was to be the principal organ of policy under paragraph 6, and if after Order 1478 was made they no longer had the power to man the principal organ of policy, then, even giving a very narrow interpretation to the word "legislature" as constituting merely the deliberative assembly and the State Council, we are, by the Orders in question, altering its powers.

Before Order No. 1478 is made, it can man the principal organ of policy. After, it can man that organ, but it is no longer a principal organ of policy. Does not that alter its powers? I shall be grateful if the right hon. and learned Gentleman will give thought to these two points, because they greatly concern us on this side of the House. If the view which I have expressed is right, then these Orders ought to have been laid. I hope that the right hon. and learned Gentleman will be so good as to give his views on the points I have suggested to him.

1704

[§ The Attorney-General](#)

With the leave of the House, I will answer the points put forward by the right hon. and learned Gentleman. As regards his first argument, I agree with every word he said, but I fundamentally differ with him on the assumption with which he started in regard to the word "legislature." Of course, if the word "legislature" in subsection (1) included the Executive Council, then the result would be different. I made it quite clear from the beginning of my argument that in my view it does not, and, therefore, it does not seem to me that one gets any further than that.

The other point put forward by the right hon. and learned Gentleman seems to me, again, to be based on some misapprehension, because if one looks at what was actually done in both cases

regarding these two Orders, one sees that it in no sense changed the powers of the Legislature. What the right hon. and learned Gentleman is saying is that the effect would be—as I think was put by Sir Kenneth Roberts-Wray—to alter the influence of the Legislative Council.

Of course, if one construes the word widely enough, one might possibly squeeze that into it, but I am bound to maintain that it is not an ordinary use of language, to talk about "constituting a Legislature or altering the Constitution or powers thereof." All one can say is that it has a certain indirect effect.

With the greatest respect to the right hon. and learned Gentleman, I would point out to him that the Committee had the benefit of extremely well-qualified advice, and that it clearly came to the conclusion that it was satisfied. [Hon. Members: "No."] It must have done because otherwise it would have said so.

[§ Mr. Harold Davies](#)

May I point out to the House that it is on record that I made it quite clear that I was not satisfied.

[§ Mr. Turner-Samuels](#)

Do I understand that the right hon. and learned Attorney-General is saying—and, if he is, I think that he is right—that the Executive Council is not a complementary part of the machine of government, but an independent part, that the Legislature is quite independent of the Executive Council and has power quite independent of the other body altogether?

[§ The Attorney-General](#)

Yes.

[1705](#)

[§ Mr. Renton](#)

On a point of order. The hon. Member for Leek (Mr. Harold Davies) has disclosed to the House what were his personal views in a Select Committee. As I understand the matter, he is not in order in doing that. However, as he has done so, would it be equally in order for me to say that the views which he expressed were not accepted by that Select Committee?

[§ Mr. William Blyton \(Houghton-le-Spring\)](#)

Further to that point of order. May I say as one who attended that Committee that we considered the position so dubious as to warrant the whole of the evidence being reported to the House?

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

I gather that it is not out of order.

§ 8.5 p.m.

§ Mr. Ian Winterbottom (Nottingham, Central)

I know that the hon. and learned Attorney-General and other hon. and learned Members will not consider me discourteous if I do not venture into their own private jungle. I understand that the actual terms of reference of this debate are narrowed by the fact that we are praying against an Order, and that we are having, as it were, as a result of that, a second post-mortem on the same body.

I hope that I shall not be out of order if I attempt to widen the subject a little. I think that everyone will agree that all attempts by Governments of whatever party to extend the constitutional liberties of a Colony are accompanied by risk. Each decision is an act of faith, an act that has been taken by many Governments over many decades, but that is not to say that there is an absolute guarantee that everything will go right on every occasion. Indeed, I am afraid that the contrary is the case.

The very difficult problem which we are discussing this evening may well recur in the next five years or so. Indeed, I would say that it is the policy of the World Federation of Trade Unions to see that it does. Competent observers have come to the conclusion that the W.F.T.U. is taking the place of the Cominform as the main executive organ of Communist policy. Indeed, the conference which has just ended issued a communiqué in which it was clearly indicated that one of the main aims of the W.F.T.U. was to achieve [1706](#) the liberation of the colonial peoples. But liberation in their sense means, of course, freeing these colonial people from one Imperial Power and linking them with another Imperial Power. It is not liberation in the sense that we understand it.

It is not only I who feel this concern, but throughout the West Indies, and even in the Gold Coast, the activities of the W.F.T.U. in Colonial Territories are viewed very gravely by the statesmen in charge of those Territories. I am sure that it will not have escaped the notice of this House that Mr. Gomes in Trinidad has asked the trade unionist Mr. Dalley to come over and advise him, because in Trinidad, where a Constitution similar to that in British Guiana has already been made, the actual forces which brought about the upheaval in British Guiana are also at work. They are to have an election in 1955, and it may well be that the problem which Trinidad will then have to face will be the same as that which we are facing today.

Intervention by Her Majesty's Government from time to time is necessary, but we must be clear in our minds when and how it is right for that Government to intervene. As I have said, every advance in regard to a Constitution is an act of faith and is accompanied by risks. This point of view was put very clearly by Dr. Rita Hinden in an article published in the "Manchester Guardian," which I think was quoted in the first debate on this subject. In that article Dr. Hinden stated: The granting of a new Constitution must always, then, be an act of faith, and Britain must go on making these acts of faith in spite of the occasional setback, or no political advance will be possible and the Commonwealth will lose its heart and its life. But where our trust is deliberately perverted in ways we abhor, we become partners to the betrayal if we take no action while we still can. One of the drafters of the Constitution of British Guiana which has just been withdrawn

by the Government considered that the Government of the day must always be prepared to defend the spirit behind that Constitution if that spirit were threatened. I believe that a situation had arisen in British Guiana when intervention was necessary, and I cannot agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Eton and Slough (Mr. Fenner Brockway)—with whose point of view I very much [1707](#) sympathise—that there was no real threat of uprising and of violence I believe that there was, and for the following reason.

To a certain extent, I share the view of the right hon. and learned Gentleman the Leader of the Liberal Party when he says that we must accept the point of view of the Governor and must make our own assessment of his character when we question the Government's policy on this subject. I have tried to cross-check the White Paper. I have had the advantage of talking, not to Dr. Jagan and Mr. Bowman, but to Members of the opposition parties in British Guiana, and from what they told me I am satisfied that violence was round the corner. One of the members of the United Democratic Party had crowds gather outside his house shouting, "You are the loyal Kikuyu."

It was quite clear that, in the minds of many people in British Guiana, the uprising there was linked with the ferment going on in Kenya, and that that state of affairs was being encouraged from some source. There was certain evidence from those individuals whom I met which points to the fact that the fears of the arson plot were not without foundation. One of the individuals was, in fact, a member of an insurance company, and very peculiar and unusual applications for policies against riot and arson were being received from individuals who, up till then, had shown no interest in that kind of policy. It became the policy of that insurance company to grant policies only to those individuals who had taken them out in the past. That is not a proof, but it is an indication.

Therefore, I feel that the situation had arisen where action had to be taken, and indeed there is not a great deal of disagreement—

[§ Mr. S. Silverman](#)

I wonder whether my hon. Friend has any evidence of what the attitude of the insurance companies was when they received these applications? Did they accept the premiums, in which case they could not have thought it was an abnormal risk, or did they refuse them?

[§ Mr. Winterbottom](#)

This is a rather technical point, similar to the legal points. I understand that the position was that they accepted the premiums from individuals, who in the past, and in normal [1708](#) peaceful circumstances, had taken out policies of insurance against arson and riot. They did not accept any new policies in this field from individuals who had never before taken out such policies.

[§ Mr. Silverman](#)

I do not wish to interrupt unnecessarily, but would not that tend to indicate that the people who had the greatest interest in not accepting new risks in abnormal circumstances had come to the conclusion that the circumstances were not abnormal?

§ Mr. Winterbottom

Indeed, the whole point was that the number of applications was quite abnormal, and therefore they decided to alter their policy and to refuse those applications to which I have referred.

§ Mr. Silverman

I do not want to make a false point, and I think the hon. Member sees what I mean. Obviously, what we are dealing with is new applications not existing hitherto. If there was arson on a wide scale, there would be no means of securing that those who were guilty would have their houses burnt down, and that those who were not, would not. Therefore, the insurance companies, if they accepted, even from people who had insured before, insurances against fire, were not in a position to indicate that the risk was the old risk and not a recently increased risk.

§ Mr. Winterbottom

My interpretation of it was somewhat different. I understand that the situation was pretty well known throughout the Colony, because the danger was known and recognised, and some individuals were wanting to cash in on this risk. Indeed, a nice little financial benefit might be achieved by an insurance policy taken out at the right moment.

There is general agreement between both Front Benches on the need for intervention. The difference between them is the somewhat narrow one as to whether or not the Governor's reserve powers were sufficient to enable him to rule in those particular circumstances. Here, I regret to say, I must differ from many of my right hon. Friends in believing that those powers were not sufficient to govern satisfactorily in the situation in which the present Governor found himself. I have weighed up all the points made by my right hon. Friend and by other hon. Members, and I have [1709](#) come to the conclusion that if the Governor had tried to carry on the government of that Colony by using his reserve powers, the whole position would have become farcical.

It is perfectly true to say that reserve powers are there but are never intended to be used, if possible. They are to be kept in the background, to be brought out only on very rare and unusual occasions, and not to be used for the running of day-to-day business. I believe the only occasion when they have been used recently in the Caribbean was in Jamaica to resolve a conflict between the Legislature and the judiciary. In that case the Legislature had attempted to overrule a judicial decision and the Governor had to intervene in order to ensure the independence of the judiciary. Those are the sort of circumstances, as I understand it, in which the Governor's reserve powers are intended to be used.

As they are drafted in the recently suspended Constitution of British Guiana, they are drafted, as I see it, almost to protect the Legislature from the interfering Governor. If he disagrees with the Legislature, he has to refer the matter back to the Secretary of State, and the drafting of the Constitution seems to me to make it almost impossible for the Governor to rule under the reserve powers. Here I disagree with my hon. Friends, but I am afraid that is the conclusion to which I have come after careful study.

Another point which makes me think that this disagreement about the Constitution is somewhat academic is that I believe the real struggle was not within the framework of the Constitution, but was for control of the trade unions, and that is something completely outside the business of government. It is quite clear that the Ministers elected in British Guiana were far more interested in achieving control of the trade union movement, in switching the allegiance of the workers of British Guiana from the Manpower Citizens' Association, which is a member of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, and bringing them over to the World Federation of Trade Unions, than they were in running the business of the country. Their main interest was to establish their power in the industrial field, so that, when the time came, they would [1710](#) have a completely extra-governmental source of power to which they could turn their own use in their own time.

There is no doubt whatever that grave damage has been done by the suspension of the Constitution but, in my opinion, the damage is less than that which would have come about if the P.P.P. had been enabled, while hiding behind the facade of democratic government, to build up the whole apparatus of single-party government. That is, in fact, what they really tried to do, and that comes out in the article to which I have referred, by Dr. Rita Hindon in the "Manchester Guardian." When she was out there she was left in no doubt that when the P.P.P. spoke of democratic government they meant single-party government.

Damage has been done, but I think that damage can be rectified. I am very glad, indeed, to hear of the constitution of the Commission of inquiry which is to be sent out there. On it we have a distinguished colonial Governor, a distinguished-British Guianese, and a distinguished trade unionist, and I am convinced that that is as well-balanced a team as could be hoped for.

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

Who is the distinguished trade unionist?

[§ Mr. Winterbottom](#)

Mr. Woodcock.

I am very glad to hear from the Secretary of State that there is no reason whatever why a Constitution at least as advanced as that which has been temporarily suspended should not be granted to the British Guianese. I hope I shall not be out of order if I make one or two points which may help to retain those particular democratic powers which we have given to the British Guianese with out the risk of a single party gaining so much power in British Guiana, or else where, as to make that particular Constitution unworkable.

[§ Mr. Ellis Smith](#)

I should like to get this on record before the hon. Member goes into these constructive suggestions. He has given some evidence with regard to an insurance company, which the House has received for the first time. Did the insurance company make representations to the Governor or to the Secretary of State?

[1711](#)

[§ Mr. Winterbottom](#)

I would tell my hon. Friend if I knew, but I do not know that particular aspect of the matter.

I return to this question of maintaining the democratic rights of an individual in a reformed Constitution. First, I believe that we should not be so bald when we draft these Constitutions. I do not mean hirsutely bald, but bald in our wording. We plunge straight into the whole business of the machinery of government. I feel that there should be a preamble to every Constitution, in which we should point out quite clearly what we mean by "good government." We ought to make it quite clear that by "good government" we do not mean single-party government. That point is made clear in many Constitutions—including the American Constitution—which state exactly what are the intentions of the Constitution and the rights and duties of the individual. It is not beyond the wit of man to provide a preamble of this sort when new Constitutions are being granted to Colonial Territories.

[§ Dr. Morgan](#)

I wish my hon. Friend would elaborate that point. Does he mean that the local Governor should have power to annul the Constitution because a policy is being followed by the elected members which differs from his own?

[§ Mr. Winterbottom](#)

I hold the view that in the ultimate analysis, if we believe in democratic government as we practise it here, we must be prepared to use force, if necessary, to maintain democratic government in territories for which we are still responsible. If, for instance, a Colony advances to self-government and to complete independence, as the Sudan seems to be doing, and, having achieved complete independence, then chooses to become Communist, that is the affair of that territory. But while we are responsible I feel that we cannot permit a totalitarian government of any form to take shape.

Secondly, there is the suggestion which has been put forward by the Liberal Party at one of its conferences. I am sorry that neither of the Liberals who have taken part in this debate have made the point for themselves, and I shall attempt to make it for them. They believe that we should consider proportional representation, with suitable safe- [1712](#) guards, as the system of universal adult suffrage in the Colonies.

We have a two-party system in this country, with very considerable power and no apparent check given to the Government of the day, but the checks do exist and they are strong, even if invisible. I feel that checks should be built into any new Constitution, so as to make it impossible for a single well-organised party to get hold of the machinery of government. If we had had proportional representation in British Guiana at the last election, the People's Progressive Party, although it would have had a majority of seats, would not have had an absolute majority.

