

# LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

(Constituted under the British Guiana  
(Constitution) (Temporary Provisions)  
Order in Council, 1953)

TUESDAY, 2ND NOVEMBER, 1954.

The Council met at 11.15 a.m. His Honour the Speaker, Sir Eustace Woolford, O.B.E., Q.C., in the Chair.

## PRESENT :

His Honour the Speaker, Sir Eustace Gordon Woolford, O.B.E., Q.C.

### *Ex-Officio Members:—*

The Hon. the Chief Secretary, Mr. F. D. Jakeway, O.B.E. (acting).

The Hon. the Attorney General Mr. F. W. Holder, Q.C.

The Hon. the Financial Secretary, Mr. W. O. Fraser, O.B.E.

### *Nominated Members of Executive Council:—*

The Hon. Sir Frank McDavid, C.M.G., C.B.E. (Member for Agriculture, Forests, Lands and Mines).

The Hon. P. A. Cummings (Member for Labour, Health and Housing).

The Hon. W. O. R. Kendall (Member for Communications and Works).

The Hon. G. A. C. Farnum, O.B.E. (Member for Local Government, Social Welfare and Co-operative Development).

The Hon. R. B. Gajraj.

The Hon. R. C. Tello.

### *Deputy Speaker:—*

Mr. W. J. Raatgever, C.B.E.

### *Nominated Officials:—*

Mr. W. T. Lord, I.S.O.

Mr. J. I. Ramphal.

### *Nominated Unofficials:—*

Mr. T. Lee.

Mr. W. A. Phang.

Mr. L. A. Luckhoo, Q.C.

Mr. W. A. Macnie, C.M.G., O.B.E.

Mr. C. A. Carter.

Mr. E. F. Correia.

Rev. D. C. J. Bobb.

Mr. H. Rahaman.

Miss Gertrude H. Collins.

Mrs. Esther E. Dey.

Dr. H. A. Fraser.

Lt. Col. E. J. Haywood, M.B.E., T.D

Mr. Sugrim Singh.

### *Clerk of the Legislature—*

Mr. I. Crum Ewing.

### *Assistant Clerk of the Legislature—*

Mr. E. V. Viapree (acting).

### *Absent:—*

The Hon. G. H. Smellie—on leave.

Mr. R. B. Jailal—on leave.

Prayers were read by the Most Reverend Dr. Alan John Knight, C.M.G., Archbishop of the West Indies.

Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on Friday, October 15, 1954, as printed and circulated, were taken as read and confirmed.

## REPORTS AND DOCUMENTS

### B. G. CONSTITUTIONAL COMMISSION REPORT

The Chief Secretary: With your permission, Sir, I desire to take this opportunity to lay on the Table the Report of the British Guiana Constitutional Commission of 1954, copies of which will be made available to hon. Members immediately after His Excellency's Address.

Mr. Speaker: I shall vacate the Chair for a short interval in order to receive His Excellency the Governor. It may be that some members of the audience would like to witness the military ceremony whilst the Governor inspects the Guard of Honour. That being so, I hope they will make it convenient to be in their places when His Excellency enters this Chamber. Hon. Members also may leave their seats. They know their duty and so I will not remind them.

*[At this stage the Speaker left the Chamber, accompanied by The Most Reverend the Archbishop of the West Indies, the Hon. the Chief Justice and the Members of the Executive Council, to meet His Excellency the Governor, Sir Alfred Savage, K.C.M.G.]*

### GOVERNOR'S ADDRESS.

His Excellency, accompanied by His Hon. the Speaker, entered the

Chamber and addressed the gathering as follows:—

Mr. Speaker, My Lords, Honourable Members, Members of the Legislative Council, and people of British Guiana.

The Report of the British Guiana Constitution Commission, 1954—or the Robertson Commission as it has come to be known—is being released today both in London and in Georgetown, and at about this time in London the Right Honourable the Secretary of State for the Colonies is making a Statement to the House of Commons on the Report. It is appropriate, therefore, that I should address the Legislative Council simultaneously and that I should take this opportunity, with the concurrence of His Honour the Speaker, to have these proceedings broadcast to the people of British Guiana and overseas.

