

STATEMENT TO THE PRESS BY HON. DR. CHEDDI JAGAN  
& HON. L.F.S. BURNHAM ON OCTOBER 22nd, 1953.

The following is a reply to the White Paper "British Guiana Suspension of the Constitution" (Command 8980) :-

1. (Para 4.) The Ministers were in office for only four months and the Governor never suggested that the economic life of the country was being endangered, except that on two occasions he drew attention to the unusual number of withdrawals from the Post Office Savings Bank. These withdrawals were instigated by political opponents of the P.P.P.

2. (Para 7.) The P.P.P. did not refuse to move a loyal address to H.M. the Queen. The loyal address prepared by the majority party in the House of Assembly was not accepted by the Speaker in the form in which it was presented. He subsequently had his version of the Address moved by the Opposition, and this was passed without a division.

3. (Para 8.) The P.P.P. believes in the freedom of movement of all persons in British Guiana, especially West Indians. Dr. Jagan and Mrs. Jagan were deemed prohibited immigrants by the Governments of Trinidad and the Windward and Leeward Islands. The delegation comprising Dr. Jagan and Mr. Burnham was not permitted to pass in transit through Trinidad and Barbados on its way to London. The delegation had to charter a plane of the Royal Dutch Line. These bans are contrary to the principles laid down in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights regarding free movement of individuals.

We sought to repeal the Undesirable Publications Bill which we had opposed from its inception. This law, among other things, gives the Postal Authorities the power to open private mail and was contrary to Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which states:

"Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression: this includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers."

4. (Para 9.) The P.P.P. never intended to set up a separate Police Force but objected to the partiality of the police, who in the past always supported the employers against the workers - witness the strike on the Enmore Sugar Estate, 16th June 1948, during which five people were shot in the back by the police. We wanted the police to be, as in the U.K., impartial, and interested only in the preservation of law and order, and we actually agreed to an increased vote for additional men and equipment for the police, for the suppression of normal crime.

5. (Para 10) The P.P.P. argued for the police being the responsibility of an elected Minister, as in the U.K. We never encouraged dissatisfied policemen to make complaints to us, but always sought to have the general grievances of the force remedied.

6. (Para 11) In labour disputes it was customary for the police to intervene and intimidate the workers and the Minister of Labour brought this to the attention of the Chief Secretary who was in charge of the Police, and the Governor who accepted the criticism,

7. (Para 12) Many senior officials of the Government, who are mostly recruited from abroad, were closely associated with the big business class and had clearly indicated their hostility to the P.P.P. In some cases they actually obstructed the work of the Ministers.

8. (Para 13) In the past, Boards and Committees have been dominated by the ultra-conservative representatives of big business - sugar - and Government Officials. The Ministers did seek to have the governor transfer the power to appoint members to various Boards and Committees, as these Boards fell within their respective portfolios. It had been agreed between the Governor and the Ministers that a new Rice Marketing Board was to be appointed shortly.

9. (Para 14) The African and Colonial Affairs Committee, of which the Ministers of Education and Labour were members, did not support terrorists in Kenya or Malaya, but espoused the cause of the Kenyans and other colonials fighting for basic human rights.

10. (Para 15) It is not true that we undermined the influence of the Man Power Citizens Association. This Union, one of whose leaders had accepted a monthly salary from the Sugar Producers, had been for years losing its influence amongst the workers it purported to represent. The Guiana Industrial Workers Union gained the confidence of the sugar workers but its official membership was low because of many instances of victimisation. The membership claimed by the M.P.C.A. is not an indication of the Union's strength in the sugar industry, because the sugar estates run a Provident Fund and for workers to enjoy the benefits of this fund they have to be members of the M.P.C.A. Indeed Union dues are deducted by the employers.

11. (Para 16) The G.I.W.U. though supported by the majority of sugar workers and having called successful strikes between 1948-53, has never been recognised by the Sugar Producers Association.

12. (Para 17) The stoppages of work on the sugar estates during this year were due to worsening conditions and the increased hostility of the employers. The Ministers in several instances used their good offices to get a return to work. The workers on their own volition, through their executive, called a general strike on the 30th August.

13. (Para 18) There were sympathetic strikes in other industries called on the initiative of the workers in these industries.

14. (Para 19) It is not true to say that we attempted to oust established Trade Unions by legislative action. The Labour Relations Ordinance which we passed in the Assembly, was based on our election manifesto, and sought to give representation to Unions with majority support. In two cases this majority had to be 65 and 60 per cent, and in no case less than 52. The Commissioner of Labour and the previous administration refused to introduce this legislation which operates in various Canadian provinces and has been adopted and is in practice in Jamaica. While the Minister of Labour moved to repeal the Trades Disputes (Essential Services) Ordinance 1952, he had in draft comprehensive legislation for compulsory arbitration in all industries.