[§ Mr. S. Silverman](#)

This is a most important proposition. I should like to know from my hon. Friend whether the principle which he is advancing is intended to have universal application, or whether it is to apply only to the Colonies. Are we never to have a Labour Government again?

[§ Mr. Winterbottom](#)

It is a terrible situation which my hon. Friend envisages, but that is not the view which I was putting forward.

[§ Mr. Ellis Smith](#)

It depends on the kind of Labour Government.

[§ Mr. Winterbottom](#)

I am not arguing for proportional representation in advanced democracies, but we are dealing here with a democracy which is not highly advanced, and I feel that we could accept the risk of universal adult suffrage and build into it a safeguard by giving proportional representation.

[§ Mr. J. Johnson](#)

This is a most fascinating view—and I say that in all sincerity—but will my hon. Friend tell us how he would build a system of proportional representation into what may be an illiterate society?

[§ Mr. Winterbottom](#)

I agree with my hon. Friend that it is extremely difficult. I am not an expert in this field, but I feel that it should be done, and I suggest that it should be done in this particular Colony as an experiment. I do not see any reason to follow one stereotyped pattern, time after time. This House has a great tradition and a great history of success in government, but it is not the only form of government which has succeeded. We have systems of proportional [1713](#) representation elsewhere, and they work, even though they have also failed in some cases. In this case, in a small Colony whose population is less than that of the city which I have the honour to represent, I feel that such an experiment could be conducted. We could build in other safeguards if we accepted this principle. We could make it a condition that a party must gain a 5 per cent. minimum of the votes before it could achieve a seat in the Legislature. That principle is already being followed in Germany. I suggest most strongly that an experiment of this sort should be tried.

Parallel with this work of rebuilding the Constitution, I sincerely hope that every support will be given to the loyal British Guianese by the trade union movement, to help them reconstruct their own trade union movement and to strengthen the free trades unions of British Guiana. I have heard of an appeal for help made by Mr. Luckhoo, the Secretary of the Manpower Citizens' Association, and I sincerely hope that that appeal has not fallen on deaf ears.

[§ Mr. Ian Mikardo \(Reading, South\)](#)

Is my hon. Friend aware that the Manpower Citizens' Association is not short of help? It gets very considerable financial help from the employers. Why does it need any further help, and why does my hon. Friend consider that a union which exists only because of money received from employers is a free trade union?

[§ Mr. Winterbottom](#)

It was sufficiently free to have one adviser sent, from the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, to help it in its work. I am satisfied that it is a reasonably free trade union—at least as free as the Guianese Industrial Workers' Union, if not somewhat freer.

I do not want to detain the House further, because I know that other hon. Members wish to speak on this subject. I hope that from this setback we shall draw the moral that we must learn what we have to do in circumstances such as we have encountered in British Guiana, and that we shall use these lessons in future to avoid a similar setback taking place in a Colony which is of greater economic and strategic importance than British Guiana.

[1714](#)

[§ 8.28 p.m.](#)

[§ Mr. F. M. Bennett \(Reading, North\)](#)

If I do not follow the arguments of the hon. Member for Nottingham, Central (Mr. Ian Winterbottom), let me assure him that it is not for the usual reason but because—and I hope this does not embarrass him—I can find nothing in what he said with which I wish to disagree. In fact, it is significant that none of the interruptions to which he has been subjected—and there have been a fair number—has come from this side of the House. I suggest that the sort of speech which we have heard from him, when compared with some of those we have had earlier, entitles hon. Members on this side of the House to be a little bewildered about what is exactly the Opposition's policy on British Guiana. I think, too, there is sufficient evidence on the point for us not to be accused of trying to make party capital or of trying to emphasise the split which we all heard was so well healed at Margate.

I have listened throughout this and the previous debate on the subject, and I want to know quite genuinely what is the point of view of the official Opposition about Guiana and about what we ought to have done there. I came away from the last debate with the provisional conclusion that the Opposition's attitude was that something certainly ought to have been done, because conditions in British Guiana were deteriorating to such an extent that we had to take some action, but that the Government had taken the wrong action because, in all the circumstances, it had been too severe.

It has emerged today, and in certain speeches throughout the country in the intervening period, that there is quite a different point of view—and I am not referring to the two or three hon.

Members below the Gangway to whose outbursts we have perhaps become a little accustomed but to a much wider Socialist circle. It is a point of view that there was no need to take any action at all in Guiana and that we were quite wrong to do anything because, by our action, we were interfering with the due democratic processes of a Colony striving towards independence and full nationhood.

Perhaps the House will forgive me if I quote from my local newspaper about an incident which occurred within Reading—that is to say, within Reading as [1715](#) a whole; I have to be cautious about saying "within my constituency" because, as is known in the House, I share the honour of representing that borough with the hon. Member for Reading, South (Mr. Mikardo), who is in the House now and to whom, let me hasten to add, I have given previous notice that I intend to raise this point tonight. In our local paper, on 20th November, referring to a meeting on the previous Sunday, the following appears: Despite the advice of the National Executive of the Labour Party not to provide a platform for the deposed members of the British Guiana House of Assembly, the Reading Labour Party held a meeting at their hall in Minster Street on Sunday evening to which Mr. L. F. S. Burnham, ex-Minister of Education of British Guiana, was invited. Mr. Burnham, in fact, was unable to come, but in his place was Dr. C. V. Jagan"—

[§ Mr. Deputy-Speaker](#)

I must ask the hon. Member to link this argument with the subject which we are discussing.

[§ Mr. Bennett](#)

Perhaps I may proceed to deal with Labour policy on British Guiana and to the action which we have taken, which has been the subject of the whole debate. With great respect, I submit that what has been said by the Opposition since the last debate about what action should have been taken in Guiana is extremely relevant to the Opposition's determination today to oppose the action which the Government have in fact taken. I will continue and will quote very quickly what the report says. It went on to say that Mr. Burnham was unfortunately unable to attend and that Dr. Jagan came instead. The hon. Member representing Reading, South explained that at his recent report-back meeting he had given his views on British Guiana, so that night he would confine himself to indicating the party opinion. 'I must be careful,' he said amid laughter, 'not to give my own views.' He thereupon proceeded to quote extensively from the Hansard report of the Parliamentary debate on the suspension of the British Guiana Constitution. He quoted most of those who had taken part in the debate, including the Leader of the Opposition, 'that master of understatement'. Then, in the report, we have Mr. Jagan's comments, in which he makes the not ununnatural assertion, after this interlude, that the National Executive could not be said to represent the Labour Party. He gave a friendly warning to the hon. Member for Reading, South that, as a [1716](#) result of his presence at the meeting, he would not be a member of that body for much longer.

Following that speech, and others which have been made both in this House and elsewhere, we are entitled to demand—and that is my purpose tonight—what exactly the Opposition think we ought to have done and what they think we ought to do now.

[§ Mr. Paget](#)

On a point of order. We were having a serious discussion on both sides of the House. Is it in order to have this bickering between two local Members of Parliament about a local meeting?

[§ Mr. Deputy-Speaker](#)

It is not out of order.

[§ Mr. Mikardo](#)

Further to that point of order. If I may make a submission to you in all humility, Mr. Deputy-Speaker, may I beg that you will not prevent the hon. Member from continuing his present line of argument? I am quite sure that it will have results in the locality quite the opposite to those for which he hopes.

[§ Mr. Deputy-Speaker](#)

I am not worried about results, I am worried about order.

[§ Mr. Bennett](#)

I am sorry that my brief exposition of what has happened in the country since the last debate took place is not welcomed by hon. Gentlemen opposite. It is natural that I should quote what has taken place in my own locality since I know it better than other parts of England, and I deeply resent the suggestion that I am impelled by considerations of possible local reactions.

[§ Mr. Percy Shurmer \(Birmingham, Sparkbrook\)](#)

Tell us what else the hon. Member said.

[§ Mr. Bennett](#)

As this appears to upset hon. Gentlemen opposite so much, I will now proceed with the body of my speech. A number of hon. Members on both sides of the House have quoted from the White Paper a series of statements as to why action was taken on the spot by the Governor. We have been told by hon. Gentlemen opposite that none of this is evidence because those statements have not been proved in a court of law. I want to know how it could be possible for any responsible Government, when deciding on colonial or foreign policy, in [1717](#) every instance to bring the matter in question before a tribunal before they were entitled to incorporate their assertions in a White Paper? It has never been the practice of any executive to accept that questions cannot be answered about what is happening in a part of the Dominions under their control unless there has first been evidence given before a court of law.

As regards what should have been done by the Government, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made an overwhelming case today and in my view no action other than the suspension

of the Constitution was practicable. I was pleased to hear that view endorsed just now by the hon. Member for Nottingham, Central. After all, it could scarcely be expected that the Governor would set his Ministers aside and proceed to veto anything they put up which he did not think was in the interests of the Colony. We have also heard legal arguments, into which I do not wish to stray, as to why the Governor was not in a position to dismiss Ministers.

Therefore we are left with the conclusion that all we could do, and all that it was right for us to do, was to suspend the Constitution and to start to rebuild. Surely that is much better than half killing the Constitution and carrying on with it for an indefinite period? Under this temporary Constitution which we are discussing tonight, and as a result of the Commission, whose terms of reference it would be out of order to mention now, there is a chance of working out something new which, by incorporating one or other of the safeguards that have been suggested, will result in a growing measure of democracy in that Colony without a return of the dangers which have manifested themselves in the past.

There is one other facet of this controversy to which not enough attention has been paid, the economic one. I have not had the good fortune to visit British Guiana but, throughout the Caribbean area, poverty is the greatest disadvantage against which any government has to strive. If there is one thing which is more certain than any other it is that action leading to the setting up of a totalitarian, Communist or near Communist state would not benefit the economic life of its people.

[1718](#) One of the most interesting parts of the White Paper is Part III which deals with the economic consequences. It not only makes a general point about this but sets out no less than five specific instances of companies which were to have put money and resources into the development of British Guiana but which were frightened off by what took place there. If those companies had had sufficient trust, and if in future they have sufficient trust in stability and security there, they will go there. The result may well be a general raising of the standard of living, which is the best way of getting rid of the illiteracy and other conditions which have led to the present and past sorry state of affairs.

It is therefore above all in the interest of those who really have the benefiting of these people at heart to do their best to see that conditions continue there which will encourage industry from this country and elsewhere, and money from the International Bank and private enterprise in America and elsewhere, to go to the Colony. If we had taken no action and this Colony had subsided into nothing more than a Communist satellite, the standard of living would have gone down. The new enterprises which I have mentioned would not have gone there, and one would not like to hazard a guess where any alternative capital resources would have been found. I cannot imagine that Soviet Russia or Guatemala, which I suppose would be the alternatives taking an economic interest, would have made any substantial transfer of currency or other resources to benefit the people there.

On economic grounds, apart from political grounds, I endorse the action which has been taken by the Government and I welcome the result already shown in the increasing stability in the Colony and the growing confidence of the outside world in its future. If the Government were defeated

tonight and this Prayer succeeded and this Order for a Draft Constitution were annulled, which is unlikely to happen, I should like to know what exactly the Opposition would want.

[§ Mr. Leslie Hale \(Oldham, West\)](#)

The Government to resign.

[§ Mr. Bennett](#)

I am not discussing the political effect here but the effect in British Guiana. If as a result of an un-favourable vote against the Government tonight this Order for a Draft Constitution [1719](#) were annulled, presumably the legal position would be that the Constitution would be suspended and there would be no more in British Guiana than the present emergency rule by the Governor in Council. I imagine that that would go on until some other Draft Constitution of a temporary nature more acceptable to the Opposition was brought forward. We have not heard in detail what the Opposition dislike about the present Draft Constitution and what they would like instead of it. I assume that they do not want the old Constitution restored. [Hon. Members: "Why not?"] Hon. Members below the Gangway may say that, but I gather that that is not the view of the right hon. Gentleman the Member for Llanelly (Mr. J. Griffiths).

[§ Mr. J. Griffiths](#)

I thought that I had made it abundantly clear that I did not want the old Constitution suspended at all.

[§ Mr. Bennett](#)

I do not deny that the right hon. Gentleman did not want the old Constitution suspended, but he wanted other action taken. I assume that he would not want simply the old Constitution restored immediately now.

[§ Mr. Griffiths](#)

If I am fortunate in catching Mr. Speaker's eye I shall deal with that very point, which apparently has not been dealt with yet by anyone in the course of this debate.

[§ Mr. Bennett](#)

I was hoping that the right hon. Gentleman would deal with that point and I am delighted that I shall have the opportunity of hearing his answer to it. The whole purpose of my speech has been to try to elicit what not only hon. Members on this side of the House but people throughout the country and in the West Indies want to know—that is exactly where the Opposition stand and what they think we ought to have done in the past and ought to do in the future, because I still remain puzzled on that point as a result of the speeches that have been made in this debate and controversy generally.

§ 8.45 p.m.

[§ Mr. Ian Mikardo \(Reading, South\)](#)

I had not intended intervening in this debate, principally because many of my hon. Friends are much better qualified than I to speak on this subject. But I have [1720](#) been, so to speak, precipitated into it unwillingly by some observations of the hon. Member for Reading, North (Mr. F. M. Bennett). I am grateful to him for having notified me that he was to make some reference to me. I only wish I could extend my appreciation of his conduct beyond that point.

Today we are having a debate on a very grave subject. I am sure there is no hon. Member, on either side of the House, who does not deeply regret that we should be under the necessity of debating the suspension of the Constitution of a British Colony. The speeches we have had in the debate—until the one to which we have just listened—seemed to me consistently to have reflected the understanding by the House of the seriousness of the issue we have been discussing. I am perfectly sure we have listened to speeches throughout the day—except the one to which we have just listened—which have been activated by no more than a desire of hon. Members to make their contribution, according to their lights, to a solution of this problem and to make clear they stand in relation to it.

It seems a great pity that on this solemn occasion, when not merely Guiana but the whole of the British Colonial Empire is listening to this debate, we should have had its quality deteriorated by what seems to be an attempt to make no more than rather silly local party capital out of the situation. I cannot think what the poor people of British Guiana, Nigeria, the Gold Coast, or anywhere else in the Empire will make of quotations which have been given from the "Reading Standard."

