

Constitution

# TOWARD INDEPENDENCE



by

CHEDDI  
JAGAN

The speech by Dr. Cheddi Jagan, Leader of the People's Progressive Party and Minister of Trade and Industry, delivered in the Legislative Council on June 5, 1958, during debate on a self-government motion.

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This is an economic relationship. It is true that the connections are not as severe as they were a few years ago, but nevertheless they are there. I would like to say that as long as those connections continue and a country is not politically free this backwardness will continue. It is no argument to say that there are certain countries which are politically free but backward also. There are many reasons for backwardness; there may be political corruption and a whole host of other reasons. But political considerations certainly are among the most important considerations in determining the state of backwardness of a country.

Before I take my seat I would like to read one last quotation on this point from an author who has written a book entitled "Self-Government for the Colonies." It is written by Mr. W.R. Crocker who, incidentally, is not a Marxist or a radical. He has had a long history, I believe, in the Colonial Service, as he writes in his book of "when I first went to Africa nearly twenty years ago to join the Colonial Service in Nigeria." So he should know what he is talking about.

I quote:

"Too many of the men responsible for, or concerned with colonial policies, whether in the Colonies or in the Metropolitan State, whether French or English, Dutch or Belgian, still profess to believe that the real problem in the colonial areas is economic, not political. Give the colonial peoples more goods and services, they argue, so that their poverty, disease and ignorance can be eased; all will then be well."

"Let us not deceive ourselves: the essence of the colonial grievance is not economic. It is political." At the very end of his book he makes a very brilliant statement. He says:

"It was a great Englishman who hit the nail on the head. Good government is no substitute for self government." I hope that Hon. Members will support this Areadment unanimously.



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# FOREWORD

BY MILES FITZPATRICK

With the formation of a Committee comprising the members of the Legislative Council to consider yet again the constitutional future of British Guiana, the time is ripe to publish the outlook of the People's Progressive Party as expressed by its Leader, Dr. Cheddi Jagan, in a speech delivered to the Council on the 5th June 1958. The occasion was the consideration by the Chamber of the following resolution, moved by Mr. J. N. Singh and afterwards amended by PPP Leader, Cheddi Jagan:

"Be it resolved that this Honourable Council request Her Majesty's Secretary of State for the Colonies to receive a delegation to discuss constitutional reform for British Guiana."

The resolution as amended was unanimously adopted by the Council. The legislative unity thus displayed is yet another example of the overwhelming desire of all sections of the Guianese people for self-government. The few that seek covertly to hinder its realisation are forced by fear of public disdain to pay lip service to the conception however much they may try to qualify it.

Since 1953 British Guiana and the PPP have gone through a difficult period—a period of "marking time" which for the progressive movement in B.G. means restraint and restriction in the present and preparation for the next step forward. We are still a long way from the goal of Self Government. Between 1953 and 1958, Trinidad, Jamaica, and Barbados have all attained, to a lesser or greater degree, control over their internal affairs, with the key Ministry of Finance in locally elected hands. Singapore has taken considerable steps towards independence, the Colony of the Gold Coast has become the independent Dominion of Ghana, and Nigeria has extracted the promise of independence in 1960.

British Guiana still suffers from a constitution that would not be out of place in an 18th century Colony. The PPP has bent over backwards in co-operating with the powers that be in this transitional period and the time has arrived for all Guianese to once more agitate for a better constitution.

**The Minister of Trade and Industry (Dr. Jagan):**  
I would like to add my commendations to the Hon. Member for bringing this motion before the Council. There is no doubt that this is a very exciting period, not only in the history of British Guiana but indeed in the history of the whole world. We have read of the great upheavals which are taking place in different sectors of the world today, and it is well that the people of this country should follow the trend of events and should take note of what is happening in other countries, so that we can learn from their mistakes and their achievements. Our country has had a rather exciting political history. We were high up on the constitutional ladder up to 1928 when our Constitution was also taken away.

Since then we have had our ups and downs, and indeed some countries which were behind us have now gone forward; some countries which were behind us are now completely free, and we find ourselves today, as the Hon. Nominated Member who spoke last said, in the position where there is grave dissatisfaction in the country.

