

The Boycott of Dr. Jagan

LAST Friday, the National Executive of the Labour Party, after having interviewed Dr. Jagan and Mr. Burnham, published a statement condemning them in language even more stringent than Mr. Griffiths had used in the House of Commons, and virtually forbidding its members to organise or speak on Dr. Jagan's platform. Nothing illustrates better the change in the climate of Labour Party opinion towards Colonial nationalism.

The suspension of the Guianese Constitution is a *fait accompli*. Let us concede, for the sake of argument, to both Mr. Griffiths and Mr. Lyttelton, that Dr. Jagan's Government missed its opportunities and failed in its trust. Consider, nevertheless, what has happened since. Dr. Jagan, having proved to his own satisfaction that Mr. Lyttelton's brand of freedom was, as he had suspected, strictly limited in its application, paid British democracy a compliment—none the less marked for being perhaps involuntary. He took plane to England in order to lay his case before the people of Britain, confident that he would be able to find among ordinary citizens the sympathy he could not win from the Government. By the time he arrived, the Communist Party and its "front" organisations were in full cry to capture him for Communist platforms. For Communists hold that it helps their cause to appear as the champions of oppressed peoples. At the same time, a group of enterprising Socialists (prominent among them were Mr. Fenner Brockway and Miss Jennie Lee) organised a welcome for Dr. Jagan inside the Labour Party, and sought to offer him the freedom of Labour platforms.

Dr. Jagan and his fellow ex-Minister, Mr. Burnham, responded to this opportunity: they shrugged off the Communists and indicated that they preferred to work through the Labour Party. This decision, bitterly resented by the British Communist Party and its friends in the Caribbean Labour Congress, was equally bitterly resented, presumably for different reasons, in Transport House. Dr. Jagan had himself, naturally and properly, asked to have the opportunity of putting his case to the Commonwealth Sub-committee of Labour's National Executive. He was received last week at a specially convened meeting, at which representatives of the General Council of the T.U.C. were also present. Reports of this meeting suggest that it resembled the proceedings of a criminal court rather than a conversation between fellow Socialists. Sir Vincent Tewson and Sir Will Lawther, already constitutionally involved in the jurisdictional battle in Guiana between the Man-power Citizens' Association (which has long been affiliated to the T.U.C.) and the newer P.P.P.-backed Industrial Workers' Union, are said to have cross-examined the ex-Ministers from prepared briefs with a degree of *a priori* hostility which would not have been out of place in a trial for murder. Last Friday's statement came as a result of this meeting. In set terms, it accused the P.P.P. leaders of "pursuing a Communist policy" and advised local parties not to provide a platform for P.P.P. speakers.

Is Dr. Jagan, then, a Communist? Many

intelligent Socialists who have met him on this visit believe that he is a puzzled young man of deep Socialist and nationalist convictions, suspicious of both Britain and the British Labour Party, which has never extended to him the hand of comradeship, and desperately anxious for support and guidance in what must seem to him a lonely, as well as an uphill struggle. The Communists have offered that guidance, and Jagan has responded to their overtures. It seems to us improbable that he is a Communist in any more significant sense than that. But in any case, the question is irrelevant. It is not as a Communist but as a nationalist that Dr. Jagan is the freely elected champion of the people of Guiana. And if, when he seeks to put their case in Britain, he is insulted and rebuffed, the insult will be held to be directed, not against a small cell of Communists which may or may not exist inside the P.P.P., but against the people of Guiana and their struggle against exploitation.

