

Constitution

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§ 16. Mr. Brockway

asked the Secretary of State for the Colonies when the constitutional conference on the future of British Guiana will be held; and what will be its terms of reference.

§ Mr. Maudling

The conference will be held in May. It will discuss the date and the arrangements to be made for the achievement of independence by British Guiana.

§ Mr. Brockway

I welcome that announcement. Is it the Government's intention to respond to the demand of the British Guiana Government that independence should be granted by the end of this year? In view of the situation in Jamaica and Trinidad, is it not very desirable that these three territories should be advancing together towards independence?

§ Mr. Maudling

I do not think that I can make any comment on the date of independence of British Guiana because that is one of the things which we must discuss at the conference; and to suggest any date or point of view in advance of the discussions at the conference would be unwise and might prejudice the discussions.

§ Mr. Gardner

Is my right hon. Friend aware of the fears, both inside and outside British Guiana, that unless there are proper constitutional safeguards built into the new constitution that country might well become a base in South America for the propagation of Communism? Will he pay strict regard to those fears when the question of a new constitution for British Guiana comes up for discussion?

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§ Mr. Maudling

I think that there will be varying views in British Guiana itself about the nature of the independence constitution, and possibly even about the date for independence. Once again, as in answer to the previous supplementary question, while taking the point. I will ask my hon. and learned Friend not to expect me to anticipate the conference.

§ Mr. G. M. Thomson

Will the right hon. Gentleman take a better view of the prospect for British Guiana than that taken by the hon. and learned Member for Billericay (Mr. Gardner)? Now that the West Indian Federation has unfortunately come to an end, will the Colonial Secretary at least attempt to rescue out of that the benefit that more flexible arrangements are possible over a wider Caribbean area, and will he encourage the Government of British Guiana to associate itself with the common services arrangements which he is planning for the Caribbean area?

§ Mr. Maudling

I should be glad to see participation by British Guiana in economic and other arrangements in the Caribbean, but I doubt whether that could be put on the agenda for a constitutional conference.