## THE DESIRE FOR FREEDOM

What do we want? What do the people of this country want at this phase of its history? I think that we as a people want no more and no less than the people in other countries. And if it is the birthright of peoples to be free then it seems to me it is also the right of this Colony's people to be entirely free. Freedom is not merely parochial, or a matter pertaining only to British Guiana. We have seen in the turbulent years of the war, when there were many subject peoples who were held under the dominance of the metropolitan countries, that in order to solicit their support for the war effort concessions had to be made. Proouncements were made that soon after the war recognition would be given to the inherent right of people to form Governments of their own choosing. We have all heard of the Atlantic Charter, when the late President Roosevelt and Mr. Churchill met and enunciated this principle.

In those very grave and serious days when the world

was faced with Fascist tyranny they got together in order to mobilize the support of people all over the world, people who were also suffering under the heels of tyranny of a different type, and said "The time will come when you shall also be free, but in the meantime let us sink our differences and fight to win the war."

### THE UNITED NATIONS

Soon after Fascism was defeated we had, as a result of the war-time co operation of all the major nations of the world, the United Nations which was created primarily with the view of preventing conflagrations like the First and Second World Wars. The United Nations accepted as a fact that political and economic subjection were sources of irritations which led to a breach of peace, and as a consequence they not only sought in their Declarations and in their Charter to preserve world peace but also to go into details in order that world peace would not be disturbed in the future. We are all aware of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights. We see there laid down the basic rights of peoples everywhere, not only in economic matters and in spheres such as liberties pertaining to religion, freedom to organize and the right to free speech, but also the fundamental right of peoples to have governments of their own choosing — political rights.

### REQUISITES FOR SELF GOVT.

Since then we have seen that as a result of the enunciation of those rights many countries have become free — India, Burma, Ceylon, Ghana, to name just a few. Others are on the threshold of freedom. Our position is somewhat different in that at one time we were more advanced than some of those territories but today we find ourselves in a more backward position. What are some of the arguments adduced for the granting of self government to a particular territory? Sometimes we hear talk of size, sometimes we hear talk of population. At other times we are told of financial resources and the ability to have a stable economy. Those are all yardsticks which are used to determine whether a country is ready or not to exercise its right to rule and govern itself. But those standards vary in different countries and from time to time even in the same country.

Let us take, for instance, the question of literacy. We are told that the people must be ready — they must have a certain degree of maturity, educational standards and so forth. What is the position with respect to certain countries which have recently become free, or which have been free for some years, as compared with British Guiana? The illiteracy rate in British Guiana is 21.36 per cent (the latest figures available when the last Census was taken in 1946-50), as compared with about 85 per cent in India, 42.2 per cent in Ceylon, 47 per cent in Indonesia, 25.6 per cent in Cuba, 45 per cent in Mexico, 28 per cent in Puerto Rico, 84 per cent in Turkey, and 57 per cent in Venezuela. Figures are not available for Ghana, Nigeria and some of the other territories which have become free recently, but when I was in Ghana I learnt that the illiteracy rate there was between 70 and 73 per cent. So that on that qualification British Guiana is certainly ready for the exercise of full self-government.

Let us take another point — the question of size. The Hon. Mover referred to Surinam next door. Surinam, and indeed the Netherlands Antilles, are relatively much smaller in size than British Guiana. Surinam has an area of 54,000 square miles with a population of 232,000.

The Netherlands Antilles comprise of six small islands with an area of 4,361 square miles and a population of 183,781, while British Guiana has a population of about half a million with an area of approximately 83,000 square miles.

Surinam has a status which to all intents and purposes is equivalent to dominion status under the British Constitutional setup. Surinam and the Netherlands Antilles are coequal partners with the Dutch Government. Each of these three territories is completely autonomous in internal affairs, and so far as external affairs are concerned they have a consultative assembly to deal with defence and other matters.

We see, therefore, that size is certainly no obstruction to the exercise of full sovereignty. There are other territories which I can cite. Iceland and Luxembourg are smaller than British Guiana. Iceland is 64,300 square miles and has a population of 159,480. That country practically decides all of its own affairs. Lux-