Whilst every hon. Member who has spoken in this debate—until the last—has been addressing himself to the Chair, to his fellow Members and to the citizens of British Guiana and the other 60 million citizens of the Colonial Empire, in seriousness and a consciousness of the gravity of the situation, it is a great pity that an hon. Member should make a speech which is not addressed to them but to the "Reading Standard" and the "Berkshire Chronicle."

§ 8.47 p.m.

[§ Mr. Godfrey Nicholson \(Farnham\)](#)

The hon. Member for Reading, South (Mr. Mikardo) has taken upon himself to deliver a very heavy and almost avuncular [1721](#)—rather a wicked uncle—rebuke to my hon. Friend the Member for Reading, North (Mr. F. M. Bennett). The hon. Member for Reading, South must be aware that very often hon. Members make speeches in this House which are partly for consumption in the constituency. It would have been much more to the point if he had answered the charge made against him by my hon. Friend instead of being just pompous and avuncular. If the hon. Member for Reading, South fancies himself as being entitled to lecture his fellow Members, let him do so in his constituency, but not deliver pompous lectures in this House. If he had answered the attack it would have been something, but he did not.

§ Mr. Mikardo

So far as I could discover no attack was made. What the hon. Member for Reading, North could not understand—because he does not know the people of Reading very well; he has only been there two or three years—is that the people of Reading have a very great regard for freedom of expression, including giving freedom to people to say things with which they do not agree.

§ Mr. Nicholson

I am sure the whole House will agree that it is right for an hon. Member to come to the support of another hon. Member when he is attacked. I feel doubly justified in doing so as the hon. Member for Reading, South did not reply to the implied criticism of his conduct made in the speech of his honourable colleague. Now let me get back to the subject of the debate—

§ Mr. S. Silverman

Hear, hear.

§ Mr. Nicholson

That is the first thing that the hon. Member for Nelson and Colne (Mr. S. Silverman) has said today with which I entirely agree. I shall have his support in my next sentence. There is no hon. Member, on any side of the House, who does not deplore the incidents which led to this debate.

This is an interesting debate, because it has brought to light a tremendous cleavage of opinion in the House. I do not think that cleavage is on strictly party lines. It seems to me that one section of the Opposition differs from the Government over methods, while another section differs over principles.

1722 Numbers of hon. Members take the view of our colonial responsibilities that it is our duty to get rid of them as soon as we can, to march out and leave them to their fate. That is what I understand from their speeches in this and other debates—the view that we should part company with our colonial responsibilities. Other Members of the Opposition share our view, and I think I may say they share my view. [An Hon. Member: "Do not be so avuncular."] I am entitled to be avuncular if I like.

I hold the view, which is shared by most Members of this House, that it is our duty in the Colonies to risk going too fast rather than to risk going too slow. I believe that we have, in the past, in our Imperial history made the mistake of saying that we will not grant self-government unless we are 100 per cent. sure that it will not sooner or later result in a falling off in administration, if we are not absolutely certain that it will be a success. I believe that the view is now held on both sides of the House that the risks of going too fast are preferable to the risks of going too slow. That must, however, carry with it the corollary that we are prepared to retreat, that we are prepared to go back, if things go seriously wrong.

I believe that the difference of opinion between the majority of the party opposite and ourselves is one of method and not of principle. They say that we have not chosen the right way or the right moment in order to go back. I wish to put it to them—it has not really been put forward in this debate by any speaker—that by the very nature of his office the Secretary of State for the Colonies cannot disclose to the House all the evidence that he has. He cannot produce in the House the confidential despatches or the telegrams which he has had from the Governor. He cannot quote from them because by convention if an official document is quoted from it must be laid on the Table of the House and quoted in full, not in small sections.

§ Mr. Turner-Samuels

But if the Secretary of State says that all sorts of crimes have been committed, including arson, and justifies his conduct by that assertion, surely he ought to explain to the House why no prosecution on them has been brought?

1723

§ Mr. Nicholson

That is a very petty point for the hon. and learned Member to raise. I wish he would be good enough to let me develop a serious argument in my own way. It is that sooner or later, in dealing with the colonial problems, we have not only to trust the man on the spot, as the Leader of the Liberal Party said, we have not only to trust an enlightened Governor, but we have to put our faith in the good intentions of the Secretary of State for the Colonies.

I do not speak of one individual Secretary of State rather than another. I can imagine the right hon. Member for Llanelli (Mr. J. Griffiths) in a similar position, when he has had to take some distasteful and unpopular step in relation to a particular Colony, turning to his hon. Friends and saying, "You must trust me. I have more information than you have but I cannot divulge it because it would destroy all confidence between Governors and myself if they felt that every single communication sent to me was liable to be produced in exten so in the House of Commons and then as a Parliamentary Paper."

That is the background of this whole problem. After all, the Secretary of State is there to be shot at if there is loss of life, civil commotion and rioting. If there had been riots in Guiana I hope, in fact I know, that I am right in saying no one would have been hotter in pursuit of the Secretary of State for being dilatory and slack in his duties than hon. Members opposite, and hon. Members on this side of the House would also have been hot on his trail.

My right hon. Friend carries an immense burden of responsibility. He must make the best use of the evidence before him. How is that evidence obtained? Most of it can only come from communications which by their very nature must remain confidential. I suggest therefore that it is right and proper that those who share my views about colonial development should place their trust in the Secretary of State and in the Government. I do not believe it possible that so many people who take the same view as the Government—I do not mean members of the Cabinet, but people in the Colonies and at the Colonial Office—can all be wrong, or corrupt, or ill-intentioned.

We on this side of the House have been criticised and jeered at by hon. [1724](#) Members opposite for appealing to the Opposition not to press this matter to a Division. The hon. Member for Leek (Mr. Harold Davies) said it was mean, or cheap—he used some such expression—to appeal to the Opposition not to force a Division. I ask most of the hon. Members opposite not to think, as the hon. Member for Leek would appear to be thinking, about the reputation of Her Majesty's Opposition. The hon. Member for Leek said this matter must be pressed to a Division because, were it not, the Opposition would lose face.

It is a serious thing for a political party in this country to lose face, but it would be even more serious if the forcing of this matter to a Division, created a bad effect in Guiana. We must consider Guiana before the future or the reputation of Her Majesty's Opposition, and it is still not too late for hon. Members opposite to have second thoughts.

I would remind those hon. Members opposite, who take a fundamentally different view of our colonial responsibilities from that taken by their colleagues on the Opposition Front Bench, and by hon. Members on this side of the House, that the British Guiana economy is on a very narrow balance. There is a knife-edge economy which may crash at any moment. For instance, the cost of producing sugar in British Guiana is considerably higher than in other parts of the West Indies. In the interests of the Guianese themselves, we cannot afford to take the slightest risk of an economic breakdown and political chaos in that country. I ask hon. Members opposite to think of that. I would remind them that there is something in the point of view of those who believe that our duty is not only to lead the colonial peoples along the road to democracy, but also to ensure that complete disaster does not supervene.

I do not know which hon. Gentleman will be called to speak after me, but if he holds the opinion held by that section of hon. Gentlemen opposite to whom I have just referred, I ask him to say where they intend that British Guiana should go. Do they propose just to give to British Guiana the benefit of chaos under the name of freedom? It is a curious thing, but no party in this House has ever [1725](#) declared in public the principles underlying our present-day colonial policy, into which we have drifted in a typically British way.

I believe that it would be an immense service to this country, and to the cause of the colonial peoples, were the Opposition to withdraw this Prayer. They might declare that though they disagree with the methods of the Government in dealing with colonial peoples, they adopt the same standpoint as we do. If I may define it in a few words, it is that our duty is to lead our younger brothers and sisters in the Commonwealth along the road to freedom, but at the same time to ensure that that road does not lead to economic hell and disaster.

§ 9.0 p.m.

[§ Mr. Donald Chapman \(Birmingham, Northfield\)](#)

I was very grateful to the hon. Member for Reading, South (Mr. Mikardo) for lifting this debate back to the plane where I thought it had been for most of the day. I was glad that he did not use the opportunity for intervention to answer the cheap points made from the opposite benches by

the hon. Member for Reading, North (Mr. F. M. Bennett). As my hon. Friend knows, I disagree with him on several matters, but I defend his right to express his point of view whenever he likes.

I can only assume that the hon. Member opposite does not know the sure foundation which exists in the Labour Party—a foundation built on the right to express differences, to fight for what one believes in and, finally, to evolve a policy based on proper discussion. I hope that my hon. Friends will extend that same sort of latitude and understanding to me tonight. It is not very often that I intervene in debates on colonial affairs. Indeed, I have never done so before, and I do not suppose that I shall ever do so again.

I was impelled to speak tonight simply to give my reasons why I cannot vote for the Prayer moved by my colleagues. I want to do so not in terms of great concentrated examination of the detailed facts of the situation in British Guiana. I want to do it on the basis of several perhaps rather simple arguments which have exercised my mind in the last few weeks. It was only two hours ago that I finally made up my mind how I would [1726](#) vote, or at least I made up my mind not to vote at all. It was only after deep thought that I came to the position of defying a three-line whip.

I am not an expert. I have read the White Paper. I have listened carefully to the debates in this House on the whole issue. I have read some of the speeches again to make sure that my own position can bear proper examination. First, I want to say that—I have approached the situation as a simple member of the public—as an ordinary Member of this House who has got the job of weighing up the facts put before him.

[§ Dr. Morgan](#)

So have we all.

[§ Mr. Chapman](#)

I agree. I hope that my hon. Friend will allow me to say how I examined the facts and the conclusions at which I have arrived.

[§ Dr. Morgan](#)

The hon. Gentleman is lucky.

[§ Mr. Chapman](#)

Perhaps I was lucky to catch your eye, Mr. Speaker. I have tried to examine each one of the simple facts put before us and come to this vital decision. Can I in all honesty protest, and take my protest to a Division in this House, with all the consequences that that has for world opinion and for the understanding of our situation in the Colony concerned? Can I take my protest so far? Can I be so absolutely certain of all the facts which have been put forward from this side of the House that I can take my position so far as to vote against the Government on this issue?

I have come to the conclusion that I cannot and that we have not the facts, and that all the facts we have are inconclusive. In the circumstances, I believe that the Secretary of State had no other alternative than to take what was a very courageous action. The simple facts on which I base my judgment are these. First, we have a Secretary of State who was faced here in London with the most disturbing reports from a Governor in a Colony several thousand miles away. He had the job—as every Minister has—before he came to any conclusion, of examining every fact about the situation that he could get hold of.

He had to take into account a factor which I am not sure that back-benchers like myself realise sufficiently. He had to ask himself whether his case was [1727](#) sufficiently cast-iron that he could defend it on the Floor of the House of Commons. He had to ask himself, "Can I withstand every attack which is bound to come on me on an occasion when I have taken such a drastic action?"

If a Minister faced with that problem comes to a conclusion on the advice of his trusted officials on the spot and with knowledge of the attacks that will be made on him—I have no objection to that; I believe these debates are absolutely essential to determine what justification he has for his action—then his conclusion should be supported by the House. In those circumstances, in view of the distance involved, the inaccessibility of many of the facts and the disputes surrounding many of the persons involved—

[§ Mr. Frederick Peart \(Workington\)](#)

Will my hon. Friend give way?

[§ Mr. Chapman](#)

This is a difficult speech to make. I should like to get through the burden of it before I am interrupted.

If the Minister is subject to all those difficulties, then at this stage, having made our protest, having tried to examine with him all the facts at our disposal, and having said that we are very doubtful, as we are, about many of the issues involved and the hearsay evidence on which so much is based, the right and dignified thing to do, in view of the world consequences of a debate of this kind, would be to withdraw the Prayer.

I understood that the debate was to be on the basis of some of the legal technicalities involved in the new Constitution. Instead, it has been a debate in which the whole of the previous debate has been rehashed. It has not been a proper debate about the Constitution. I join in criticism from all parts of the House that no alternative to the Constitution has been advanced. We have heard no discussion of the details of the new Constitution. All we have had has been a continuation of the earlier debate on whether the original Constitution should have been suspended.

Here I stand with a fellow member of my party who has often been quoted in these debates. I have the greatest respect for her. She has done as much as anyone [1728](#) in the Labour Party to inspire—I use the word advisedly—and direct a great deal of the colonial advance which has occurred during the last eight years. I am speaking of Dr. Rita Hinden.

[§ Mr. Ellis Smith](#)

There were a few who did a bit before she did.

[§ Mr. Chapman](#)

I would remind the House that Dr. Hinden has done her share and has a right to be heard.

[§ Dr. Morgan](#)

Some of us were there when she was a baby.

[§ Mr. Chapman](#)

What is it that has made me feel that I cannot vote against the suspension of the Constitution? In British Guiana the situation had unfortunately arisen that a Constitution of an advanced democratic type was not likely to work. Indeed, it was not being worked. I have come to the conclusion that in those circumstances the honest thing for us as democrats is to face the situation and to say that the best we could do was to withdraw the Constitution—temporarily, I hope—and to send out to British Guiana, as we are doing, trusted people to advise on a temporary alternative. I am glad to see that the Assistant Secretary of the T.U.C. is our guarantor in that respect and that there will be a good trade union, Left-wing, British democratic point of view from one whom I respect. [Interruption.] I think that some of my horn. Friends are objecting to my action, but I do not object to their opposing the Government, and they should allow me to be in a minority on the other side.

