

OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE LEGISLATURE

MARCH 1965

Mr. Speaker, Members of the House of Assembly:

The official opening of a new Legislature is always an event of great importance. On this occasion it is not only important, but also a most significant landmark on the road of our country's march to stability, progress and independence.

This House is the first returned under the eminently fair and democratic electoral system of Proportional Representation where every vote has exactly the same value wherever cast. This has come about as a result of the request of the leaders of the three main political parties to the Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations and for the Colonies to settle outstanding constitutional issues in October 1963, and there will be no turning back of the clock. Proportional Representation has come to stay.

Many things have happened and events transpired since that historic Conference - things and events which many a Guyanese would rather forget. This is a critical and challenging period of our history, but my Government is stimulated by the challenge and accepts it with spirit and confidence.

Towards the end of 1964 our society was threatened by a deep cleavage; our nation's treasury was virtually empty; unemployment was spiralling to unprecedented heights; our country stood discredited abroad, and at home there was little or no confidence in, or hope for, the future.

Immediately on its assumption of office, my new Government embarked upon the engaging tasks of restoring confidence, re-establishing harmonious relations and achieving social and economic reconstruction. But the rate at which Guyana moves forward from stagnation to progress, from uncertainty to confidence will depend no less on the active and patriotic support of the people of the land than on the impartial approach and statesmanship of the Government.

The majority of the electorate has declared in favour of the Government in office. It is therefore my sincere desire and confident hope that Guyanese in and out of the Legislature will settle down to the patriotic

duty of assisting in charting a course of peace, prosperity and national unity.

Rehabilitation will not be easy. Government institutions and corporations will have to be re-organised and active steps taken to restore the community's confidence in its own ability, to prepare our country for the great leap forward and for independence.

CONSULTATION

It is my Government's firm and irrevocable intention to establish a free and open society in Guyana and to banish all reasonable suspicions and tensions. The maximum consultation with, and involvement of, all sections of the community will be instruments of national policy. At one level or another, leaders of religion, trade unions, industry and voluntary social and cultural organisations will be called upon to play their part from time to time.

RACE RELATIONS

The past three years of crisis and turmoil have imposed severe stresses and strains upon all our peoples. There has been suspicion, hatred, and an atmosphere of intransigence. All this must and will be eliminated as real nationhood is achieved.

Legislation in this context and field may be useful but that alone will not solve the problem. There must be constructive and continuous work and example to convince every citizen regardless of race that he is needed, that he is important and that his sufferings, hopes and aspirations are the concern of all.

This will be the principal function of the new Department of Race Relations which has been included in the Ministry of Education and Community Development.

YOUTH

The claims of the Youth of Guyana have been ignored for many years. A potential for good and the energies of an important section of the community have thus been allowed to go waste.

My Government will correct this. It recognises the major contribution that youth can make to present and future development. A specific Department for youth has been created in the Ministry of Education and

Community Development and a youth leader has been appointed a Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry. This Department will shortly introduce a workable youth programme and an efficient youth counselling service devoted to dealing with the problems of young people in all fields, promoting opportunities of employment for them and providing such activities as will make the best use of their time while emphasising the benefits of co-operative and group activities.

LABOUR

The workers of every class and group form the basis of our society and are the special friends of my Government.

The Ministry of Labour, Health and Housing has already been split and the subject of Labour assigned to one Minister. This is too important a subject to be pushed aside as it has been in the past, as a mere section of a larger Ministry.

The whole question of unemployment will be tackled from a new basis and the Labour Exchanges revitalised and made more meaningful. In this operation there will be the closest co-operation between all the Ministries, more particularly those of Labour, Agriculture, Works and Hydraulics and Economic Affairs.

It is further proposed to establish a civilian employment service for the prime purpose of pursuing all avenues and opportunities of employment in Government, Public Corporations, Public Works programmes and private industry. In the meantime the Emergency Development Programme for this year is intended to relieve unemployment. This explains the emphasis on road building and resurfacing, construction and proper maintenance of public buildings, including schools and agricultural expansion. Special interest will be taken in arrangements for youth employment and training and the channelling of young persons into remunerative and economic apprenticeship programmes and community activities.

The mediation service offered by the Ministry of Labour will be re-organised and widened for the purpose of amicable settlement of industrial disputes. At the same time every encouragement and assistance will be lent to the Trade Union movement to ensure its continued and increased strength, responsibility and independence.

Workmen's Compensation Legislation will be completely overhauled with a view to bringing it up to date to accord with our present circumstances and the proposed new undertakings which will form an integral part of our Development Programme, Emergency and Five Year.

The Ministry of Labour will have the task of ensuring fair and impartial employment practices in both the public and private sectors. Persuasion, administrative action, precept and example will be the chief instruments but if the necessity arises my Government will not hesitate to use legislation for the achievement of this ideal.

