

SECOND LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

(Constituted under the British Guiana (Constitution) (Temporary Provisions) Orders in Council, 1953 and 1956)

Tuesday, 22nd December, 1959

Special meeting, held at 9.30 a.m. with ceremonial proceedings, broadcast over Radio Demerara and the British Guiana Broadcasting Service (BGBS) and witnessed also by invitees.

PRESENT:

Speaker, His Honour Sir Donald Jackson

Chief Secretary, Hon. D. M. Hedges

Attorney-General, Hon. A. M. I. Austin, Q.C. *ex officio*

Financial Secretary, Hon. F. W. Essex, C.M.G.

- The Honourable Dr. C. B. Jagan** —Member for *Eastern Berbice*
(Minister of Trade and Industry)
- B. H. Benn** —Member for *Essequibo River*
(Minister of Natural Resources)
- Janet Jagan** —Member for *Western Essequibo*
(Minister of Labour, Health and Housing)
- Ram Karran** —Member for *Demerara-Essequibo*
(Minister of Communications and Works)
- B. S. Rai** —Member for *Central Demerara*
(Minister of Community Development and Education).
- Mr. R. B. Gajraj** —Nominated Member
- W. O. R. Kendall** —Member for *New Amsterdam*
- F. Bowman** —Member for *Demerara River*
- L. F. S. Burnham** —Member for *Georgetown Central*
- S. Campbell** —Member for *North Western District*
- A. L. Jackson** —Member for *Georgetown North*
- S. M. Saffee** —Member for *Western Berbice*
- J. N. Singh** —Member for *Georgetown South*
- R. E. Davis** —Nominated Member
- A. M. Fredericks** —Nominated Member
- H. J. M. Hubbard** —Nominated Member
- A. G. Tasker, O.B.E.** —Nominated Member.
- Mr. I. Crum Ewing** — Clerk of the Legislature.
- Mr. E. V. Viapree** — Assistant Clerk of the Legislature.

ABSENT:

- Mr. R. C. Tello**—Nominated Member.
- Mr. E. B. Beharry**—Member for *Eastern Demerara*.
- Mr. Ajodha Singh**—Member for *Berbice River*.

PRAYERS

After the Council was constituted, His Grace the Archbishop of the West Indies (the Most Reverend Dr. A. J. Knight, C.M.G.) read Prayers.

SEASON'S GREETINGS

Mr. Speaker : Before I suspend the sitting of the Legislative Council, may I take this opportunity of extending to the Members of the Council and to others present wishes for a very happy Christmas and a still brighter New Year.

SITTING SUSPENDED

This sitting is now suspended in order that we may await His Excellency the Governor and receive him on his arrival.

On arrival at the Public Buildings His Excellency the Governor, Sir Ralph Francis Alnwick Grey, K.C.M.G., K.C.V.O., O.B.E., was accorded a Royal Salute. He inspected a Guard of Honour drawn from the British Guiana Volunteer Force, proceeded to the Committee Room of the Council and entered the Council Chamber at ten o'clock, preceded by His Honour the Speaker.

SITTING RESUMED

The sitting was then resumed.

The Clerk read the Commission, dated 7th December, 1959, and passed under the Royal Sign Manual and Signet appointing Sir Ralph Grey to be Governor and Commander-in-Chief of the Colony of British Guiana.

OATHS TAKEN

His Excellency took the Oath of Allegiance and the Oath of Office, which were administered by the Hon. the Chief Justice

SPEAKER'S ADDRESS OF WELCOME

Mr. Speaker : Your Excellency, I am glad you have honoured tradition by coming first to the Legislature. The enthusiasm which has gathered us here this morning ends anxious expectancy and is evidence of our sincere desire to bid you welcome to this Legislative Council and to offer you the hospitality of the people of British Guiana, an hospitality which in whatever circumstances will remain undiminished in quality and content.

The news that your predecessor in office had accepted preferment in a similar capacity elsewhere in the Commonwealth prompted a great deal of speculation as to who his successor would be. No one who found pleasure in this pastime was successful in his guess. But I assure you, Sir, that soon after your appointment was announced, if my assessment is correct and I have no reason to doubt its accuracy, public opinion was satisfied that the choice fell on one who by report was widely experienced, possessed sturdy and fearless commonsense, and was not unaccustomed to problems of modern colonial Government; one who had rendered himself familiar with the ways of men and kept company with the vagaries of human beings. It is with this access of confidence Your Excellency's arrival has been awaited.