I come to this point. As I see it, when a Constitution of this advanced kind is not being worked, it is the honest and the best thing to withdraw it. Dr. Rita Hinden has told us that, when she interviewed representatives of the P.P.P., she found—and these are such significant words that I am surprised that they have not had greater attention—The idea that the minority also had rights, that democracy meant government by consent; that is, by the consent of everyone governed,... was alien to their thoughts. [Interruption.] I am not going to bandy words, because the great spirit of those words is accepted in all quarters of the House. The position was that the P.P.P. wanted a one-party State, and [1729](#) understood democracy to be that. Dr. Hinden went on to say: P.P.P. made it clear that it was Dot the constitution they wanted. They wanted power, complete and unchecked. Heavy words, important words. I join her in distress at what Dr. Malan is doing in South Africa, and what may happen in Central Africa—and if we are to withdraw Constitutions anywhere, let us be honest to withdraw it in Central Africa if something on the reverse side happens there. After the much-quoted phrase about every constitutional advance being an act of faith, Dr. Hinden said: It expresses a belief that the power transferred will not be abused; that the acceptance of democratic rights will be accompanied by the acceptance of democratic values. All our colonial constitution-making is based on that assumption, not only that there will be the rights, the machinery, the fabric of voting and all the rest, but that there will be underneath that which will make it work and put the spirit of life into it—that there will be the acceptance of democratic values. I feel sufficiently superior—and heaven help anyone who feels superior in many ways in this world—to say solemnly that I believe sufficiently in democracy to

feel superior to those who want to use democracy in order to substitute totalitarian rule, and I believe that, if we are faced with that situation, we must agree further with Dr. Hinden when she says: Is there, after all, any reason why British democrats should fight for the extension of democracy in the Colonies if non-democratic forces are then allowed to use the votes they win in order to establish a dictatorship? I join with her in every word of that quotation. I have no right and no reason to fight for the kind of democracy which will then be used to throw democracy away, and certainly I have no intention of doing so, so far as one humble vote in this House is concerned.

So I come to my conclusion on these simple lines. If it were the case, as seems undeniably to be so, that there was no chance of that Constitution being worked in the spirit in which we made it, by means of the democratic values underlying it making it function with the real spirit of democracy, then the honest thing to do—in contrast with the Gold Coast, where Dr. Nkrumah might have taken exactly the same position, but did not do so, since he cleared out of his [1730](#) party the people who were trying to establish a one-party State—was to retrace one or two steps in order to be able to advance again in a short time. This would have been in contrast to what happened in the Gold Coast, where the risk that we took worked, whereas we took it in Guiana and it did not work.

I believe fundamentally that the Constitution was not going to work, and I believe that the Governor was strongly in favour of its suspension. I believe that the Secretary of State must have the benefit of the doubt on all the facts which led him to a most drastic action, which he knew would be the subject of the most searching debate in the House.

I come to the final point I want to make. It has been said that perhaps we could still vote against the Government because it may have been that the Governor was in a panic and that all this action was not justified because he acted too quickly on mere hearsay evidence and ought to have been more calm; and that the Colonial Secretary ought to have brought him home and asked for consultation; or perhaps that the Governor should have been sacked and somebody else substituted. It may well be that those charges are true and that this was panic action. I do not know.

All I can say is that we have no evidence and no facts on that situation. We have nothing to contribute. We can put that forward to challenge the Government, but that sort of evidence on this side of the House, so far as I am concerned, should not lead to a three-line whip vote against the Government. That is the sort of stuff of which exploratory debates are made, in which we challenge the Government and probe every aspect of their speeches and actions. On such evidence as that, the House of Commons and a great party should not be the subject of a three-line whip to vote against the Government.

I have not been told the alternative to this Constitution. I have not had the answer to the one plea which I have made in Birmingham, which is that as this democratic Constitution is not being worked, is it not better to say—although the world will call it "superior"—that we believe in democracy even when the rest of the world may think our behaviour a reactionary colonial move?

[1731](#) I am willing to be the subject of such condemnation, if condemnation it really is. I have honestly tried, in the difficult situation in which I have been placed, but I very much feel that I cannot possibly vote for this Prayer now. The Opposition would have been much wiser in the whole of these debates on this subject to have used the opportunity to fight, criticise and extract information, in order to keep that thorough check on the Executive that we need in our democracy. I have not yet found the facts on which a vote on a three-line whip should be based, and for that reason I must abstain from voting.

§ 9.18 p.m.

§ [Mr. F. A. Burden \(Gillingham\)](#)

This debate has been notable for two speeches, one by the right hon. and learned Member the Member for Montgomery (Mr. C. Davies), Leader of the Liberal Party, and the second the speech of the hon. Gentleman who has just resumed his seat.

§ [Mr. Ellis Smith](#)

The hon. Member.

§ [Mr. Burden](#)

He has shown very great courage in taking the stand he has, in very difficult circumstances. He has shown a personal integrity that is always welcomed, acclaimed and honoured in this House and throughout the country. It is upon such integrity that our democracy is fundamentally based, sure and safe.

I liken myself to the hon. Gentleman in one way, in that I have not spoken before in a debate of this character, but I have ventured to intervene today because I, too, feel very strongly about this situation. It is a great tragedy that an experiment entered into such a very short time ago with high hopes should have ended in collapse in such a short time. My right hon. Friend the Colonial Secretary above all people in this House probably regrets the tragedy that brought about the suspension of the Constitution in British Guiana.

While listening to this debate today, I have not heard one hon. Member opposite refute the allegations that were made in the White Paper. Indeed, it seems to me that if one refers again to the White Paper, one finds a complete and absolute justification for the action taken by my [1732](#) right hon. Friend. The White Paper states that the Ministers were guilty of: Fomenting of strikes for political ends; attempting to oust established trade unions by legislative action; removal of the ban on the entry of West Indian Communists; introduction of a bill to repeal the Undesirable Publications Ordinance and the flooding of the Territory with Communist literature; misuse of rights of appointment to Boards and Committees; spreading of racial hatred; plan to secularise Church schools and to re-write textbooks to give them a political bias; neglect of their administrative duties; under mining of the loyalty of the Police; attempts to gain control of the Public Service; threats of violence. I have not heard it stated from any quarter today that these charges are untrue. Is it to be suggested that they were figments of the imagination of responsible

members of the British Guiana Colonial Service? Is it to be suggested that the Governor sent this information to my right hon. Friend the Colonial Secretary knowing it to be untrue?

It is indeed strange that my right hon. Friend should have been pilloried—and I use the word objectively and selectively—by so many hon. Members opposite for acting as he has acted when the threats to the new Constitution were as grave as has been made apparent by the statements contained in the White Paper and which have not been refuted by hon. Members opposite.

It cannot be denied, I submit, that the accusations are correct. Indeed, it was emphatically admitted by the right hon. Gentleman the Leader of the Opposition and by his right hon. Friend the Member for Llanelly (Mr. J. Griffiths) that there was a very strong Communist element in the Colony. Speaking in this House on 22nd October, the right hon. Member for Llanelly said: 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."—[Official Report, 22nd October, 1953; Vol. 518, c. 2190.] [1733](#) I submit that if there were no other evidence or no other reason for the suspension of the Constitution, evidence and reason enough have been submitted to this House by the right hon. Member for Llanelly. If we refer to the White Paper, we find there some of the quotations which have been made and not denied even by the leaders of the P.P.P. when they came to this country. We find that: Ministers intended to organise a 'People's Police'. The date is given, the statement is given. Does any hon. Member opposite deny that Dr. Jagan said: Comrades, in the past when we asked for bread we were given bullets and those who fired at workers were honoured by the masters. But when the P.P.P. gets into power the same bullets which were fired on those poor people will be fired on our oppressors. We shall organise a Police Force; it will be known as the People's Police. I submit that is a direct statement that Dr. Jagan and his party intended to take over the police and to use them for their own purposes.

If we go further we find another quotation which, I think, shows how right my right hon. Friend was in the action he took. On 10th March this year Dr. Jagan said: 'In Kenya the Africans are not only killing white men who took away their land, but are killing their own people who turn stooges and that should be done to stooges [here]...'. I, and my hon. Friends, agree that as soon as possible we should advance, and give a greater constitutional freedom to our Colonial friends across the seas, but we also take the view that there are bad black men as well as bad white men, good black men as well as good white men, but very often the good have to be protected from the villainies of the bad. This is an instance where I believe that protection had to be extended.

The Minister for Education, who also came to this country, said in the House of Assembly on 11th September: The possibility of our present Constitution being taken from us... will be met by as much force as is necessary. Force, threats, taking over the police—does any hon. or right hon. Member opposite believe that the Colonial Secretary should have stayed quiescent in regard to such actions and words as that? Do they believe that, at the time when the whole thing had boiled

up, it was [1734](#) not right and proper to send troops to stop any violence? It is perfectly obvious that most responsible Members opposite do agree that that was the right and proper course. My right hon. Friend has certainly not been blamed by the Leader of the Opposition, or by the right hon. Gentleman the Member for Llanelly, for taking action.

I was present earlier this afternoon when the hon. Member for Eton and Slough (Mr. Fenner Brockway) stated, and I took down his words very carefully, that journalists had reported, after the troops had landed, that there was no sign of violence. That may well be so, but I submit that there was a very grave likelihood of violence had those troops not been sent and that it was the very prompt action taken at that time that probably stopped the violence. Is my right hon. Friend to be thought wrong because the violence has not taken place? What would Members opposite have said had the troops not been sent in until the violence had actually broken out? Then, indeed, there would have been an uproar; then, indeed, he would have been pilloried. He would not have been pilloried for taking action too soon, but told that he should have taken action long before. The very people now blaming him for the action he took would then have cursed him for not having taken it.

The hon. Gentleman for Eton and Slough, and all in this House recognise his sincerity and understand his desire for extending freedom and privilege to the people of the Colonies, but he should not imagine that he is alone in that desire. He said that the leaders of the People's Progressive Party had made foolish utterances and committed foolish actions. Those foolish utterances and actions were sufficient to show the pattern of things to come, had those men been left in control. By those words and those actions, small though they may have been at that time, the Governor—the man on the spot—and my right hon. Friend were left in no doubt what would follow if those men had their way.

I join with my hon. Friends, and with at least two hon. Members opposite, in saying that we must trust the judgment of the Governor. We must trust the integrity of the high officers of the Colonial Service who, at that time, were in a position to form an idea of what was [1735](#) going on. We must also trust the integrity of the security services, who were there to advise on matters underground. If the Governor said, "It is right and proper that the Colonial Secretary should, at this stage, suspend the Constitution," backed up by all the evidence shown in the White Paper—none of which has been refuted by hon. Members opposite—then I say that my right hon. Friend was carrying out his duties, and it is a disgrace that he has been the butt of hon. Members opposite and the subject of so much criticism by them.

We all hope that this is merely a short setback in an advance along a constitutional line for the people of British Guiana. One of the things which has impressed me most since I have been in this House is the fact that this Chamber shows so many examples of the affection and friendship which is felt for us by the Governments, Legislatures and Parliaments of the Commonwealth. Everywhere we see some gift, some token, which shows their affection for us—the Mother of Parliaments from which their own freedom has grown.

I hope that, in the not too distant future, when we enter this Chamber we may see some gift from the new and democratically elected Chamber of British Guiana alongside those of the other Constitutions which we have helped to introduce. I hope and trust that my voice, with others,

may persuade hon. and right hon. Gentlemen opposite that this is not the time to show division but unity.

§ 9.34 p.m.

§ Miss Jennie Lee (Cannock)

It is the custom of this House that, if one wishes to make a personal reference to any other hon. Member, one should try, if possible, to give that Member due notice. I hope that it will not be taken as a discourtesy that I have not been able to communicate with my hon. Friend the Member for Northfield (Mr. Chapman). It is very likely that he will be back in the Chamber in a matter of moments. I should like to say something directly to him, not in any way to dispute his right to take a view other than that of his party, but, if possible, to put one or two arguments to him which I hope may influence him even now to change his mind.

1736 First, I want to deal with a minor but still important issue. If there is any ground for doubt about the legality of the stand taken by the Colonial Secretary, I hope that the legal experts will get it cleared up, for two reasons. We seem to be having a spate of deposed Governments and Ministers, and if we are to carry out an execution, at least let us do it in the proper form.

I call that a minor but quite important item, because it must be known not only in this country but all over the world that we have a proper respect, in this country, for legal processes. I hope there will be agreement on that on both sides of the House. If an action is carried out, it should be carried out with a most austere regard for exact legal and administrative propriety.

My quarrel with the Government and with the Colonial Secretary goes far deeper than the legal aspect of the problem. Even if the Government were proved wrong on the legal aspect it would be a simple matter, I am sure, to find some covering formula which would then leave the essential arguments untouched. The point is this: have the Government behaved correctly in dealing with a young Colonial Government, with some inexperienced Ministers who had held office for about five months, by taking the drastic step of saying, "We must set you aside completely"? I agree with one hon. Member opposite who stressed the fact that in speaking in this House we must have special regard for the people of British Guiana. They must feel that we are really concerned about their interests. That is why even on this legal point they must feel that they are being dealt with according to the due processes of law.

But how are the people of British Guiana to react to the behaviour of the British Government? For generations they have lain under the dictatorship of the sugar planters and of big business. They had had no previous experience of democratic government and yet, in the early stages of such an experience, we pretend we are outraged because some of them are alleged to want to replace the dictatorship of property by the dictatorship of the poor.

We, on this side of the House, do not believe in the dictatorship of property, nor do we believe in the dictatorship of 1737 the Communist Party, but I urge hon. and right hon. Members opposite, as well as some of my hon. Friends, to bear in mind that if they want to build powerful

Communist parties and to create Communist sympathisers in British Guiana and all over the British Commonwealth and Colonies, their behaviour is precisely the right way to go about it.

This is the second occasion upon which the House has discussed this issue, and on this second occasion we have no more information before us than we had on the first occasion. Indeed, we have rather less certainty than we had on the first occasion. When the Minister came before us we said, "There must be a great many undisclosed facts." When my right hon. Friend the Member for Llanelly (Mr. J. Griffiths) spoke from our Front Bench on the previous occasion, I am sure he felt that it was only a matter of days or weeks, at most, before a great deal more undisclosed evidence was brought before us.

Since that last debate in the House there has been a great deal of talk about arson and other criminal charges. I do not want to take up time in repeating that even the information alleged to have been given by secret agents was given after the decision had been taken to set aside the Constitution. I am sure there is agreement on that. That evidence should be left aside, therefore, in making our decision tonight; it has not been advanced by the Government as part of their essential case for setting aside the Constitution.

To what are we reduced? We are reduced to a debate in this House in which there has been practically no evidence which would be accepted in a court of law, not even evidence which would be accepted as decisive by reasonable men and women outside a court of law. We have not had evidence. What we have had is testimony. I suggest that if we were to have a House of Commons debate based on tendentious comment, at least it would have been fair to have the testimony of the People's Progressive Party considered properly along with the rest.