My Government recognises, and will fulfil, its responsibilities to the workers - responsibilities which have in the past been honoured in the breach - and is confident that the workers will recognise and honour their responsibilities and obligations to the community and nation.

ECONOMIC RECONSTRUCTION

Much harm has been done to our economy as a result of the wanton destruction of life and property which has been the nation's lot in recent years. The experience gained over the last three months has however convinced my Government that our economy is resilient and that the potential for expansion and our people's dedication are unlimited.

To bring about the necessary economic re-construction and rapid and orderly development, there has to be proper and expert planning. As a first step, there has been created a separate Ministry of Economic Affairs responsible for planning and development and the co-ordination of all plans and proposals which are part of our Development Programme. In addition, the Planning Unit is to be re-organised, strengthened and re-named the Economic Planning and Development Secretariat within the new Ministry.

As you are no doubt aware, the preliminary work on a five year Development Plan - 1st January, 1966 to 31st December, 1970 - has already started. All the Ministries have been involved as well as various sections of the community including Local Government Councils and Agencies who have been asked to submit proposals. The proposals will be collated and processed by the Ministry of Economic Affairs.

A working party headed by the world famous West Indian Economist, Sir Arthur Lewis, and consisting of Guyanese and international experts will then more closely examine these proposals and make recommendations to the Council of Ministers through a sub-committee of the Council. This whole exercise will, it is hoped, be completed by July 31st. Thereafter, a number of international experts will be invited to hold a consultation and make further recommendations before the Plan is finally adopted.

Thus for the first time in Guyana's history there will be a real and serious attempt to draft, publish and implement a practical and scientifically prepared Development Plan.

It has become painfully clear in the preparation of a development budget and plan that even though the unemployment figures are high, there is a paucity of skills in many fields. This naturally affects our country's ability and capacity to engage on large scale development projects. In addition, there is no proper inventory or catalogue of such skills as are available to Government and private industry. My Government has taken three steps: First, it has undertaken a Man-power Survey with the object of ascertaining not only the quantum but also the location of the unemployed and at the same time of the skills which are present, what potential there is for the early development of skills and in what fields specific skills are necessary and what are the means for producing them.

Secondly, the Ministry of Education, which is normally responsible for training is being geared to undertake in collaboration and co-operation with other Ministries an extensive training programme so as to produce in the shortest possible time the skills upon which our economic advance is largely dependant.

Thirdly, my Government has undertaken a scheme for the registration and re-migration to Guyana of all Guyanese in the United Kingdom who are willing to return, priority being given to those who possess skills that are necessary for the implementation of our development programme.

Though very recent events have shown that we can look forward to substantial capital and technical assistance from friendly nations, notably Britain and the United States of America and international agencies, my

Government's emphasis will be at all times on national self-help, the maximum possible exploitation of our agricultural and other resources by ourselves, and the making of a substantial contribution by Guyanese to the capital necessary for development. In this context, my Government notes with satisfaction and pride the fine response to the Voluntary Savings Certificates Scheme.

The ultimate object of the Development Programme is to exploit to the fullest on behalf of the people of Guyana all the resources of the country and to ensure that the products, direct and indirect, are equitably distributed. Ours must not be a society where the rich get richer and the poor poorer. It must be a society where there is not only political but also social democracy.

CO-OPERATIVES

The Co-operative is regarded by my Government as most vital in the nation's economic reconstruction. It gives the common man an opportunity not only to be involved in major projects in agriculture, commerce and industry, but also to practise group effort and self-reliance.

Undoubtedly in the early stages there will have to be a great deal of training, assistance and guidance all of which my Government is prepared to provide on its own and with the help of international agencies.

The Co-operative Department has been shifted from the Ministry of Education and Community Development to that of Economic Affairs to emphasise its new importance and to ensure its playing its proper role in our new plans for development. It is to be re-organised shortly to meet the new demands, and orientation and training in this field will be one of the top priorities.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

It is my Government's conviction that increased trade with external countries can make a significant contribution to our economy and development. Every effort is therefore being made to encourage foreign trade and to improve the quality and competitiveness of the goods upon which such trade depends.

Though Guyana largely relies and will for some time continue to rely on agriculture, there is a programme for the rapid development of industry. The possibility of developing secondary industries based on agricultural by-products is being actively investigated and there is reason to believe

that some of these industries will be in evidence before the end of 1965.

This Government is prepared to welcome and encourage the setting up of all industries which will be beneficial to our economy and is heartened by the number of proposals so far received. These are being carefully studied and discussed. My Government/^{is}not, however, satisfied that Guyana's industries should always be relatively small, secondary and assembling ones. Our country can sustain heavy industry but motive power is an important consideration.