2. Let me first read the main conclusions of the Commission:—

"We are satisfied that the setback to orderly constitutional progress in British Guiana was due not to defects in the Constitution but to the fact that those in control of the People's Progressive Party proved themselves to be relentless and unscrupulous in their determination to pervert the authority of Government to their own disruptive and undemocratic ends.

"We are, therefore, driven to the conclusion that so long as the P.P.P. retains its present leadership and policies, there is no way in which any real measure of responsible government can be restored without the certainty that the country will again be subjected to constitutional crisis.

"We have no doubt that British Guiana, with its precarious economy, cannot afford another crisis of the kind that developed in 1953 and we can, therefore, see no alternative but to recommend a period of marking time in the advance towards self government.

"We cannot estimate the length of the period which should elapse before the advance towards self government is re-

sumed. Everything will depend upon the extent to which the people of British Guiana, including the leaders of the P.P.P. themselves, can be brought to the realisation that the futile and deliberately disruptive policies for which the P.P.P. at present stands are no basis for the future constitutional progress of their country."

#### STATEMENT IN HOUSE OF COMMONS

Next I shall read the Statement of the Secretary of State made in the House of Commons:—

"The Report of the British Guiana Constitutional Commission has been published today as a Command Paper. My Right Honourable Friend, the Minister of State, has discussed it with the Governor during his recent visit to British Guiana, and H. M. Government accept the conclusions of the Report. Honourable Members will wish to study it and I will not therefore go into detail now. Briefly, their conclusions amply justify the action taken by H.M. Government last October. They state that the breakdown was not due to defects in the Constitution but to activities of those in control of the People's Progressive Party. They recommend that there is at present no alternative to a period of marking time in constitutional matters. They do not recommend a specific period nor do H.M. Government wish to be tied to one. H.M. Government however consider it desirable to set some maximum term to the personal appointment of the present Members of Legislative Council without prejudice to when it may be possible to hold elections again. The present appointments will therefore run for four years from January 1st, 1954.

"During the period of this Interim Government it is our firm intention to do everything possible to fit the Colony for a return to representative government. In particular there will be a thorough reform and extension of local government institutions.

Members will no doubt wish to question me when they have studied the Report, I would like to express the warm thanks of H.M. Government to Sir James Robertson, formerly Civil Secretary of the Sudan, who was Chairman of the Commission and to the other two

members, Sir Donald Jackson, Chief Justice of the Windward Islands and the Leeward islands, and Mr. Woodcock, Assistant General Secretary of the T.U.C."

That is the end of the Statement of the Secretary of State.

3. As I have said, the Commission's Report is being released today in Georgetown, but arrangements have been made for copies to be distributed as quickly as possible to all parts of the country. It is my intention that the Report should have a very wide circulation, so that as many people as possible will have the opportunity to read and study for themselves the findings of this independent Commission in respect of the events of the period between the Report of the Waddington Commission in 1951 and the decision to suspend the Constitution in October, 1953.

4. As I have said, you will read and study these findings for yourselves, but I shall briefly refer to them here. After a most careful and painstaking examination of all the relevant material the Commission have found that it had become necessary in October, 1953, to resolve the impossible position which had developed in the Executive Council, to put an end to the general anxiety and uncertainty in the Colony and to remove the distinct danger of real trouble. They have found that at that time the fear of violence was real enough, that the Executive Council had come nowhere near to fulfilling its constitutional role and that there was no option but to suspend the Constitution if there was no other certain way of resolving the situation.

5. The Commission have found that there was nothing substantially or inherently wrong with the Constitution which has had to be suspended and that the set-back to orderly constitutional progress which resulted was due, not to defects in that Constitution, but to the

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fact that those in control of the P.P.P. proved themselves to be relentless and unscrupulous in their determination to pervert the authority of Government to their own disruptive and undemocratic ends. They concluded that four of the seven principal officers of the P.P.P. and about half of the members of the Party Executive Committee were Communists and that these people had been restrained by expediency rather than by principle from forming and leading openly a Communist party. The Report states:

"They had decided on balance that they could more speedily achieve their most important and immediate objectives—that of ridding British Guiana of British rule and influence—by remaining associated with others who had a similar objective in a party with a wide popular appeal.....They did not believe that self-government for British Guiana could be earned in successive steps by revealed capacity for responsible Government. On the contrary, they believed that a dependent territory can normally expect to win self-government only by violent action little short of revolution....We are convinced that from the moment the P.P.P. secured its majority it was at most only a question of time before these people made a concerted effort to get the Party embarked on a course of action which was deliberately intended to lead to a serious constitutional crisis as a means of forcing the British Government to capitulate to the demands of the P.P.P."

