

# Independence Conference

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§ 16. [Mr. Peter Emery](#)

asked the Secretary of State for the Colonies if he will make a statement about the proposed constitutional conference for British Guiana.

§ [Mr. Maudling](#)

In January Her Majesty's Government agreed with the Government of British Guiana to hold an Independence Conference in May. Subsequent events have now made this impracticable. A Commission, under the chairmanship of Sir Henry Wynn Parry, will begin an inquiry into the February disturbances in Georgetown in the middle of this month. We are discussing with the British Guiana Government measures aimed at enabling the Conference to have before it a formulation of local ideas for an Independence Constitution, with initial areas of disagreement narrowed as far as possible. The two Governments are also undertaking a joint examination of financial matters. To enable these measures to be completed some deferment of the Conference is needed. I propose to hold it in July provided the necessary preparatory steps are completed in time. The Government of British Guiana has been so informed.

§ [Mr. Emery](#)

While all hon. Members must be disappointed about the delay in holding the Conference, does my right hon. Friend appreciate that when it does arise everybody would wish to show it encouragement? Will he say whether the political parties and political leaders have been fully consulted on this step and are in agreement over it?

§ [Mr. Maudling](#)

I have, of course, consulted the Government of British Guiana on this subject. I think it is apparent to everyone that it would be [200](#) quite impracticable to hold an Independence Conference at this moment.

§ [Mr. Brockway](#)

Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that his statement that the Conference is to be postponed will be received with very great disappointment in British Guiana? In view of the serious situation there, does he appreciate that the most effective way to obtain stable government there would be to allow the Government in British Guiana to announce an early date by which independence would be achieved?

§ [Mr. Maudling](#)

No, Sir I entirely disagree. It is precisely because of the serious situation to which the hon. Gentleman referred that I think it would be unwise to have a Conference at the moment.

§ *Mr. Gardner*

Will my right hon. Friend bear in mind the very real fears of many people in British Guiana that independence without proper and effective safeguards can lead only to the domination of that country by Communists and the establishment of a new Communist centre in South America?

§ *Mr. Maudling*

I am very anxious to get a Constitution for British Guiana on independence that will guarantee the rights of individuals. I think that the best way to do that is through the maximum possible agreement between the political parties. I also think that the atmosphere for such an agreement is not particularly favourable at the present moment

§ *Mr. G. M. Thomson*

Can the right hon. Gentleman say whether Dr. Jagan and the British Guiana Government have agreed to the date in July which he has suggested? Can he give an assurance that the report of the committee of inquiry will be published in this country as well as in British Guiana?

§ *Mr. Maudling*

On the first point, I think it would be unfair to Dr. Jagan to say that he has agreed but it would be right to say that he was fully consulted and has acquiesced in the postponement. I want the report of the committee of inquiry to be available as soon as possible. I will look into the question of publication.