We deposed a young Prime Minister in a British Colony. Should we not have given him every assistance to come to this country to state his case? Instead of doing that, we have created bad feeling [1738](#) and suspicion of our motives and of the type of people we are, by making it clear to all in British Guiana that we obstructed his passage to this country instead of helping it.

§ Mr. Lyttelton indicated dissent.

§ [Miss Lee](#)

The Minister shakes his head, but Dr. Jagan had difficulty in getting a visa and had ultimately to come through Dutch territory. Then, when he came to this country, I should have thought that we would have been meticulously careful to see that his side of the case should also be put. Some of us on this side of the House have met Dr. Jagan and have heard him state his case. We have also met Mr. Buraham, the ex-Minister of Education, and we have heard him state his case. But there has been no complete, written statement in the hands of all hon. Members of this House and of members of the British public putting forward their view of these events.

I should have thought that the more certain the Government were that they had taken the correct line, the more they would have been anxious to see that the young Colonial Ministers they were setting aside should have their side of the case put forward. I consider that, when we had our earlier debate on British Guiana, or even before it took place, there should have been a

substantial all-party delegation from this House going out to British Guiana and that we should have had information coming to us from much wider and much more acceptable sources than has been the case.

When a Governor is appointed to a Colony he must have respect and authority, but the case put by my hon. Friend the Member for Northfield, that whatever the Governor says must be taken practically on trust, is doctrine fit for a one-party State. It is doctrine fit for a society in which all the basic economic conflicts have been resolved. It is most certainly not doctrine for a country or for any situation in which there is not so much a wrong and a right as a conflict between two people, each of whom think they are right.

I say to my hon. Friend the Member for Northfield that the argument he put tonight in relation to British Guiana is the argument that was put by hon. Members opposite at the time of the "[red 1739 letter](#)" scare that brought down one inexperienced Government on our side. It is precisely the argument that was put in 1931 when the Government of the late Ramsay MacDonald collapsed, and I would remind my hon. Friend that it was put by some very nice people—important governors, leaders of churches, and so on. We are not disputing their moral belief in what they said, but the fact is that they were on the other side of the profound economic conflict, namely, who is to own the basic resources of society, and how can those resources be more fairly distributed.

I am in the same position as other hon. Members of this House, I have to make largely tendentious statements and judgments. More and more, as the information comes to me from British Guiana I see a parallel in what is happening there today with what happened in this country in 1924 and in 1931 and, indeed, with some of the circumstances that brought down the last Labour Government. We had a balance of payments crisis then which was made much worse than it should have been because the fact that the majority of the British Press exerted its utmost influence to undermine confidence in that Labour Government and a great many British businessmen, with less than maximum patriotism, exaggerated the crisis by making inroads on our dollar resources which this country could not stand.

So I see in British Guiana a community in which the Press and the radio were against the P.P.P. and the employers were against it. I do not wonder therefore that at least some in that young party should have had doubts as to whether democracy could work or not, and I say that it should have been our duty to help strengthen their confidence in democracy and constitutional measures instead of adding to their cynicism. My hon. Friend the Member for Northfield quoted from Dr. Rita Hinden, who said she had been shocked because the P.P.P. said it was not satisfied with the instalment of democratic government which was offered by the Commission and that it wanted "power complete and unchecked." I should like even that phrase examined.

I know that the P.P.P. objected to the limited amount of power given. I know that its members say that the employers [1740](#) are against them, that fundamentally this is a problem of the sugar plantations. It is not ultimately a constitutional point. The P.P.P. members say, "It is a question of how we develop our country, what wages will be paid to us and what kind of houses we shall live in." They say, "You are offering us a small instalment of constitutional government in circumstances where there are such powerful forces against us that we do not think we shall be

able to do anything with that power." I do not ask the House to accept or reject that argument, but it is an argument.

When we talk about "power complete and unchecked" is not that what we want when we become a Government? Do not we want to have a real Labour or a real Tory Government? Were we not intrigued by the suggestion made by one of my colleagues that we could give proportional representation to British Guiana? We wanted to know at what point British Guiana would become sufficiently mature to set aside proportional representation and have one party as the Government. One colleague intervened and said that if there was proportional representation in this country we might never have another Labour Government. We believe that it is good to have one party in power. Did some members of P.P.P. use a phrase of that kind in that sense? I do not know. There is far too much that I do not know. There are far too many questions left unanswered. There is far too much that all of us do not know in this debate today.

I think that the right hon. and learned Gentleman the Member for Montgomery (Mr. C. Davies) could quite easily have found the answer to some of the questions he put. I have never known Liberalism used for a worse cause than that for which the right hon. and learned Gentleman used it today. At one point he said that perhaps we ought to send someone out to British Guiana to find out what conditions were really like there. One cannot find out the main ground work of wages and living conditions in British Guiana by sending somebody out there for a week or two. We could help to clear up part of the constitutional problem in that way, but the Library of the House of Commons is stocked with books which give a great deal of the information that the right hon. and learned Gentleman wanted.

[1741](#) Much of that information makes me uneasy in this debate. I find, for instance, that in the year 1950 exports from British Guiana to America and Canada were valued at 31,500,000 dollars but imports were valued at 14,500,000 dollars. I found that in British Guiana, with a population of half a million, there were 67 doctors and 33 dentists a year or two ago, and I suppose that is pretty much the position now. I found that in 1945 an official survey of housing conditions made in Georgetown examined 7,944 houses. They found 2,309 unfit for human habitation and 5,303 beyond repair. They found only 382 of those houses structurally sound and many instances in which people were living 12 to a room.

We had Mr. Burnham, the former Minister of Education, in this country. We have serious enough problems in this island, but his situation was one in which only one in five of the teachers in the primary schools had any real training to justify being called teachers. A class of 50 or 60 is regarded as a rather small class; sometimes the numbers were 80 or 90. It was a travesty of education. Secondary education was something which soared beyond the hopes and expectations of the coloured people of British Guiana because it had to be paid for.

Against that background of basic poverty and people who had only known what it was to live under the dictatorship of big business, I was deeply concerned that some of my own friends should have taken the line -they have over the trade union issue interlocked with constitutional issues in that part of the world. I should like someone on the Government Front Bench, or my right hon. Friend the Member for Llanelly—if he would be good enough, because I am sure he knows all the facts—to tell me if it is or is not true that the Citizens Manpower Association

received money from the employers in British Guiana? My information is that this union did receive company money and in that sense was a company union to which it was safe to belong, whilst it was dangerous to belong to the Industrial Workers Union.

One hon. Member has spoken of victimisation as if it were the People's Progressive Party, the newcomers, who had power over the Press and everyone else, who were doing the victimising. We know [1742](#) how the Labour and trade union movement have been built up in this country, and we know where victimisation cuts in most sharply. It is when earning one's daily bread—

[§ Mr. Shurmer](#)

And prison too.

[§ Miss Lee](#)

And prison too. In the White Paper there is a great uproar about the P.P.P. attempting to oust established trade unions by legislative action. Are we seriously to say that we cannot intervene in trade union matters by legislative action? It has been done again and again in this country.

The Americans ask that there should be 51 per cent. of available membership of a union in order that it should be accepted, but, if my information is correct, the legislation P.P.P. sought to introduce was along these lines. If on a sugar plantation the existing union, the Manpower Citizens Association, could hold 35 per cent. of the members on any ballot, they, as the existing union, were entitled to continue, but if on a ballot the younger, challenging, union got the great majority, they should be recognised and employers should deal with them. Can any hon. Member, on any side of the House, take objection to that? I was in America when the C.I.O. was started. It too was called a "Communist conspiracy." Everything is a Communist conspiracy at the time. The C.I.O. and the Federation of Labour, of course, had their bitter disputes. We who belong to the trade union movement know that nothing can be more bitter than a dispute between unions over membership.

But we are the British House of Commons. I have a White Paper put before me, and I have gone through the list of reasons which the Minister is using to justify the extreme action which he has taken in British Guiana. One I have already given. I do not see that that is so serious. Any Parliament anywhere is surely entitled to introduce legislation to state on what terms it believes it reasonable for one or another union to be represented.

I see another reason given—the fomenting of strikes for political ends. Why should a party which had a clear majority resort to industrial strikes for political ends? It had the votes, it could carry out its constitutional powers unless obstructed by the powers of the Governor and by other limitations on its acts.

[1743](#) I am deeply perturbed about the lack of adequate information available during this debate to all sides of the House. I do not think we need to wait for a great deal of information until the Commission which has been appointed comes back. In terms of elementary fair play we ought to have had a written statement giving the case which the P.P.P. puts for itself. If it used wrong

facts and weak arguments we should have been, in all the stronger position to answer those statements and arguments.

I am not justifying the wild speeches which have been made by Dr. Jagan and other members of his Government when they spoke as if they were going to start civil war. But if the right hon. Gentleman will look at the files of M.I.5 he will find some pretty wild speeches that have been made by Members on this side of the House. When a strike is in progress or when one is dealing with people who are bitter because they are losing hope when dealing with questions of primitive poverty, they say bitter things. I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli would agree if we went back far enough we should find there have been occasions when he said one or two pretty bitter things.

[§ Mr. Turner-Samuels](#)

And the other side as well.

[§ Miss Lee](#)

Well, I do not intend to pursue that argument.

Surely it is not what statements have been made but the record of action with which we should be dealing, and I agree with my party in saying that we had ample means to control these young, in experienced Ministers. By our faith, by our generosity, by our tolerance and by our attention to their basic economic needs we could have won them for the democratic way of life. Instead of that we are apparently doing our best to leave them nothing except bitterness and cynicism and the conviction that they can fight one kind of dictatorship only with another.

[§ 9.59 p.m.](#)

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

The hon. Member for Cannock (Miss Lee) indicated to the House her view that we could have led these Ministers to a more sober and rational way of conduct. The trouble was, as the White Paper so [1744](#) clearly indicates, that they were not prepared to deal with their Ministerial duties. How, then, could we have led them in those circumstances?

Let the House consider the circumstances of the case. The Waddington Commission reported, the Constitution was established and a new Governor was sent out with great acceptance to all sides of the House. There was never any question in anybody's mind that he could perform his duties well. Over a long period he reported, as my right hon. Friend has indicated this evening, that things were not going well.

Things were deteriorating, and they deteriorated more and more. The hon. Member for Cannock suggests that that must have been the fault of the Governor—that he was not properly directing the ministers. She did not actually say so, but the implication was that, in her view, he lost his head. She said we should have sent someone out to British Guiana. In due course we did. My

right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Colonial Affairs went, and he will be able to tell us what he found.

The hon. Member for Cannock talked about the seriousness of the problems in British Guiana. My hon. Friend the Member for Farnham (Mr. Nicholson) described the British Guiana economy as being on a razor edge, and that is not much of an exaggeration. If the economic problems of British Guiana are serious, it is all the more necessary that there should be a responsible Government, and that the Ministers should be prepared to deal with their portfolios, and handle the business of the Colony. Instead of that, what did we find? I see that three of these Ministers at least were presidents of trade unions. One was president of the Sawmill Workers' Union, one of the British Guiana Labour Union and another of the Guiana Industrial Workers' Union.

[§ Dr. Morgan](#)

And why not?

[§ Mr. Macpherson](#)

All of them acted in these trade unions while they were Ministers, and not only that, but they were promoting strikes as well.

I recall to the House what was done in Malaya. It will be remembered that the party opposite laid down that those in charge of trade unions must have worked [1745](#) in them. Instead of that, in British Guiana we had people who were palpably using the trade union movement in order to try to seize power. It is all very well for the hon. Member for Cannock to talk about victimisation and intimidation. We know from experience in Germany and elsewhere that if you organise on the basis of force, you can very soon get control and exercise intimidation and victimisation.

[§ Mr. Hale](#)

I appreciate that that is undesirable, but surely the answer is that the employers of labour were all on the State Council.

[§ Mr. Macpherson](#)

I am well aware of the facts, but would the hon. Gentleman say they were all on the State Council? And who are the employers of labour? Someone described them rather more modestly as representatives of industry on the State Council. And why not? Who are these representatives? They are men earning salaries out there, men who are spending their lives striving for the good of the workers and for production in the interests of the country. Some of them actually worked in the British Administration beforehand. Their honesty and devotion to duty is beyond question. These are not men who are making huge fortunes out of the sugar industry, but quite the contrary; and that is something this House should realise.

The hon. Member for Eton and Slough (Mr. Fenner Brockway) said that he was concerned about the personal liberties and the rights of colonial peoples. So are we all. But personal liberties can

be lost, democracy can deteriorate and decline into tyranny all too easily. The personal liberties and the rights of the colonial peoples in this case have to be preserved.

I believe that the action taken by my right hon. Friend was timely. I believe that there is now some hope of those liberties being preserved and of British Guiana being allowed to settle down. Instead of her economy rapidly deteriorating, it will be lifted up, and as a consequence political liberty will develop. That is the principal thing which this House must watch, and I am convinced that had my right hon. Friend not taken this step we would have seen within a very short time that those liberties would have declined. Instead, we believe that now they will advance.

[1746](#) It would seem that the policy of the People's Progressive Party is directed to one end. It was an end which they were determined to pursue at any cost to their own country, and that was to get rid of the British—to get rid of the very people who the hon. Member for Cannock says should now be leading them towards their liberties and freedom. I believe that she was right when she said that. We should be doing that, and the path the Government have taken is the only one.

§ 10.5 p.m.

§ [Mr. James Griffiths](#) (Llanelly)

It is the desire of the House that we shall very soon come to a decision upon this matter. Therefore, I do not propose to detain hon. Members for long. I am asking, as my right hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Mr. Ede) asked, that my right hon. and hon. Friends should vote for this Prayer. I want to set out briefly but clearly the reasons we ask our right hon. and hon. Friends to vote and what we are voting for and against.

We had a debate on 22nd October when the House listened to me for a very long time and when I sought to set out our views upon the situation in British Guiana. I stick to every word I said then. I have seen no reason since to depart from anything I said. I repeat what I said—as one who had some part in bringing the Constitution in British Guiana into operation—that the People's Progressive Party had a great opportunity and they missed it and misused it. From that I want to make one or two other comments which show the lessons we learn from experiences of this kind.