I have oft-times heard it said that for Governors, British Guiana is a very difficult assignment. I do not pronounce for I am inexperienced on that question, but I do say there are here problems crying aloud for solution, unemployment figures mounting, large areas of the country waiting for development, and industrial expansion seeking even more encouragement.

Your Excellency will, I am sure, take some time to understand our ways and our approaches for we are six peoples with differing origins living together; if therefore as a whole we appear impatient or too precipitate in our aspirations, I trust you will on the one hand find it

intelligible impatience or on the other understandable, if not prudent, haste; nevertheless, you will find all inflexible in the pursuit of the main objective—a better British Guiana for all its inhabitants, a worthwhile independent part of the British Commonwealth. On this objective and its timing Your Excellency will find the people of this country exceedingly interrogatory; it is just here the resources of your indulgence will be severely taxed, and if I am right, I say with respect Your Excellency's tact, courtesy and firmness will in combination be warmly appreciated and applauded.

The listeners of this assembly are waiting to hear your address to them and to the country. Every word will be patiently received and the leisure thoughts of both men and women will carefully weigh them.

I am sorry it has not been practicable for Lady Grey to accompany Your Excellency and be present today at this ceremony to receive her share of this public demonstration of welcome. Please permit me, Sir, to observe that mere men, yea, even Governors serving away from their native country do often stand in need of feminine comfort, assistance and sometimes even consolation; all the more are we gladdened that Lady Grey will come soon. I anticipate Honourable Members of this Council and the inhabitants of this country when I say we shall be ever so grateful if Your Excellency will let her know we offer no less than we offer you — a hearty welcome, our hospitality, our co-operation, our friendship. We wish for you both a happy sojourn and for you Sir, a fruitful term of office. [*Applause.*]

HIS EXCELLENCY'S ADDRESS

His Excellency: Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members of the Legislative Council: Thank you for the kindly welcome which you, Sir, in the name of this Council have given to me. It echoes and renews the kindness already shown to me by those of your sons and daugh-

ters whom I have been privileged to meet overseas; and it is proof of the assurance given me by all who know British Guiana that here are courtesy, warm friendliness and bountiful hospitality to the stranger.

It is true that it is as a stranger that I come among you. It has not been my good fortune to serve in the Caribbean, or even to visit these historic and romantic lands that lie at the edge of what used to be called "the New World" and that now are moving forward into what can be, in the best sense of the words, a new world of peace, progress and prosperity if all of us will work together manfully to that end.

You will not expect the stranger to speak at length to you today about matters not yet within his knowledge. Until he knows at least the questions, you will expect him to refrain from giving you the answers. But you are entitled to have him say sufficient to show what sort of man he claims to be and what claim he makes upon your allegiance and support. And you are entitled to certain assurances from him.

The first assurance you are entitled to seek from him is that he will not long remain a stranger. That I gladly give. If, despite such reading as I have done and such conversations as I have had with those who know and love this country and who wish it well, I have as yet little knowledge of it, I have a great desire and willingness to listen, to see and to learn. I hope to travel widely (if only to learn for myself how great and yet how necessary is the task of bringing all parts of this land into closer and more useful contact one with another) and I hope to meet many people in all their diversity and to get to share with them that unity, despite diversity, which we must attain if British Guiana is really to achieve its destiny. The second assurance is that in my work and in my travels I shall at all times try to be worthy of the welcome you have already shown me.

[THE GOVERNOR]

With the Oath of Allegiance that I have sworn in your presence I have renewed my obligation of loyalty to the Sovereign and in that lies my first and principal claim upon your own allegiance and support. It is as the Queen's representative that you welcome me today. The Governor is sent here to serve the people of British Guiana as the Queen Herself serves all her peoples, to remind them of their common heritage of so many of the good things of life, none the less good and valuable because they are not to be seen or touched, liberty and the rule of law, a system of government and of justice that ensures for each man or woman, no matter how humble, the dignity of his own separate, individual claim upon the State for the basic rights that each human being should have an opportunity to draw upon, as well as to contribute to, the joint strength of the Commonwealth.

Her Majesty has graciously left me in no doubt of Her deep and lively personal interest in British Guiana, its people and their problems. We are very soon to be honoured with a Visit by Her Royal Highness The Princess Royal and shall then be vividly reminded by the presence of this Royal emissary among us of the reality and sincerity of the affectionate concern of the Head of the Commonwealth for all its varied peoples.