Arrangements will shortly be made for the completion of hydro-electric surveys and, since the financing arrangements can be made, it will be possible to embark soon thereafter on the construction of an hydro-electric station.

AGRICULTURE

This is a vitally important sector of our economy. On it we shall have to depend for feeding our population, providing employment, saving and increasing foreign credits and making a significant contribution to the formation of capital so necessary for the economic take-off.

Steps are being taken to secure diversification from sugar cane, rice and subsistence provision farming, and the introduction and economic production of new crops on old and new lands are being carefully planned by the Ministry of Agriculture and its advisers.

In so far as sugar is concerned, my Government has been able to obtain the agreement in principle of the sugar companies to the Government's active participation in the ownership in the industry's undertakings. The details of a scheme for increasing the production of sugar by Guyanese peasant farmers have been settled and the feasibility of re-establishing Essequibo as a sugar producing county - not on the plantation system - is being carefully studied.

The rice industry will be overhauled with a view to making it more efficient and thus more remunerative and competitive on the world market.

Greater emphasis will be placed, than in the past, on developing new economic crops and on expanding the livestock industries, not only to provide employment for some of the unemployed, but also to produce alternatives to the millions of dollars worth of agricultural and dairy products we import and to increase our country's earning capacity on foreign markets.

My Government will shortly embark on a campaign aimed at giving our farmers and would-be farmers the necessary mental and technical equipment for improving the productivity of their holdings and therefore their own standards and the economic conditions of the country.

The Board of the Guyana School of Agriculture has been re-organised and the staff of that Institution will be strengthened so that it can play a vital role in the revitalising and expansion of agriculture.

FORESTS

My Government has undertaken the collation of surveys and reports on our forest resources and will itself initiate further surveys where necessary. It looks forward during the course of this year to the beginnings of a more extensive and intensive use of our woods for buildings, furniture, veneers and other new purposes. At the moment, the possibility of setting up a wood pulp industry is being investigated in pursuance of serious and earnest enquiries which have been received.

In addition, reforestation is to be more actively undertaken and plans worked out to ensure that our forest industry moves from the crude stage of log extraction and primitive saw-milling to a fully integrated economic industry.

LAND SETTLEMENT AND UTILISATION

As a result of land reclamation planned and carried out over the past two decades, there are vast acreages that can be cultivated at present. Every effort must be directed towards consolidation and ensuring that maximum beneficial use is made of every square inch of land that has been made available in such schemes. To this end, my Government will order the necessary surveys to be carried out at all the present land settlement schemes.

However, my Government feels that more facilities and encouragement should now be directed towards further land utilisation; thus the opening up and occupation of new farm lands in the North West and in the Interior is proposed - lands which will require less capital expenditure for their conversion into an arable condition and will certainly be less hazardous to bring into use and productivity.

With this effort, my Government plans to channel a new breed of Guyanese pioneers unto the hitherto uninhabited and unoccupied fertile lands of our country, thus relieving the congestion on the coastal strip of our territory, and contributing to the diversification of our agricultural system and the development of our country.

MINING

My Government has been able since its assumption of office to arrange for an expansion of bauxite mining both by the Demerara Bauxite Company and Reynolds Metals Company and to negotiate with these two companies a formula as a result of which their contribution to revenue will be considerably increased.

It is not, however, good enough for a country like ours with its hydro-electric potential to be satisfied with being a mere producer of ore. My Government therefore proposes in co-operation with the two large Bauxite Companies extracting ore in Guyana, or on its own, in the light of certain offers which it has recently received, to start this year on a project aimed at converting our hydro-electric potential into an actual.

My Government will also seek to stimulate increased production of gold and diamonds and to have set up a factory for the cutting and polishing of the latter here. At the same time, our reserves of copper, iron and other ores are being carefully studied and analysed by our Geological Department with a view to ascertaining the economic feasibility of their large scale extraction.

There has been considerable interest shown in the potential of our continental shelf for producing oil and right now, after detailed and keen discussions, the Ministry of Forests, Lands and Mines has arranged to grant certain exploration leases to applicants. In this field as in others, any concessions which may be eventually granted to foreign or local companies will be granted in the context of my Government's oft stated principle of seeking and ensuring that Guyana for whose people the Government is a mere trustee gets the best and fullest benefits from the exploitation of her natural resources.

COMMUNICATIONS

One of the main projects in this year's Emergency Development Programme will be the reconstruction of all the coastal and some of the village roads and the construction of the road from Atkinson to Mackenzie. The route for the latter was surveyed and planned with the assistance of U.S.A.I.D. personnel during the previous administration but only now has it been possible to have the necessary finance and equipment available.