My hon. Friend the Member for Eton and Slough (Mr. Fenner Brockway) drew a comparison between the Gold Coast and British Guiana and between the Convention People's Party in the Gold Coast and the People's Progressive Party in British Guiana. May I carry that comparison a little further? It was, so it happened, during my period of office that the final step was taken which brought about the new Constitution for the Gold Coast, and the beginning of the steps which led to the British Guiana Constitution. In the main they are very much the same kind of Constitution.

In both cases, a single party won a very big majority. When these parties win big majorities, they are confronted [1747](#) with a choice. They can accept the responsibility of their victory, accept the Constitution with all its limitations, seek to work it responsibly to show that they can themselves

as a party, and as Ministers, shoulder the responsibilities of democratic government and work for their people to the utmost of their power to make sure that their next advance is won by the fact that they can shoulder those responsibilities.

In the Convention People's Party in the Gold Coast, when they won their victory they had their controversies. There were two sides. There were those who thought that what they had to do was to wreck the Constitution, to make it unworkable; and there were those who thought that the right way was to work responsibly. Let me say, to his eternal credit, that Dr. Kwame Nkrumah came down on the side of those who wanted to work the Constitution responsibly. He won, and the Gold Coast Constitution has worked now for three years. Very shortly they will have further advancement and will come within sight of Dominion status. I hope that we shall all rejoice one of these days to see the first African Dominion in the British Commonwealth of Nations.

It was the contrary with the People's Progressive Party. I expressed my view about the People's Progressive Party after careful examination and to the best of my knowledge. I expressed that view in the debate on 22nd October and I reaffirm it now. I do not change it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cannock (Miss Lee) asked me about the trade union, the Manpower Citizens' Association. There are many trade unions in British Guiana. I will answer her question. I tell my hon. Friend that the Manpower Citizens' Association has been assisted financially by the Trades Union Congress. Whether or not it has been helped by employers, I do not know. I have never heard that before. To the best of my recollection, when I met Dr. Jagan and Mr. Burnham—I met them on more than one occasion—they made no charge of that kind. All I know is that the Trades Union Congress has assisted that organisation. It was associated with the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions. In the trade union world, if I have to decide whether I am for [1748](#) unions associated with the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions or unions associated with the World Federation of Trade Unions, I know where I stand.

[§ Miss Lee](#)

The choice of union that we might accept is one thing. What I am concerned about is whether my right hon. Friend thinks that a government ought to have power to prevent any unions from coming into a field because one already exists, whether or not we approve of the one which exists.

[§ Mr. Griffiths](#)

I do not think so, but I was dealing with a point which my hon. Friend put, which related to the Manpower Citizens' Association. I do not know anything of its faults or merits. All I know is that it is associated with the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions and was assisted by the T.U.C. If the I.C.F.T.U. thinks the union worthy of acceptance into its ranks, I stand by it. Consequently, I reaffirm what I previously said.

There is another matter which I should like to develop, because it is important, but I shall not do so tonight. I merely want to re-affirm the policy of the Parliament to which we belong. We have

reaffirmed it at our annual conferences, and it is a policy which we all accept. It is that in the Colonial Territories we should work steadfastly towards the establishment of democratic self-government—that is our aim and object, and I emphasise it—and assist them to build the economic foundations, social conditions and democratic institutions upon which democracy can be based and sustained and successfully worked.

There is another matter which is of some importance and I hope that one day we may return to the subject. It is that there has been remarkable development in the trade union field in our Colonial Territories. Twenty years ago there were not three trade unions in the Colonies; now there are about 1,400. We have assisted the territories to develop trade unions largely upon our own pattern but modified to suit local conditions. We have given them guidance and assistance. There has also been enormous development in the co-operative field. The number of co-operatives in the Colonies has trebled since 1945, their membership has increased eight-fold and their turnover [1749](#) has risen enormously. The co-operative organisations were also assisted by us.

Now there is a new problem, which I have raised with my own party, in regard to the new political parties arising in the Colonial Territories. We have had very little association with them and very little opportunity to help them. I have told my party that this is a challenge which we must accept if we are to establish democracy in our Colonial Territories. Just as in the trade union and co-operative fields, it is of the utmost importance to offer them our experience and knowledge based upon generations of effort and trouble. We must find means to enable us to give guidance, assistance and encouragement to the political parties in the Colonial Territories.

I now come to the question on which we are divided. We said in October, and we repeat it now, that the suspension of the Constitution should not have taken place and that all other methods should have been tried first. I developed that view in the debate on 22nd October, and if I do not do it tonight it is because I do not want to take up too much time.

The suspension of the Constitution is the most extreme step that we could take. I have listened to arguments tonight, and I heard them in the debate on 22nd October, against using the reserve powers, but what else do we do when we suspend a Constitution? It is because British Guiana and other Colonial Territories have not reached the stage of independence and have reached only partial democracy that powers are still vested in the Governor, the Secretary of State and the British Government. It is because they are at that stage that we have reserve powers at all, because, if we did not have these reserve powers, we could not do anything about the Constitution. We could not suspend it. Therefore, what I have been arguing is not that the reserve powers should be used, but that, faced with a situation of that kind, every other step should have been taken before the final step of suspending the Constitution.

Having suspended it, what now? Here, I come to deal with the content of the Order against which we are praying, and it has scarcely been referred to by any speaker in the debate. Having suspended the Constitution—and I have expressed my view upon that, and, if this Motion is [1750](#) defeated, that will be the final act in the suspension of the Constitution—we shall be confronted with a period during which the old Constitution will be suspended and the Commission will be examining the problem of what the next Constitution should be like. I do not

propose to discuss that now. The Secretary of State said last Wednesday, and repeated earlier today, that the Commission is entitled to report, if it so wishes, that the old Constitution can be restored. Therefore, we must await its report; but in the meantime what must we do?

This evening, we are not only debating the issue of the suspension of the Constitution, but, if this Motion is negatived, this temporary Constitution comes into operation. I believe that, having suspended the Constitution—and that is the wrong method—we are now deciding that there shall be a Constitution for a temporary period in which the Governor will have an Executive Council which will be composed of three ex officio members and seven nominated members, which is exactly the size of the Executive Council which has been suspended. There is also to be a Legislative Council of three ex officio members and 24 nominated members, which is the exact numerical composition of the old Legislative Council. Instead, therefore, of the old Executive Council and the old Legislative Council, we are to have new ones of this kind.

I will express my own view about this, and this view is expressed on the assumption that this interval between the suspension of the old Constitution and the bringing before the House of the proposals of the Secretary of State for a new one will be a short one. I think we should set a time-limit of a reasonably short time, and that we should aim at making the interval as short as possible. The Commission should be encouraged to do its job adequately and fully, but as quickly as possible, so that this interval will be short. We should not let anything divert us from our policy, which is the building of democracy everywhere, including British Guiana, and, if this interval is to be short, I would rather continue direct rule.

Having reached this stage, with this elaborate Constitution, I ask the House to realise what this means for the territory's political future. Everybody [1751](#) has said that we should keep the Governor out of politics, but this brings him in. This gives him the right to decide himself to nominate seven members of the Executive Council and 24 members of the Legislative Council, and he must pick and choose among the political leaders in British Guiana. This is bringing the Governor into politics to a far greater extent than any suggestion that we ever made.

I would rather not do that. I would rather continue direct rule for a short period and hope that during that period there would be an investigation, a full investigation, by a Commission. On that point I want to ask one or two questions. The Commission's terms of reference include that it has to consider the situation in the light of the circumstances. I take it that it will have the fullest facility to examine all the circumstances, fully and thoroughly, including the right to hear evidence from everybody concerned and to examine all those charges and accusations in the White Paper which are relevant circumstances leading to this situation. I hope that it will make a thorough examination and will report to the House. We have been told that it is free to report as it will. In that short period I hope rather for direct rule, and then to come back to the House to consider the new Constitution when we have the Report and the Recommendations of the Commission.

There are underlying causes. There are grave economic problems and real economic hardships. There has been neglect in the past. Let the House remember that it is only for a very short time that anything like substantial public money has been going to the Colonies at all. Half the money we have given over the last 30 years has been given in the last six years, through the Colonial

Development and Welfare Fund. I hope that at an early opportunity, if not to night, the Secretary of State will tell us what further help can be provided from that Fund.

I have listened to hon. Members from both sides of the House who had been to the West Indies. Their testimony was indelibly imprinted on my mind when they said: "We tremble to think what the position would have been in all these [1752](#) Colonies had it not been for the aid of the Colonial Development and Welfare Fund in the last few years." What are we going to do for that Fund? What about the C.D.C.? It is interested. What is happening to it, and what is to be its function in the future? I hope it will be the fullest concentration upon providing help to overcome these difficulties.

We expressed our view on a Motion which I moved on 22nd October and which set out our views about the situation and the reasons we think that the Constitution should not have been suspended. We are engaged this evening on the final act of suspension, and as we voted against that suspension for the reasons which I gave on 22nd October and as nothing that has happened has changed our views, we shall, for those reasons, vote for this Prayer this evening.

§ 10.24 p.m.

[§ *The Minister of State for Colonial Affairs \(Mr. Henry Hopkinson\)*](#)

When I saw the Prayer which the Opposition put down to annul this Order I wondered what their real purpose was. Was it simply that they did not like the terms of the interim Constitution now proposed, or that they wished to use this means of registering a further protest against the withdrawal of the old Constitution on which this House pronounced so decisively on 22nd October, or was it to have an opportunity for going over the whole ground that was covered in that debate? A large number of speeches this afternoon seemed to indicate that the last explanation was correct, and this was in fact admitted in the course of the debate by the hon. Member for Northfield (Mr. Chapman) in the very difficult and courageous speech which he made. But comparatively little has been made in this debate of the question of the composition of the new Constitution, and it was really left to the right hon. Member for Llanely (Mr. J. Griffiths) to deal with this matter.

I do not feel that we have the time to go through every detail of this Constitution, but I would say to the right hon. Gentleman that his suggestion that we should continue direct rule means, in fact, that the present Constitution as modified would prevail. It would mean that the existing Executive, with its majority of P.P.P. ex-Ministers, would continue in office. That seems to me to be a fantastic proposition. Having [1753](#) regard to the circumstances in British Guiana, I can hardly believe that the right hon. Gentleman would risk the civil disturbances which might arise from leaving a Constitution in existence which involved such a proposition as that.

In his opening speech this afternoon, my right hon. Friend showed with great clarity why there was no other alternative to the action taken by Her Majesty's Government in suspending the existing Constitution when they did. Certainly no alternative that has been proposed by the party opposite seems to hold much water, and, apart from the proposal put forward by the right hon.

Member for Llanelly, there has certainly been no other proposal for an alternative to the interim Constitution which we propose.

I wish to touch very briefly on one or two points made by hon. Members on both sides of the House, and then to consider what is going to happen in this interim period. The right hon. Member for Llanelly paid tribute to the work of the trade union movement and of our own Trades Union Council in the colonial field. I should like to support and endorse that tribute. We have need of them now in the colonial field as never before, and we are grateful for the help they are giving us in many parts of the world.

The hon. Member for Cannock (Miss Lee) quoted a great many facts and figures, some of which I have and some I have not. I would only say to her that she is very far from the mark on the ones which I have. Her reference, for instance, to imports and exports was completely wrong. The imports for 1950 were 55 million, and the exports were only 50 million. Imports for 1951 were 65 million, and exports were only 58 million. The same was true in 1952.

§ Miss Lee

I gave the dollar trade figures for the dollar countries.

§ Mr. Hopkinson

These are dollars. The point which the hon. Lady was trying to make was that exports exceeded imports by almost twice as much, whereas precisely the opposite was the case. Imports exceeded exports.

The hon. Member for Northfield and the hon. Member for Nottingham, Central (Mr. Ian Winterbottom) both made very difficult speeches, and I agreed with [1754](#) almost every word of them. In particular, I agreed with the hon. Member for Nottingham, Central when he said that we had had to take a risk. We have had to take a risk on this occasion.

At the meeting of the Trusteeship Committee of the United Nations this autumn, speaking on behalf of Her Majesty's Government, I said: Her Majesty's Government would regard it as an utter dereliction of their duty if they handed over complete power to the peoples of the Territories they administer when those Territories had acquired no more than a facade of self-discipline and responsibility. In some cases risks must be taken. But if we take such risks we must always be ready to recognise an error when we see it. That was before the suspension of the Constitution in British Guiana. These experiments in responsible government which are going on all over the British Empire, all involve risks—as the right hon. Member for South Shields (Mr. Ede) says—and a risk was taken on this occasion in British Guiana which turned out to be a bad one. It has been recognised as such, and it is being remedied.

The responsibility for taking this risk must be shared by the right hon. Member for Llanelly who set up the committee which devised the new Constitution and who, as one of his last acts before leaving office, accepted in principle its main recommendations. It must be shared, on the other hand, by Her Majesty's present Government, who, after examining all the facts and factors

involved, decided to carry it into effect. We had a risk and—as the right hon. Member for Llanelli stated—we took it as an act of faith. But this experiment has failed, and we must now seek for and examine the causes of that failure and take such steps as we can, in the future of British Guiana, to avoid a repetition.

The first and foremost thing is that the Constitutional Commission itself has now been nominated, and it will be shortly starting on its work. I think that Members in all parts of the House will agree that in the qualifications of its members it is well fitted to its task. We believe that the terms of reference are sufficiently elastic to cover all the essential features in this complex situation, including those to which the right hon. Gentleman referred at Question time the other day, and again today. While the Commission is doing its work, and in the [1755](#) later period when the Report is under consideration, all the work of drafting a new Constitution and introducing it will take time. We hope it will be a short time, but it is of the highest importance that we should make the best possible use of that period of what I might describe as respite.

The right hon. Member for South Shields asked me what were the causes of the breakdown, after so short a time, of the constitutional experiment in British Guiana. It is true to say that it was due to political, economic and, I would add, social causes, each of them having certain reactions one on the other.