15. (Para 20) The Minister of Works did not on the 24th September exhort crowds to rush the House of Assembly. Since the elections it has been customary for large numbers of people to attend meetings of the House.

16. (Para 21) We are not surprised, knowing the composition of the State Council (Upper House) that they expressed alarm at the activities of certain Ministers of the Crown.

The Governor privately advised certain Ministers to relinquish their posts in trade unions, but we felt that in view of the development of trade unionism in British Guiana it was essential the Ministers should retain their trade union positions - for some time yet.

17. (Para 22) Ministers have been charged with negligence, but it is to be noted that they were in office for only four months, and much valuable time during this period had to be spent gathering and correlating information. In addition our staffs were smaller than those of our official colleagues who in some cases kept files over unduly long periods.

18. (Para 23) The Ministers were quite aware of the land hunger of the farmers and their serious difficulties with drainage and irrigation and they made frequent trips throughout the country to examine these problems. They also requested their heads of Departments to give fullest information about land availability and land utilisation. The Ministers took advantage of the blue print provided in the report of the International Bank Mission. Relevant parts of the report were sent to heads of Departments and Ministers were in consultation with them.

19. (Para 24) Big business was thoroughly hostile to the party long before, during and after the elections. Private firms did not lose confidence in the Government. Within the four month period large numbers of industrialists applied for exclusive permission to mine various minerals. While it is true that Kennametals International S.A. (Inc.) abandoned an exclusive permission to explore for columbite, other new companies had applied to take up these leases. The fact that the Gulf Oil Corp. withdrew and Panhandle abandoned further exploration, can be attributed to the expressed official view that there is no oil in Guiana.

20. (Para 26) The withdrawals from the Savings Bank have continued after the arrival of troops and the Governor in his broadcast speech on Friday the 15th October implored depositors to return their money to the bank. The small depositors who support the party are losing their confidence and withdrawing.

21. (Para 28) The statement attributed to Dr. Jagan in Para 28 (1) of the White Paper is taken out of its context and is inaccurate. The reference to "stooges of the Government" is in relation to the complete support by members of the Legislature of the Undesirable Publications Bill, referred to above.

The Minister of Education did say that "as much force as is necessary in the circumstances" would be used if the constitution were suspended. This was in reply to the Opposition suggestion that the constitution should be suspended, and the type of force we intended using was that of non violence, non co-operation - the course which we have now adopted. The second statement alleged to have been made by him was indeed made by the Minister of Labour at a public meeting attended by over 20,000 people and was only political rhetoric. This is admitted by the Editor of the Daily Argosy, who has been the severest opponent of the P.P.P.

22. (Para 30) It is absolutely untrue that Dr. Jagan, Mr. Burnham, Mr. King and Mrs. Jagan had planned to set fire to business property and residences of prominent persons and government officials. It is surprising that the Government, in possession of proof, has not taken legal action against these individuals.

23. (Para 31) The party has never advocated violence. The campaign which was run until recently after the suspension of the Constitution and the dismissal of the Ministers was one specifically of non-co-operation and non-violence.

24. (Para 34) The P.P.P. is not a Communist party. It is a democratic alliance of all progressive elements who are prepared to struggle for self government and for the well being of all Guianese. The party does not dictate to individuals their political ideology. It is significant that while the P.P.P. is accused of close ties with the W.F.T.U., the I.C.F.T.U. has done nothing to help the people struggling for self government in British Guiana, rather have they backed fully the company dominated union, the M.P.C.A.
25. (Para 35) The P.P.P.'s political organisation is no different from any political organisation in the U.K.
26. (Para 36 etc) It is considered normal activity in Great Britain to disseminate literature of all types, and the setting up of a book store which sought to sell all types of literature should not be regarded as a crime.

The White Paper on the suspension of the Constitution of British Guiana has built up a case based upon the familiar device - find something behind which to hide and which will arouse the emotionalism of people. Communism in this instance has been made the bogey and in order to fill in the familiar picture of Communist violence and terror and arson, the Government in the White Paper is attempting to fill in the details. Statements, many of them erroneous, have been lifted out of their context and without giving the background of the situation in which they were made. Statistics have been used to distort the truth. A plot has been invented where there is none. The issue of British Guiana today is not Communism. What is challenged is the very right to vote - the basis of democracy. All that has been presented in the White Paper about Communist activity has been pointed out in very glaring terms, before and during the elections. The people were quite conscious of the issues - in fact Communism was one of the issues. The people voted and now force and the threat of bullets have taken away their democratic rights. It has always been pointed out to us that Communism is sustained by force and violence - now we see that in the name of democracy democracy is being destroyed by force.