With my Oath for the due execution of the Office of Governor, I have bound myself to heavy tasks in your service. I hope that that too will give me a claim on your friendly support. Although, admitting that I have everything yet to learn about British Guiana and I come among you without previous experience of this part of the world, I come also without preconceived ideas. There may be advantage in that. Obviously my task is to help to carry forward work already done by those who have laboured in the past and are labouring now for the public good in British Guiana. In particular I must try to take the place vacated by so distin-

guished an immediate predecessor (who worked so well, and happily accomplished so much for this country, for which he had a deep affection) and must seek to carry on the work to which he set his hand. But, if it takes one who must learn both questions and answers longer over his task than one to whom the questions had long been painfully clear, there may yet be benefit in a mind fresh to the problems and not yet worn with their difficulty. If you will give me your patient encouragement and support, we may come together to an understanding of some at least among the pressing problems of this land and of the solutions to them.

For, if I come without preconceived ideas, I must confess to coming with the recognition already formed that here are problems indeed. Divine Providence has blessed this country with some rich gifts. By the courage, persistence and ingenuity of those who have gone before us, many of those gifts have been pressed into the service of mankind, to the general good and to the particular benefit of British Guiana and its people. The land has been made to grow sugar and rice (though often it has first had to be painfully won from the waters and then the waters have had to be harnessed to its service), it has yielded timber and minerals and man's skill of hand and brain and his courage of body and of purse have made these products of the soil give profit not only to those who worked on them but to the country as a whole.

But one who comes newly to these matters must inevitably be struck with the fact that here there has been no easy wealth. All has depended on skill and hard work. It has always been man's way to seek and hope for easy gain. The philosopher's stone that would turn all to gold; and the land of El Dorado where, if one could but attain to it, uncountable wealth would be had for the taking, the buried treasure to be had for no more than a little digging if only one had the right map; these have been man's will-o-the-wisps beckoning on to fortune in the past; and now I suppose it is the weekly

venture in the football pools. But the Divine Scheme of things is and always has been in general such that true and lasting prosperity is won only by hard work. And so, I am sure, it must be here.

One need not despair although there are problems aplenty; even if all of them are not mastered, this country can and will progress — but there is no easy road. Hard work, patience, determination in spite of disappointment, deeds and not words, efforts of mind and muscle; these are the ingredients of success.

All who wish British Guiana well must therefore work for her welfare. If the Governor is to accomplish anything himself or be a means to accomplishment by others, he must have the aid of all who work for the public good. You have assured me of the advice and guidance of this Honourable House. I look with confidence to the co-operation of my Ministers. We shall hope to legislate wisely and well, promoting at all times that which can best assure for the Guianese people their progress to the goal of a happy and prosperous nationhood. But the wisest plans of Ministers and the best of legislation can of themselves achieve nothing. They must be given practical effect.

Here is the work of the Public Service. Man being so much less perfect than the angels, has always had a naughty habit of affecting to regard but lightly things that in truth he values highly. Through all history public servants have suffered from this cause. The system of government that developed in Britain and that is now followed, in whole or in part, in so much of the modern world depends on a loyal, trustworthy, hard-working public service; and yet it is our frivolous habit to mock at the civil servant and to use him as material for easy jests. That may be harmless enough, provided we do not thereby impair the efficiency of the Service or destroy its will and capacity to serve.

If the collective wisdom of Ministers, embodied in the best of legislation, is to do any good at all, the public servants who give effect to the decisions of the Government, and who are the means by which the facts that should influence policy are collected for the Government, must be efficient. And, in general, for all our easy jibes, it is the good fortune of the British Commonwealth to have efficient public servants. In any Commonwealth country and at any level of its service, there are to be found, I am sure, men who can match quality for quality with any comparable group in other walks of life. But this will not always be so if we allow easy criticism to develop into baseless scorn. For any people to be well served, its public servants should be reasonably contented. The public servant, like any other labourer, is worthy of his hire. And if his service to the state warrants it, he should be given respect for his attainments and encouragement to do better.