As hon. Members know, the population of British Guiana is crowded into a narrow coastal belt. Most of the cultivated land is reclaimed from swamp, or is actually below sea level. There are sea walls to be built and maintained, and so on. The land has to be constantly irrigated and drained, and this has meant two things. First, it has prevented the development of peasant farming of sugar, such as exists in almost all the other sugar-producing territories in the Caribbean. The reason is that only the large sugar estates can afford the system of irrigation and drainage which is necessary, and in the absence of peasant farming there is no class of small proprietors between the large sugar estates on the one hand and the cane cutters and sugar factory workers on the other.

That is the position. That does not mean—as the hon. Member for Cannock (Miss Lee) said—that there has been dictation on the part of the sugar companies. On the contrary, the sugar estates of British Guiana have been as enlightened as any other sugar companies in the Caribbean in doing what they can, within their means, for the workers.

[§ Dr. Morgan](#)

Indentured labour.

[§ Mr. Hopkinson](#)

That occurred 60 years ago, and was stopped in 1917. In the absence of peasant farming there is no class between the sugar estate and the cane cutters. This has led to a lack of balance in the social structure of the territory, and to a lack of political and social stability, and this is reflected in the social conditions in the towns.

The right hon. Member for Llanelly knows that this problem existed when he [1756](#) took office, and he also knows that it cannot be solved in a day. The only section of the community which can be said to represent the middle class are the small rice peasants, of whom there are now some 55,000 to 60,000. If we are to get a proper balance between the various sections of the community it is necessary that this system of small peasant proprietors should be extended. For that reason, as hon. Members know, we have sent out Mr. Brown and Mr. Lacey, the latter my right hon. Friend's irrigation adviser and Mr. Brown formerly general manager of the Gezira Cotton Board, to advise the Government of British Guiana for six weeks about what should be done on land settlement and about the possibilities of introducing peasant farming in the sugar industry.

The second point is that the heavy expense of maintaining this irrigation and drainage has handicapped the Government of British Guiana and the sugar companies in improving the social conditions of the Colony. There is no doubt that in housing, in water supplies and in other things there is a great deal which must be done. Some housing conditions, particularly in the old ranges on some of the sugar estates, are shocking. I have visited them myself, and for sheer disgrace they compare with some of the worst housing conditions I have ever seen, including those of the Middle East.

On the other hand, a great deal has already been done, and much has been done by the sugar companies themselves. Since the war, one-third of all the families have been rehoused by the sugar companies, but if further progress is to be made in dealing with this problem we need two things. First, we need more finance. That has to take the form of increased C.D. and W. grants to the Colony and of special efforts by the sugar companies to find the money for improving the amenities.

Here I would mention the decision by the companies only a few weeks ago to agree to the loan of some 2,500,000 dollars from their sugar price stabilisation fund to the labour welfare fund for purposes of housing. Above all—and this is most important in the interest of the Colony—we have to recreate confidence in its future and in the future of its industries. We have to recreate confidence in this country, from where capital is [1757](#) needed, in the United States and elsewhere, for I am certain that the full results which we seek in British Guiana will never be secured without further great financial investment from private sources as well as from public sources.

Secondly—and this is just as important—we need a long and stable period of good government. We need it not only to restore confidence but because we have made it clear, as the right hon. Member for Llanelly and his party have made it clear, that it is our desire that British Guiana should go forward under a genuine democratic system to full self-government. If such a system as we know in this country, and as exists in many other British Colonial Territories overseas in different forms, is to come about, the inhabitants, the voters, must be taught to realise and understand their responsibilities.

That was the trouble in the last elections. A climate must be prepared in which democracy will work and flourish. The voters must be taught to judge between genuine and proper democratic activities and the mixture of gangsterism and political bribery to which they were subjected at

the last election. Intimidation, which existed before the constitution was suspended and which exists now, must be suppressed. It must cease to be a factor in the life of British Guiana. The secrecy of the ballot must be enforced, as it was not in the election, and it must be known to be enforced. None of these conditions obtained when the first elections were held.

Finally, and above all, we must ensure that there is a proper, solidly-based party system with proper political organisations. As was said today by the right hon. Gentleman, at the time of the last election there was only one properly organised party. The United Democratic Party and other smaller parties had no existence, or practically no organisation in the provinces. There were as many as 10 candidates for one seat of whom only one, the P.P.P. candidate, represented an organised political party. Is it surprising that the P.P.P. secured 18 seats out of 24? The surprising thing is that they did not get more than 51 per cent. of the votes.

In this interim period all parties as well as the people must be helped to [1758](#) extend their political education. I was glad that the members of the United Democratic Party when they were over here a few weeks ago had the opportunity of making long and valuable visits to Transport House and the Conservative Central Office. The Government of British Guiana must also do their share, through the information services, in proclaiming the ideals and aims of parliamentary democracy on a non-party basis. That is being done. The public information services in the Territory are being improved. All these things will take time, but it is our hope that under this interim Constitution which is before the House there will be progress in all these fields.

This Constitution which is embodied in the Order we have been debating today will act over the next 12 months, or we hope for not much longer, as the Constitution of British Guiana. It is in no sense a Constitution which can be regarded as containing any message of despair or despondency to that Territory. On the contrary, it is one of hope. It is a Constitution covering a period during which a great deal can be done. And I hope that even at this late hour the Opposition may feelable to withdraw their Prayer and thus present to the Guianese people and to the world a picture of a united House of Commons determined to assist the Guianese in their political and economic progress despite, or perhaps on account of, this setback.

We have had a long debate on this Prayer, and it is not my intention to add much more to what has been said already. I would only say that, during the course of my admittedly short visit to British Guiana, I made a point of meeting delegations of all representative bodies in the Colony, including the P.P.P., the employers, the Sugar Producers' Association, the Chamber of Commerce, the rice producers, and the Christian Churches, the Council of which represents every single denomination and which is, I think, the only body in the world in which the Roman Catholic Church is collaborating fully with other churches. I saw the British Guiana Trades Union Council, which, I am glad to hear, is now being re-organised. I saw the League of Coloured Peoples, the British Guiana East Indian Association and many other bodies. All these bodies, other than the P.P.P., either spontaneously or in reply to [1759](#) questions from me, fully endorsed the action of Her Majesty's Government. Some said that they did so with reluctance because they were anxious about the retention of their newly acquired liberties, but they all agreed that there was no alternative.

In the same way, private individuals, men of the highest influence and integrity, emphasised to me that had not action been taken when it was, and had not the troops arrived when they did, there would have been a breakdown on the civil administration side of the Government, followed by civil disturbances and bloodshed. Having regard to these facts and to what the Secretary of State has put before the House this afternoon in justification of the Government's action,

1760

§ to the lack of alternatives and to the possibilities of the future as a time when we can make some progress in political education in British Guiana, I beg right hon. Gentlemen opposite to withdraw this Prayer and let us appear united before the world.

§ Mr. Foot rose—

§ The Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. P. G. T. Buchan-Hepburn) rose in his place, and claimed to move, "That the Question be now put."

§ Question put accordingly.

§ The House divided: Ayes, 271; Noes, 304.

1763

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| Division No. 12.] | AYES | [10.45 p.m. |
| Acland, Sir Richard | de Freitas, Geoffrey | Hoy, J. H. |
| Adams, Richard | Deer, G. | Hudson, James (Ealing, N.) |
| Albu, A. H. | Delargy, H. J. | Hughes, Cledwyn (Anglesey) |
| Allen, Arthur (Bosworth) | Dodds, N. N. | Hughes, Emrys (S. Ayrshire) |
| Aden, Scholefield (Crewe) | Donnelly, D. L. | Hughes, Hector (Aberdeen, N.) |
| Anderson, Alexander (Motherwell) | Driberg, T. E. N. | Hynd, H. (Accrington) |
| Anderson, Frank (Whitehaven) | Dugdale, Rt. Hon. John (W. Bromwich) | Hynd, J. B. (Attercliffe) |
| Attlee, Rt. Hon. C. R. | Ede, Rt. Hon. J. C. | Irvine, A. J. (Edge Hill) |
| Awbery, S. S. | Edelman, M. | Irving, W. J. (Wood Green) |
| Bacon, Miss Alice | Edwards, Rt. Hon. John (Brighouse) | Isaacs, Rt. Hon. G. A. |
| Baird, J. | Edwards, W. J. (Stepney) | Janner, B. |
| Balfour, A. | Evans, Albert (Islington, S.W.) | Jay, Rt. Hon. D. P. T. |
| Barnes, Rt. Hon. A. J. | Evans, Edward (Lowestoft) | Jeger, George (Goole) |
| Bartley, P. | Evans, Stanley (Wednesbury) | Jeger, Mrs. Lena |
| Bellenger, Rt. Hon. F. J. | Fernyhough, E. | Jenkins, R. H. (Stechford) |
| Bence, C. R. | Fienburgh, W. | Johnson, James (Rugby) |

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| Benn, Hon. Wedgwood | Finch, H. J. | Jones, David (Hartlepool) |
| Benson, G. | Fletcher, Eric (Islington, E.) | Jones, Frederick Elwyn (West Ham, S.) |
| Beswick, F. | Follick, M. | Keenan, W. |
| Bevan, Rt. Hon A. (Ebbw Vale) | Foot, M. M. | Kenyon, C. |
| Blackburn, F. | Forman, J. C. | Key, Rt. Hon. C. W. |
| Blenkinsop, A. | Fraser, Thomas (Hamilton) | King, Dr. H. M. |
| Blyton, W. R. | Freeman, John (Watford) | Kinley, J. |
| Boardman, H. | Freeman, Peter (Newport) | Lee, Frederick (Newton) |
| Bottomley, Rt. Hon. A. G. | Gaitskell, Rt. Hon. H. T. N. | Lee, Miss Jennie (Cannock) |
| Bowles, F. G. | Gibson, C. W. | Lever, Harold (Cheetham) |
| Braddock, Mrs. Elizabeth | Gooch, E. G. | Lever, Leslie (Ardwick) |
| Brockway, A. F. | Gordon Walker, Rt. Hon. P. C. | Lewis, Arthur |
| Brook, Dryden (Halifax) | Greenwood, Anthony (Rossendale) | Lindgren, G. S. |
| Broughton, Dr. A. D. D. | Greenwood, Rt. Hon. Arthur (Wakefield) | Lipton, Lt.-Col. M. |
| Brown, Rt. Hon. George (Belper) | Grenfell, Rt. Hon. D. R. | Logan, D. G. |
| Brown, Thomas (Ince) | Grey, C. F. | MacColl, J. E. |
| Burke, W. A. | Griffiths, David (Rother Valley) | McGhee, H. G. |
| Burton, Miss F. E. | Griffiths, Rt. Hon. James (Llanelly) | McInnes, J. |
| Butler, Herbert (Hackney, S.) | Griffiths, William (Exchange) | McLeavy, F. |
| Callaghan, L. J. | Hale, Leslie | McNeil, Rt. Hon. H. |
| Carmichael, J. | Hall, Rt. Hon. Glenvil (Colne Valley) | MacPherson, Malcolm (Stirling) |
| Champion, A. J. | Hall, John T. (Gateshead, W.) | Mainwaring, W. H. |
| Chetwynd, G. R. | Hamilton, W. W. | Mallalieu, J. P. W. (Huddersfield, E.) |
| Coldrick, W. | Hannan, W. | Mann, Mrs. Jean |
| Collick, P. H. | Hardy, E. A. | Manuel, A. C. |
| Corbet, Mrs. Freda | Hargreaves, A. | Marquand, Rt. Hon. H. A |
| Cove, W. G. | Harrison, J. (Nottingham, E.) | Mason, Roy |
| Craddock, George (Bradford, S.) | Hastings, S. | Mayhew, C. P. |
| Crosland, C. A. R. | Hayman, F. H. | Mellish, R. J. |
| Crossman, R. H. S | Healey, Denis (Leeds, S.E.) | Messer, Sir F. |

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| Cullen, Mrs. A. | Henderson, Rt. Hon. A. (Rowley Regis) | Mikardo, Ian |
| Dalton, Rt. Hon. H. | Herbison, Miss M. | Mitchison, G. R. |
| Darling, George (Hillsborough) | Hewitson, Capt. M. | Monslow, W. |
| Davies, Ernest (Enfield, E.) | Hobson, C. R. | Moody, A. S. |
| Davies, Harold (Leek) | Holman, P. | Morgan, Dr. H. B. W. |
| Davies, Stephen (Merthyr) | Holmes, Horace (Hemsworth) | Morley, R. |
| | Houghton, Douglas | |
| Morris, Percy (Swansea, W.) | Roberts, Albert (Normanton) | Thornton, E. |
| Morrison, Rt. Hon. H. (Lewisham, S.) | Roberts, Goronwy (Caernarvon) | Timmons, J. |
| Mort, D. L. | Robinson, Kenneth (St. Pancras, N.) | Tomney, F. |
| Moyle, A. | Rogers, George (Kensington, N.) | Turner-Samuels, M. |
| Mulley, F. W. | Ross, William | Ungoed-Thomas, Sir Lynn |
| Murray, J. D. | Royle, C. | Usburne, H. C. |
| Nally, W. | Shackleton, E. A. A. | Viant, S. P. |
| Neal, Harold (Bolsover) | Shawcross, Rt. Hon. Sir Hartley | Wallace, H. W. |
| Noel-Baker, Rt. Hon. P. J. | Shinwell, Rt. Hon. E. | Warbey, W. N. |
| O'Brien, T. | Short, E. W. | Watkins, T. E. |
| Oldfield, W. H. | Shurmer, P. L. E. | Webb, Rt. Hon. M. (Bradford, C.) |
| Oliver, G. H. | Silverman, Julius (Erdington) | Weitzman, D. |
| Orbach, M. | Silverman, Sydney (Nelson) | Wells, Percy (Faversham) |
| Oswald, T. | Simmons, C. J. (Brierley Hill) | Wells, William (Walsall) |
| Padley, W. E. | Skeffington, A. M. | West, D. G. |
| Paget, R. T. | Slater, Mrs. H. (Stoke-on- Trent) | Wheatley, Rt. Hon. John |
| Paling, Rt. Hon. W. (Dearne Valley) | Slater, J. (Durham, Sedgfield) | Wheeldon, W. E. |
| Paling, Will T. (Dewsbury) | Smith, Ellis (Stoke, S.) | White, Mrs. Eirene (E. Flint) |
| Palmer, A. M. F. | Smith, Norman (Nottingham, S.) | White, Henry (Derbyshire, N.E.) |
| Pannell, Charles | Snow, J. W. | Whiteley, Rt. Hon. W. |
| Pargiter, G. A. | Sorensen, R. W. | Wigg, George |
| Parker, J. | Soskice, Rt. Hon. Sir Frank | Wilcock, Group Capt. C. A. B |
| Parkin, B. T. | Sparks, J. A. | Wilkins, W. A. |
| Paton, J. | Steele, T. | Willey, F. T. |