These findings have led the Commission to the conclusion that so long as the present leadership and policies of the P.P.P. continue, there is no way in which any real measure of self-government can be restored without the certainty that the country will again be subjected to constitutional crisis.

6. In passing may I point out that only last Saturday Party statements made clearly emphasize that the attitude of leaders of the Party towards the Constitution has in no way altered, and that they continue to be determined, if allowed, to invite rather than to avoid

a constitutional crisis if they conceive such a crisis to be necessary to enable them to obtain their objective of immediate self-government.

7. The Commission have no doubt that British Guiana, with its precarious economy, cannot afford another crisis of the kind that developed in 1953, and have, therefore, in all the circumstances of the present situation, recommended a period of marking time in the advance towards self-government. The Report makes certain suggestions regarding modifications in the suspended Constitution to be considered at some future date, and comments on a number of subsidiary constitutional matters affecting ministerial conduct, the Judiciary and the Public Service. The Report proposes that adult suffrage should be maintained, and also makes certain recommendations about the electoral system, including a proposal to set up an Electoral Commission.

8. The Commission have found it impossible to estimate at this stage the length of the period which should elapse before the advance towards self-government is resumed. Everything, in their view, will depend upon the extent to which the people of British Guiana—I repeat, the people of British Guiana, including the leaders of the P.P.P. themselves, can be brought to realize that the futile and deliberately disruptive policies for which the P.P.P. at present stands are no basis for the future constitutional progress of the Colony. Her Majesty's Government have nevertheless considered it desirable that a maximum term should be set to the personal appointment of the present Members of the Legislative Council though, as was stated by the Secretary of State, the fixing of this period will be without prejudice to the time when it may be possible to hold elections again.

9. At this stage let me emphasize, and it cannot be over emphasized, what

has been stated by the Commission—that the extremist leaders of the P.P.P. and the policies for which they stand are the sole barriers to constitutional progress. This clearly is a challenge to the people of British Guiana. It is the duty now of public opinion, enlightened by recent experiences and stimulated by the resolve to remove the barriers that stand in the way of constitutional progress, to renounce such policies and all those who advocate them. It is a time for moral courage and firm determination, as nothing less than the future of democratic principles and institutions in British Guiana is at stake.

10. In the meantime everything possible will be done to prepare the Colony for a return to elections and representative government. The creation of a healthy political environment is perhaps the most important safeguard of free and democratic institutions and much may be done towards this end through the reform and extension of the Local Government system of the Colony. The Report states:

“...We do not think that local government bodies play an important part in the affairs of British Guiana and indeed we are not convinced that in local affairs the village and country district councils were popular or influential amongst the people....”

It goes on to say:

“...The whole scope of local government, therefore, appears to be very limited....”

Accordingly it is proposed to appoint a Commissioner of high standing and experience to report to the Government on the reform and extension of the local government system. With a new and reformed local government it will no doubt be possible to provide a very large measure of political training through Local Councils for the more important field of central government. For that reason I have decided

that elections to the New Amsterdam Town Council should continue to be postponed as they were in 1953, and that elections to the Georgetown Town Council—which were not due to be held in 1953—should now be similarly postponed. A Bill seeking to give effect to this decision will be introduced shortly in the Legislative Council. I do not propose, however, that there should be any interference with the periodic Mayoral elections, and these will be held from time to time in the usual manner.