Our present railways, with assistance from Canada and a contribution from our own funds, will be improved.

The extension of the telecommunications system in Georgetown, New Amsterdam and the rest of the country is being pursued as a matter of immediate urgency. It is also hoped that our international telephone connections will be improved and modernised.

There is a programme to modernise our water transport as well as the ports of New Amsterdam and Georgetown and the Guyana Airways Corporation has been commissioned to investigate and make recommendations for the improvement, extension and re-organisation of air transport.

My Government further proposes to bring all forms of transport under the aegis of one national agency to offer a better opportunity than hitherto for the adumbration and execution of a national policy in this important field.

EDUCATION

My Government is deeply conscious of the fact that the success of any proposals or plans for social and economic re-construction and rehabilitation is largely dependent on the re-organisation of our educational system.

Plans are being worked out to introduce a well integrated, modern educational system which will raise standards, provide new skills, improve existing vocational training and increase earning capacity.

The year 1965 will be a year of re-appraisal and intensive reform in education; but we cannot drag our feet on the immediate tasks that confront us. Important among these is the absolute necessity to provide more school accommodation and more trained staff. Priority has therefore been given in this year's Emergency Development Programme to the building of schools in

over-crowded areas by direct grant from Government as well as by aided self-help programmes with assistance from Government and the World Food Programme.

It is proposed to go ahead as soon as possible with plans for the establishment of at least two junior technical colleges in central rural areas.

Teacher training will benefit from proposals to award, with assistance from UNESCO, local fellowships which will cover the cost of boarding and lodging for out of town teachers attending the Pre-service Training Centre in Georgetown. Improved educational standards and curriculum reform are receiving urgent attention and matters affecting the recruitment and promotion of teachers will be the subject of discussions between the Ministry, the British Guiana Teachers Association, and the schools' Governing Bodies.

Steps are being taken also to reduce some of the restrictions on parents' freedom in choice of schools for the secondary education of their children.

During the year also, indeed very shortly, positive action will be taken to settle the relationship between the University of Guyana and the University of the West Indies and other institutions of higher learning outside the country, and my Government hopes to be able to announce soon, a firm date for embarking upon the construction of buildings to house the University.

HEALTH

The productivity and therefore economic progress of our country is dependant on, amongst other things, the people's good health. The first steps will be taken very shortly to ensure improvement not only in the curative but also in the preventive field. Plans for the building of a new hospital are being prepared and in the meantime the equipment and services of the Public Hospitals will be immediately improved. Pure Water Supplies are being provided apace in the rural areas and my Government proposes to set up a national water board or commission to deal with the problem of water generally at a national level.

HOUSING

My Government has made available to the Trades Union Council approximately 112.5 acres of land for an housing scheme in the greater Georgetown area to be

substantially financed by the American Institute for Free Labour Development.

In addition, the Government looks with favour on the Civil Service Association's request for a loan of \$500,000 from the New Widows' and Orphans' Fund for the provision of homes for members of that Association, and will lend whatever assistance and support may be necessary for the achievement of that objective.

A substantial sum will also be allocated for the provision of housing by the Government, with emphasis on the needs of the rural areas.

It is intended to integrate all public agencies connected with and/or responsible for housing to ensure the maximum economy and planning and that all public funds destined for the provision of this vital and important social and economic service are utilised to best advantage.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Local Government is considered an integral and important aspect of Government and it has been decided to proceed at all possible speed with the implementation of the main and basic proposals of the Marshall Plan for Local Government reform by stages if necessary. The franchise will be extended to Universal Adult Suffrage and the Local Authorities and Municipalities will be given greater autonomy and responsibility especially in the fields of financial control, social services and national development planning.

AMERINDIAN AFFAIRS

My Government's particular interest in the welfare of our Amerindian citizens may be judged from the fact that a special department of Amerindian Affairs has been created and is under the charge of a Parliamentary Secretary, himself an Amerindian.

It will be the task of this department of Government to implement speedily a programme aimed at bringing Amerindians into full participation with other Guyanese at all levels and in all fields so that they can share fully in the benefits and responsibilities of a free Guyana. In this sector, my Government is in receipt of technical and financial assistance from the Canadian Government for which it is most grateful.

CONCLUSION

In the broad and necessarily brief outlines I have given, are my Government's proposals for laying the foundation of a free, progressive and prosperous Guyana. The path to progress is now open before us.

Let us go forward together in peace; let us develop the resources of our great land; build up its institutions and promote its best interests; let us cultivate a free state of unity, harmony and nationhood.

With God's help we can and shall transfer Guyana into a splendid monument more lasting than bronze; a monument not to oppression and terror, but to wisdom, peace and liberty. A monument upon which the world may gaze with admiration and wonder.