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| Peart, T. F. | Stewart, Michael (Fulham, E.) | Williams, David (Neath) |
| Plummer, Sir Leslie | Strachey, Rt. Hon. J. | Williams, Rev. Llywelyn (Abertillery) |
| Popplewell, E. | Strauss, Rt. Hon. George (Vauxhall) | Williams, Ronald (Wigan) |
| Porter, G. | Stross, Dr. Barnett | Williams, Rt. Hon. Thomas (Don V'll'y) |
| Price, J. T. (Westhoughton) | Summerskill, Rt. Hon. E. | Williams, W. R. (Droylsden) |
| Price, Philips (Gloucestershire, W.) | Swingler, S. T. | Williams, W. T. (Hammersmith, S.) |
| Proctor, W. T. | Sylvester, G. O. | Wilson, Rt. Hon. Harold (Huyton) |
| Pryde, D. J. | Taylor, Bernard (Mansfield) | Winterbottom, Ian (Nottingham, C.) |
| Pursey, Comdr. H. | Taylor, John (West Lothian) | Winterbottom, Richard (Brightside) |
| Rankin, John | Taylor, Rt. Hon. Robert (Morpeh) | Woodburn, Rt. Hon. A. |
| Reeves, J. | Thomas, George (Cardiff) | Yates, V. F. |
| Reid, Thomas (Swindon) | Thomas, Iorwerth (Rhondda, W.) | Younger, Rt. Hon. K |
| Reid, William (Camlachie) | Thomas, Ivor Owen (Wrekin) | |
| Rhodes, H. | Thomson, George (Dundee, E.) | TELLERS FOR THE AYES: |
| Richards, R.s | Thorneycroft, Harry (Clayton) | Mr. Bowden and Mr. Pearson. |
| NOES | | |
| Aitken, W. T. | Butcher, Sir Herbert | Ford, Mrs. Patricia |
| Allan, R. A. (Paddington, S.) | Butler, Rt. Hon. R. A. (Saffron Walden) | Fort, R. |
| Alport, C. J. M. | Campbell, Sir David | Foster, John |
| Amery, Julian (Preston, N.) | Carr, Robert | Fraser, Hon. Hugh (Stone) |
| Amory, Rt. Hon. Heathcote (Tiverton) | Cary, Sir Robert | Fraser, Sir Ian (Morecambe & Lonsdale) |
| Anstruther-Gray, Major W. J. | Channon, H. | Fyfe, Rt. Hon. Sir David Maxwell |
| Arbuthnot, John | Clarke, Col. Ralph (East Grinstead) | Galbraith, Rt. Hon. T. D. (Pollok) |
| Ashton, H. (Chelmsford) | Clarke, Brig. Terence (Portsmouth, W.) | Galbraith, T. G. D. (Hillhead) |
| Assheton, Rt. Hon. R. (Blackburn, W.) | Clyde, Rt. Hon. J. L. | Garner-Evans, E. H. |
| Astor, Hon. J. J. | Cole, Norman | George, Rt. Hon. Maj. G. Lloyd |

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| Baker, P. A. D. | Colegate, W. A. | Glover, D. |
| Baldock, Lt.-Cmdr. J. M. | Conant, Maj. R. J. E. | Godber, J. B. |
| Baldwin, A. E. | Cooper, Sqn. Ldr. Albert | Gomme-Duncan, Cot. A. |
| Banks, Col. C. | Craddock, Beresford (Spelthorne) | Gough, C. F. H. |
| Barber, Anthony | Crookshank, Capt. Rt. Hon. H. F. C. | Gower, H. R. |
| Barlow, Sir John | Crosthwaite-Eyre, Col. O. E. | Graham, Sir Fergus |
| Baxter, A. B. | Crouch, R. F. | Gridley, Sir Arnold |
| Beach, Maj. Hicks | Crowder, Sir John (Finchley) | Grimond, J. |
| Beamish, Maj. Tufton | Crowder, Petre (Ruislip— Northwood) | Grimston, Hon. John (St. Albans) |
| Bell, Philip (Bolton, E.) | Cuthbert, W. N. | Grimston, Sir Robert (Westbury) |
| Bell, Ronald (Bucks, S.) | Darling, Sir William (Edinburgh, S.) | Hall, John (Wycombe) |
| Bennett, F. M. (Reading, N.) | Davidson, Viscountess | Harden, J. R. E. |
| Bennett, Dr. Reginald (Gosport) | Davies, Rt. Hon. Clement (Montgomery) | Hare, Hon. J. H. |
| Bennett, William (Woodside) | Deedes, W. F. | Harris, Frederic (Croydon, N.) |
| Bevins, J. R. (Toxteth) | Digby, S. Wingfield | Harris, Reader (Heston) |
| Birch, Nigel | Dodds-Parker, A. D. | Harrison, Col. J. H. (Eye) |
| Bishop, F. P. | Donaldson, Cmdr. C. E. McA. | Harvey, Air Cdre. A. V. (Macclesfield) |
| Black, C. W. | Doughty, C. J. A. | Harvey, Ian (Harrow, E.) |
| Boothby, Sir R. J. G. | Douglas-Hamilton, Lord Malcolm | Harvie-Watt, Sir George |
| Bossom, Sir A. C. | Drayson, G. B. | Hay, John |
| Bowen, E. R. | Dugdale, Rt. Hon. Sir T. (Richmond) | Heald, Sir Lionel |
| Boyd-Carpenter, J. A. | Duncan, Capt. J. A. L. | Heath, Edward |
| Boyle, Sir Edward | Duthie, W. S. | Henderson, John (Cathcart) |
| Braine, B. R. | Eccles, Rt. Hon. Sir D. M. | Higgs, J. M. C. |
| Braithwaite, Lt.-Cdr. G. (Bristol, N.W.) | Elliot, Rt. Hon. W. E. | Hill, Dr. Charles (Luton) |
| Bromley-Davenport, Lt.-Col. W. H. | Erroll, F. J. | Hill, Mrs. E. (Wythenshawe) |
| Brooke, Henry (Hampstead) | Fell, A. | Hinchingbrooke, Viscount |
| Brooman-White, R. C. | Finlay, Graeme | Hirst, Geoffrey |
| Browne, Jack (Govan) | Fisher, Nigel | Holland-Martin, C. J. |

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| Billiard, D. G. | Fleetwood-Hesketh, R. F. | Hollis, M. C. |
| Bullus, Wing Commander E. E. | Fletcher, Sir Walter (Bury) | Holmes, Sir Stanley (Harwich) |
| Burden, F. F. A. | Fletcher-Cooke, C. | Hope, Lord John |
| 1762 | | |
| 1763 | | |
| Hopkinson, Rt. Hon. Henry | Markham, Major Sir Frank | Scott-Miller, Cmdr. R. |
| Hornsby-Smith, Miss M. P. | Marlowe, A. A. H. | Shepherd, William |
| Horobin, I. M. | Marshall, Douglas (Bodmin) | Simon, J. E. S. (Middlesbrough, W.) |
| Horsbrugh, Rt. Hon. Florence | Maude, Angus | Smithers, Peter (Winchester) |
| Howard, Gerald (Cambridgeshire) | Maudling, R. | Smithers, Sir Waldron (Orpington) |
| Howard, Hon. Greville (St. Ives) | Maydon, Lt.-Comdr. S. L. C. | Smyth, Brig. J. G. (Norwood) |
| Hudson, Sir Austin (Lewisham, N.) | Medlicott, Brig. F. | Snadden, W. McN. |
| Hudson, W. R. A. (Hull, N.) | Mellor, Sir John | Spearman, A. C. M. |
| Hulbert, Wing Cdr. N. J. | Molson, A. H. E. | Speir, R. M. |
| Hurd, A. R. | Moore, Sir Thomas | Spence, H. R. (Aberdeenshire, W.) |
| Hutchinson, Sir Geoffrey (Ilford, N.) | Morrison, John (Salisbury) | Spens, Sir Patrick (Kensington, S.) |
| Hutchison, James (Scotstoun) | Mott-Radclyffe, C. E. | Stanley, Capt. Hon. Richard |
| Hyde, Lt.-Col. H. M. | Nabarro, G. D. N. | Stevens, G. P. |
| Hylton-Foster, H. B. H. | Neave, Airey | Steward, W. A. (Woolwich, W.) |
| Jenkins, Robert (Dulwich) | Nicholls, Harmar | Stewart, Henderson (Fife, E.) |
| Jennings, R. | Nicholson, Godfrey (Farnham) | Stoddart-Scott, Col. M. |
| Johnson, Eric (Blackley) | Nicolson, Nigel (Bournemouth, E.) | Storey, S. |
| Johnson, Howard (Kempton) | Nield, Basil (Chester) | Strauss, Henry (Norwich, S.) |
| Jones, A. (Hall Green) | Noble, Cmdr. A. H. P. | Stuart, Rt. Hon James (Moray) |
| Joynton-Hicks, Hon. L. W. | Nugent, G. R. H. | Studholme, H. G. |
| Kaberry, D. | Nutting, Anthony | Summers, G. S. |
| Kerr, H. W. | Oakshott, H. D. | Taylor, Charles (Eastbourne) |
| Lambert, Hon. G. | Odey, G. W. | Taylor, William (Bradford, N.) |
| Lambton, Viscount | O'Neill, Phelim (Co. Antrim, N.) | Teeling, W. |
| Lancaster, Col. C. G. | Ormsby-Gore, Hon. D. W. | Thomas, Rt. Hon. J. P. L. (Hereford) |

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| Langford-Holt, J. A. | Orr, Capt. L. P. S. | Thomas, Leslie (Canterbury) |
| Law, Rt. Hon. R. K. | Orr-Ewing, Charles Ian (Hendon, N.) | Thomas, P. J. M. (Conway) |
| Leather, E. H. C. | Orr-Ewing, Sir Ian (Weston- super-Mare) | Thompson, Kenneth (Walton) |
| Legge-Bourke, Maj. E. A. H. | Osborne, C. | Thompson, Lt.-Cdr. R. (Croydon, W.) |
| Legh, Hon. Peter (Petersfield) | Page, R. G. | Thorneycroft, Rt. Hn. Peter (Monmouth) |
| Lennox-Boyd, Rt. Hon. A. T. | Peake, Rt. Hon. D. | Thornton-Kemsley, Col. C. N. |
| Lindsay, Martin | Perkins, W. R. D. | Tilney, John |
| Linstead, Sir H. N. | Peto, Brig. C. H. M. | Touche, Sir Gordon |
| Llewellyn, D. T. | Peyton, J. W. W. | Turner, H. F. L. |
| Lloyd, Rt. Hon. G. (King's Norton) | Pickthorn, K. W. M. | Turton, R. H. |
| Lloyd, Maj. Sir Guy (Renfrew, E.) | Pilkington, Capt. R. A. | Tweedsmuir, Lady |
| Lloyd, Rt. Hon. Selwyn (Wirral) | Pitman, I. J. | Vane, W. M. F. |
| Lockwood, Lt.-Col. J. C. | Pitt, Miss E. M. | Vaughan-Morgan, J. K. |
| Longden, Gilbert | Powell, J. Enoch | Vosper, D. F. |
| Low, A. R. W. | Price, Henry (Lewisham, W.) | Wakefield, Edward (Derbyshire, W.) |
| Lucas, Sir Jocelyn (Portsmouth, S.) | Prior-Palmer, Brig. O. L. | Wakefield, Sir Wavell (St. Marylebone) |
| Lucas, P. B. (Brentford) | Profumo, J. D. | Walker-Smith, D. C. |
| Lucas-Tooth, Sir Hugh | Raikes, Sir Victor | Ward, Hon. George (Worcester) |
| Lyttelton, Rt. Hon. O. | Rayner, Brig. R. | Ward, Miss I. (Tynemouth) |
| McAdden, S. J. | Redmayne, M. | Waterhouse, Capt. Rt. Hon. C. |
| McCallum, Major D. | Rees-Davies, W. R. | Watkinson, H. A. |
| McCorquodale, Rt. Hon. M. S. | Remnant, Hon. P. | Webbe, Sir H. (London & Westminster) |
| Macdonald, Sir Peter | Renton, D. L. M. | Wellwood, W. |
| Mackeson, Brig. H. R. | Roberts, Peter (Heeley) | Williams, Rt. Hon. Charles (Torquay) |
| McKibbin, A. J. | Robertson, Sir David | Williams, Gerald (Tonbridge) |
| Mackie, J. H. (Galloway) | Robinson, Roland (Blackpool, S.) | Williams, Sir Herbert (Croydon, E.) |
| Maclay, Rt. Hon. John | Robson-Brown, W. | Williams, Paul (Sunderland, S.) |
| Maclean, Fitzroy | Rodgers, John (Sevenoaks) | Williams, R. Dudley (Exeter) |

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|---|---------------------------|---|
| Macleod, Rt. Hon. Iain (Enfield, W.) | Roper, Sir Harold | Wills, G. |
| MacLeod, John (Ross and Cromarty) | Ropner, Col. Sir Leonard | Wilson, Geoffrey (Truro) |
| Macmillan, Rt. Hon. Harold (Bromley) | Russell, R. S. | Wood, Hon. R. |
| Macpherson, Niall (Dumfries) | Ryder, Capt. R. E. D. | York, C. |
| Maitland, Comdr. J. F. W. (Horncastle) | Sandys, Rt. Hon. D. | |
| Maitland, Patrick (Lanark) | Savory, Prof. Sir Douglas | TELLERS FOR THE NOES: |
| Manningham-Buller, Sir R. E. | Schofield, Lt.-Col. W | Mr. Buchan-Hepburn and Sir Cedric Drewe. |
| | Scott, R. Donald | |

Question put, and agreed to.