11. The Robertson Commission did not deal with events subsequent to the decision to suspend the Constitution, but those of us living in this country have not forgotten the acts of violence, of sabotage and of sacrilege committed earlier this year; such evil deeds, you will realise, confirm and emphasize the findings of the Commission. Such conduct has been destructive both in spirit and in character; yet there has been much constructive progress during the ten months of the Interim Government's existence. It took over the reins of Government at a most difficult and trying period in the affairs of this country; it was a time of strain and evident tension within the Colony itself, while abroad its credit and good name had already become suspect. In addition to all this a pernicious and sustained campaign of slander and propaganda endeavoured to discredit and frustrate the best efforts of the new Government. In spite of this propaganda and violence, tension has diminished to some extent, and confidence in the stability of Government is being gradually restored.

There are signs that people are prepared to give this Government an opportunity to carry out its programme of economic and social development; and it is a matter of satisfaction that persons have returned to the Savings Bank the deposits withdrawn last year.

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Already, much of the extremist propaganda has been shown to be untruthful, and its repeated calls for non-co-operation remain unanswered. I firmly believe that the people of this country are realising more and more as the days go by, the tragic mistakes of 1953 and the opportunities for progress which were thrown away by reckless politicians entrusted in all good faith with the powers of government. Human relations, the very foundations of any society, have improved, but there is so much to be done and often undone both by individuals and racial groups. The new Regional Development Committees introduced in every part of the country, have stimulated an interest in economic development hitherto unknown, and the response of the people to self-help and co-operative schemes in many parts of the country has been most gratifying. These things indicate to me, and I am sure to you who are listening, that the thinking of some people has undergone some change in the last ten months—and the credit for this is largely due to the efforts of the present Government and to the loyalty and industry of the Public Service.

12. A few days ago the Development Secretary published a progress report on the Development Plan to the 30th September. It has given some satisfaction although progress has not been as rapid as had been hoped, but you will recall that final approval was not obtained until May. Preparatory work, including investigations and reports by many visiting experts, the establishment of the Credit Corporation, the setting up and organising of the new Departments of Housing, Land Settlement and Drainage and Irrigation all required much time and study, but practical results are becoming increasingly evident all over the country, and people are seeing and realising for themselves the benefits to be derived now and in the future. We can look

forward to an acceleration in the progress towards full implementation of our Development Plan. Here, I must again remind you that (in the words of the World Bank Mission), "the ability of the economy to sustain a continued growth and expansion will, however, depend on the extent to which private investment is maintained". It is fair to say that overseas confidence in British Guiana is being restored, and that this year overseas industrialists have been showing a strong interest in this country, particularly in the field of development of mineral resources. We can, for example, count on an expansion of investment in bauxite mining and substantial new investment in the initiation of undertakings to mine for manganese, columbite and tantalite. In the field of agriculture, private interests, working in collaboration with the Government, have successfully completed the first stage of experimental cultivation and production of jute in this country. I should also mention the interesting experimental scheme which is about to begin on one of the sugar estates in the cultivation of sugar cane by individual cane farmers on a basis of partnership with the proprietors.

13. An urgent need, of course, is the provision of more cultivable land for small farmers and (as the Commission say in paragraph 21 of their report) for the establishment of a class of peasant proprietors with the feeling of having a real stake in the country. The major land reclamation and water control schemes in progress in Berbice and West Demerara are the most important means by which the need for more cultivable land will be met. Quicker results should, however, be obtained by improving and bringing into use the many scattered areas of land in the rear of existing estates and on the river banks, which are not being beneficially occupied, and it will be the function of the new Land Settlement Department to pursue this objective as

rapidly as possible. I also hope that the Land Tenure Committee which has been set up will be able to find a solution of the difficult problem of safeguarding the rights of the large number of persons in beneficial occupation of agricultural land, but who, for various reasons, are without proper legal titles.

14. But all is not lovely in this garden of British Guiana. I am certainly not complacent. I am well aware that the extremist elements are endeavouring in devious ways to maintain their position and to undermine confidence in Government, and to promote disruption and discord among the people of this country. I realise also that they have the physical support of a section of the party who are like-minded. I want it to be clearly understood that any conduct which is subversive to the maintenance of good government will continue to be dealt with promptly and firmly.

