

## APPENDIX 'B'

### PRESS STATEMENT BY JANET JAGAN, EDITOR OF THE 'MIRROR' NEWSPAPER, August 31, 1979.

The 'MIRROR' newspaper, which was first published in December 1962, in the last few years has been going through a process of slow strangulation. The Government of Guyana has instituted a series of measures which have led to this process. Today, the 'MIRROR' is forced to shut down.

The printers of the 'MIRROR', the New Guyana Co., Ltd., had ordered in 1971 new printing machinery, to replace its antiquated press. A substantial deposit was placed on this, which is one of the requirements when ordering, but later that year and in 1972, two Orders were promulgated by the Government which placed severe limitations on the importation of printing machinery, supplies and newsprint. The first restriction on the 'MIRROR' came when the Government refused to allow the importation of this new press. This meant that not only did the Company lose its deposit, but it had to continue with outdated machinery, which severely hampered the production of an up-to-date newspaper.

Following this, the New Guyana Company experienced repeated difficulties in obtaining licences to import supplies and newsprint. As a result, it had to cease printing on a number of occasions and suffered limitations of various supplies needed on a day-to-day basis.

In 1973, the New Guyana Co., Ltd., instituted legal proceedings, challenging the constitutionality of the Orders, that these constituted restrictions on freedom of the press and freedom of expression. Judge Vieira, who heard the case, ruled in favour of the New Guyana Company, stating among other things "What it basically amounts to is this: no licence — no newsprint and/or printing press; no newsprint and/or printing press — no freedom of the press and, therefore, no freedom of expression. This clearly, to my mind amounts to newspaper control and not to newsprint and/or printing equipment control... I am satisfied that the authorities cited... clearly show that the 1971 and 1972 Orders directly infringe, prima facie, the applicants of their freedom of

expression expressly guaranteed under Article 12 (1) of the 1966 Constitution, and I so hold and rule".

The Government appealed the ruling of Judge Vieira and this year the Court of Appeal reversed the decision in favour of the New Guyana Co., Ltd. which was taxed costs to the tune of \$24,119. The Appeal Court declared that there was no interference or any hinderance to the New Guyana Company's enjoyment of freedom of expression either in law or in fact.

Since two years ago, the New Guyana Company, which was importing newsprint, frequently under difficult conditions of constant delay in granting licences (which we termed Maximum Administrative Delay (MAD), was told that it would no longer be granted licences. In future, the Company was informed, it would purchase its supplies from the 'CHRONICLE'. This was stated in a letter from the Minister dated December 8, 1977. From that time, all purchases had to be made from the 'CHRONICLE', and the 'MIRROR' had to suffer whatever shortages the 'CHRONICLE' met as a result of inefficient ordering and/or shipment delays. It also had to pay whatever price was set by the 'CHRONICLE'; in one instance, the price went up arbitrarily by 50 per cent.

It may be noted that during 1977, we immediately answered an appeal from the 'CHRONICLE' for newsprint, when their shipment was delayed. The 'MIRROR' loaned the 'CHRONICLE' 96 rolls on one occasion, in the spirit of friendship that generally exists among newspaper personnel.

During this month, the 'CHRONICLE' suddenly informed us that we could not uplift our normal weekly quota of newsprint. Further, the spokesman for the 'CHRONICLE' could give no estimation of when newsprint would be available. Daily calls to the 'CHRONICLE' have brought the same reply. We have evidence that there are ample supplies of newsprint available and one has only to see the 40 page edition of the 'NEW NATION' to know that the printers are not suffering any newsprint shortage. We also photographed and printed a picture of rolls of newsprint being shifted from the waterfront to the bonds last week.

The refusal to supply newsprint has caused the 'MIRROR' to close down, as it is impossible to print any more. For the past three weeks, we have drastically reduced circulation and the size of the daily and Sunday 'MIRROR', in order to stretch our supplies as far as possible.

Our editorial staff and printing technicians, numbering 40, will be without work from tomorrow. In fact, many have been without duties for the past few weeks, but the New Guyana Company, has manfully kept them on full pay so as not to create any economic hardships to its employees. With the complete shut-down now, we do not know what the future holds for our employees.

Clearly, the government is trying to muzzle the 'MIRROR', the only non-governmental daily newspaper in Guyana. The denial of newsprint is a deliberate act to silence all opposition. Weekly papers have already experienced the same methods of silencing the press. It seems evident that the government wants only the government-controlled media to exist.

We have called this press conference to put forward the facts and to call for the strongest protests to the suppression of freedom in Guyana. We also call on the government to lift its restrictions on all newspapers. As our National Poet Martin Carter wrote: "All are involved. All are consumed".

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