Too often nowadays in the less developed countries, the cry is for money when it ought to be for men to spend wisely such money as is there. Good men, men of skill — and particularly in this technological age men of technical skill — are hard to get and hard to keep. I trust that we in British Guiana will not be seen to fail in our endeavours through any lack of wisdom in man management. I shall look to all in the Public Service for their devoted and unsparing effort in the common cause of British Guiana's progress; I shall try always to offer in return my support and encouragement in that effort, and my concern for their welfare.

On my way here I heard with distress of a strike that temporarily deprived the country of the services of some of its workers, and diverted the energies of others from their own pressing duties. I rejoice to know that normal work has been resumed, and to be told that reasonableness and restraint on the part of both the workers and the elected members of the Government helped to this end. But whatever the issues involved (and I shall

[THE GOVERNOR]

seek to inform myself of them), a strike by public servants is a melancholy business when the welfare of the country so obviously demands the greatest sustained mental and physical efforts of all. It may well show that our task of management is no easy one; but equally it emphasises the obligation of the public servants to serve the public welfare, and the obligation of the Government to give fair conditions for that service.

I may have left too long unstated my claim to be here at all. Perhaps my best claim is that I have worked for more than twenty years and worked hard, I believe—in a country of very diverse peoples who have seen in increasing measure as the years have gone by the need to sink differences and to work together for the common good of all, and who are now within one last short step of the goal of independence and an honoured place among the nations.

I hope in future not to talk too much about the place whence I came—nothing is more annoying to those to whom one has come—but here on this first occasion it is perhaps appropriate. It is easy to suppose that everyone in Africa is like unto his neighbour; nothing is farther from the truth. There are as great differences in race and creed, in language and custom, in dress and habit of thought among the thirty-five million people in Nigeria as there are among the varied peoples of Europe. And yet Nigerians are succeeding in an attempt to become one people. Because of their differences of origin and of environment they have felt obliged to adopt an admittedly complex and difficult political system, but they are making a success of it. Perhaps my experience there may be of help here, where the clamant need is for every Guianese to look on himself as a Guianese no matter what his past or the origins from which he has sprung.

I have also had some hand in the drafting and amending of Constitutions. That is a much less compelling claim on your regard. It is not the written word

of any Constitution that matters; it is the spirit and manner of its working.

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members: my first arrival in British Guiana is at a time when a great part of mankind, all Christendom, is preparing to celebrate a festival the keynote of which is "Peace on earth; goodwill to men". This troubled earth is seemingly nearer peace than for many a year. Let us pray that God's will be that there shall be peace. I venture to look on it as a happy augury that your new Governor comes to you at the season of goodwill.

It is also a season that much of the world looks on as being pre-eminently the festival of the family. It is a sorrow to me that my family cannot be with me as we start this new life with its new responsibilities. My children are young and are busily occupied with the affairs of youth, schooling and growing up, but I have no doubt that they, like their parents, will fall under the spell that I am told affects all who sojourn here and will come to love British Guiana. For my wife I can promise that she will do all she can to help in the task of ensuring British Guiana's progress that now we share with you.

May the blessing of God be upon all we seek to do together. [*Applause.*]

DR. JAGAN'S REPLY

The Minister of Trade and Industry (Dr. Jagan): Your Excellency, I wish to express on behalf of my colleagues in this Council, the peoples of British Guiana and on my own behalf our appreciation and thanks for your most impressive and inspiring address.

You have come to our country at a critical period of its colourful history—a time when forces hitherto latent, but nevertheless developing, have emerged to play their part in the task of gaining for our people the fulfilment of its national aspirations.

British Guiana, in common with all under-developed territories, faces many

problems on all fronts. It has fallen on your lot to be placed among us at this most challenging time to share our cares and burdens, and also such good fortune as may come to us. We sincerely hope that during your term of office we shall, with your co-operation, support and encouragement, overcome these many obstacles and solve those problems which confront us in our march on the road to social advancement, economic development and political independence.

Sir, we are pleased to hear that you intend to take time out of your normal duties to make extensive tours of the country. I feel sure you will enjoy our contrasting life and scenery wherever you go, and you will also enjoy the hospitality and warm friendship of our people.

I again thank you and request permission that your address to this Council be printed and circulated. [*Applause.*]

His Excellency : Thank you, Mr. Minister; let it be so if the Council so desire.

His Excellency, accompanied by the Speaker, withdrew from the Chamber while the sitting was suspended.

Shortly after the Speaker returned to the Chamber, the sitting was resumed.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Speaker : This Council is now adjourned to a date to be fixed.