As I have said before, there is an immense job of work to be done by everybody. The situation demands clear thinking, sincerity of purpose and constant effort. It needs primarily close personal contact with the people. Government officers, politicians, employers, trade union leaders and last but by no means least Christian, Hindu and Mohammedan priests and clergy must go out to the people and not wait for the people to come to them. Although the political extremist will in time be rejected by the people of the country, there is a real danger that their places may be taken by other extremists dominated by racial prejudices. May I say in all frankness and friendliness to the two numerically strongest races in this country, namely, the people of African and East Indian descent, that if you allow yourselves to be guided by racial extremists it will bring nothing but sorrow to yourselves, to your children and to your country. As I have

moved about Guiana I have met many mixed groups living in complete harmony, and there are both African and East Indian leaders who work together for the common good. The country needs many more leaders of this kind. We must build on friendship and tolerance and not on hatred and malice. I must add I believe that minority groups could do more to help by avoiding racial discrimination in its many aspects.

15. Another matter which has caused me grave concern is the position of the trade union movement in this country. On this question it would be appropriate for me to quote briefly from the Commission's Report:

"The trade union movement has been too much used by would-be politicians as a means for obtaining power, and not as a way of improving the conditions of labour; too many presidents and officials of trade unions even today are mere politicians: many of them are not and never have been "workers."

"We believe that if trade unionism in British Guiana is to climb out of the rut in which it now finds itself two things are needed; firstly, for trade unionists to develop a healthy mistrust of the motives behind the patronage of personally ambitious politicians, and secondly, for union executives to pursue their industrial objectives by industrial and not by political means."

You will recall the first speech I made on my arrival in this country. It was a plea for labour and capital to come closer together. They need each other. During last year industrial relations reached a very low ebb, and although they have since shown some improvement there is yet so much to be done. Unless steps are taken, and taken by the members of the Unions themselves, to place the trade union movement on a sound basis, it may be impossible to achieve that better understanding which is so vital to the true interests of this country. At the same time I would urge on all employers the

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urgent necessity to redouble their efforts in promoting the closest relations possible with representatives of employees.

16. You will already have gathered from the statement of the Secretary of State that the Members of the Executive and Legislative Councils will continue in office, and these Councils will continue to be responsible for the peace, order and good government of the Colony. You will recall also that the personal appointments of these Members are to run for a maximum period of four years from the 1st January, 1954—that is, terminating not later than 31st December, 1957.

17. You all know that I am most anxious for this country to return to normal conditions as soon as possible. It will be the task of this Government to create the conditions in which the interrupted constitutional progress towards self-government can be resumed. The emphasis for the time being must be on sound administration and the implementation of the programme of social and economic development which has already been commenced. I hope that it will be possible for me, in consultation with my advisers, to relax gradually the restrictions which circumstances have compelled me to impose under the Emergency Order. Processions and public meetings may then be allowed subject to such controls as are necessary in the interests of law and order. If there is any relapse, however, into conditions of disorder and violence the restrictions will have to be reimposed.

18. While, like the Commission, I have no illusions as to the difficulties

which lie ahead, yet I am optimistic for the future. I have a strong and abiding faith in the people of this country, in their commonsense and their spirit of goodwill. I feel that the times through which we have passed and are passing, serve but to strengthen our resolve that British Guiana shall advance as many other countries have done, along the path of ordered progress to an honoured place in the Commonwealth. I am sure that this faith and this optimism are shared by the people of British Guiana. With that faith, let us work harder than ever before. With that optimism let us move forward in practical co-operation to the future. Then, under God's guidance, we shall succeed.

Mr. Lee: Your Excellency, may I be permitted, on behalf of the Members of this Council, to express to Your Excellency our deep appreciation and thanks for your interesting and stimulating address this morning. On this historic occasion I am sure my colleagues would wish me to give to Your Excellency an assurance of our continued co-operation in the fullest measure in the tasks that lie ahead.

Finally, Sir, I would ask that you grant permission for your address to be printed and circulated among the Members of the Council.

*His Excellency then withdrew from the Chamber.*

There being no further business, the Speaker, at 12.20 p.m., adjourned the Council *sine die*.