Britain has already failed British Guiana in most of the ways that are possible. It is British capital which has grown rich on the miserable conditions of the Guianese workers; and this reproach is no less real to the Guianese because of the few belated reforms of recent years. It is successive British Governments which, by denying political progress for too long, have perpetuated this exploitation and aggravated bitterness; nor is this political responsibility lessened, as the Guianese see it, because an admittedly liberal

constitution was offered at the eleventh hour in response to pressure. It is British officialdom (and both British Parties) which have withheld both blessing and a helping hand from the ardent, awkward nationalists who inevitably inherited power; and this failure is underlined by a comparison with other parts of the world—Burma, for instance, or the Gold Coast—where we have done better. It is a British Government which, having offered a constitution to Guiana, has taken it away too early; and the Labour Party, by its pusillanimous attitude in Parliament, will not seem to the Guianese to have dissociated itself from Mr. Lyttelton's action.

It is against that background that, when the Guianese leaders appeal to British Socialists for a hearing, the British Labour Party turns them down. Was there ever an act of greater political folly? In one blind afternoon, the British Labour movement has insulted not so much Dr. Jagan, who, if he is indeed a Communist, will be well satisfied with what has happened, but the masses who, for better or worse, look upon him as their leader. The Communists are never tired of claiming that the Labour Party stands almost indistinguishably from the Tories, for imperialist exploitation. On Labour's post-war record that charge is false. All those who helped to impose last week's ban have done something to make it seem more true. It is they who have directed Guianese nationalists into the Communist camp, and they must not be surprised if their advice is taken to heart in other parts of the Colonial world.

LABOUR PARTY'S REPLY ON BRITISH GUIANA

DR. JAGAN "NOT PREVENTED FROM PUTTING CASE"

BY OUR LABOUR CORRESPONDENT

Both the Labour Party and the T.U.C. have found it necessary to explain to their supporters their attitudes to affairs in British Guiana, for which both have been much criticized by members of the Bevan group and others.

The Labour Party, while critical of the People's Progressive Party, have condemned the Government's decision to suspend the Constitution, but they caused controversy by advising local parties not to provide a platform for P.P.P. speakers. The December issue of *Fact*, the party monthly, explains that this advice "did not prevent, and was not intended to prevent, Dr. Jagan and his colleagues from putting their case before the British public. Nor did it prevent local parties from hearing their views. What it did was to dissociate the Labour Party from the P.P.P. and the Communist organizations which arranged many of Dr. Jagan's meetings."

The T.U.C. have also been critical of the P.P.P., but differed from the Labour Party in making no complaint about the Government's action in suspending the Constitution. They have now written to all affiliated organizations and trades councils explaining that they did not pass judgment on the action of the British Government because they felt that the whole situation needed examination by a body appointed for that purpose. After studying the report of the proposed commission of inquiry, they will issue a statement for the guidance of the movement.

MR. MIKARDO ON BRITISH GUIANA - "GOOSE-CLUB"

T.U.C. ATTITUDE TO UNION CRITICIZED

BY OUR LABOUR CORRESPONDENT

MR. IAN MIKARDO, M.P., whose criticism, three weeks ago, of the Trades Union Congress attitude to British Guiana was the subject of a protest from the T.U.C. general council to the Labour Party executive on Wednesday, returns to the subject in to-day's issue of *Tribune*.

He suggests that the T.U.C. attitude arises from their support of the Man-Power Citizens' Association, a British Guiana trade union which is opposed by the People's Progressive Party. Having considered whether the M.P.C.A. is an employers' "stooge" he concludes that it is an "obvious goose-club, which British trade unionists are being told by their leaders to support."

MR. J. TANNER, the T.U.C. chairman, referred to the T.U.C.'s complaint about the earlier article, at a luncheon in London yesterday. Of the dispute between the union leaders and the Bevanites generally, he said that the T.U.C. were more conservative in their outlook than certain sections of the Labour Party. They had, in some respects, a greater responsibility than politicians. They were responsible to their organizations.

"It seems to me that that old grey horse of Low's—though its head may be small and its hooves large—has got some horse sense," Mr. Tanner added. "It may not have been as progressive as I would have like it to have been, but results since the war have proved that it has been wise."

Mr. Tanner said he hoped that the troubles and disputation with certain sections of the Labour Party were now over.