

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL OF BRITISH GUIANA

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

OFFICIAL REPORT

(HANSARD)

OF PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE THIRD SESSION

IN THE

FIFTH YEAR OF THE REIGN

OF HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II.

FIRST SITTING

WEDNESDAY, 25TH APRIL, 1956.

The first meeting of the Third Session of the Legislative Council of British Guiana, constituted under the British Guiana (Constitution) (Temporary Provisions) Order in Council, 1953, was held in the Chamber of the Legislature, Public Buildings, Georgetown, on Wednesday, 25th April, 1956, at 2 p.m.

PRESENT :

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

Ex-Officio Members :

The Hon. the Chief Secretary, Mr. M. S. Porcher (Ag.).

The Hon. the Attorney General, Mr. C. Wylie, Q.C., E.D.

The Hon. the Financial Secretary, Mr. F. W. Essex.

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. L. A. Luckhoo, Q.C. ✓

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. 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 Gertie H. Collins.

Mrs. Esther E. Dey.

Dr. H. A. