

BRITISH GUIANA (SITUATION)

HC Deb 19 February 1962 vol 654 cc35-7 [35](#)

[§ Mr. Healey \(by Private Notice\)](#)

asked the Secretary of State for the Colonies whether he will make a statement on the situation in British Guiana.

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

Following a general strike and demonstrations against the Budget proposals of the elected Government of British Guiana, serious disorders began in the capital, Georgetown, on Friday afternoon, in the course of which the police were fired upon and two were wounded; Subsequently, the police were ordered to fire, resulting in the death of one rioter and the wounding of another. The available troops [36](#) and two frigates were called on. Fires were started and have caused great damage to property, especially in the commercial area.

At the request of the Council of Ministers, who are responsible for internal security, the Governor asked for reinforcements to aid the civil powers. One company of the Royal Hampshire Regiment is stationed in British Guiana; the first of the reinforcements, a sister company of the Royal Hampshires stationed in Jamaica, and two frigates of the Royal Navy arrived at Georgetown on Friday afternoon.

Two companies of the 1st East Anglia Regiment, and one of the 1st Duke of Edinburgh Royal Regiment from this country and four other naval vessels have since arrived.

On the advice of the Council of Ministers, the Governor, on Friday, made an Order under the Emergency Powers Order, 1939, proclaiming a State of Emergency.

I regret to say that civilian casualties are at present estimated at five killed and 127 injured. Great damage has been done to property. The military forces and the police have restored order in Georgetown, but the situation remains tense.

[§ Mr. Healey](#)

I am sure that everyone in the House deeply deplores the events which have led to the intervention of British troops and the loss of life and property involved. Would not the right hon. Gentleman agree that the fact that the Chief Minister of British Guiana called on British troops to intervene to restore order throws an odd light on his remarks to the Trusteeship Committee of the United Nations last December, when he said that there was a Colonial Office régime of terror and oppression in British Guiana and that ... only the armed might of Britain acts as a deterrent to my country proclaiming its freedom."? Nevertheless, would not the right hon. Gentleman agree that it would be a mistake, even in these circumstances, to delay the proposed talks on British Guiana's independence in May? Would not he also agree that the main lesson of these unhappy events is the need to include in the Constitution of independent British Guiana some

such provision as was agreed recently for [37](#) Jamaica, which would guarantee the constitutional position of the opposition party in British Guiana, whichever it may be?

[§ Mr. Maudling](#)

The immediate task is to restore law and order, which the forces and police are doing. Clearly, these events have considerable implications for the future of British Guiana. I would not like at this early stage to comment on what those may be.

[§ Mr. Fisher](#)

While endorsing the Government's decision to send troops in aid of the civil power, will my right hon. Friend bear in mind, when considering the question of independence for British Guiana, the unfortunate fact—and I think that I shall be acquitted of having any reactionary views on these issues—that whenever Dr. Jagan gets power in British Guiana it leads to trouble—now, as in 1953? Will my right hon. Friend weigh this when considering the danger, or possible danger, of giving independence to a Government which may become the first Communist Government in the British Commonwealth?

[§ Mr. Maudling](#)

I would not like to comment on these important and far-reaching issues at this stage. We are urgently examining the implications of recent developments. I do not think that this is the time for me to make a statement on them.

[§ Mr. F. M. Bennett](#)

Can my right hon. Friend confirm Press reports that the troops are there solely to restore law and order and not in any way to intervene for, or on behalf of, any particular political party or policy?

[§ Mr. Maudling](#)

Yes. I am glad to confirm that. It is quite true.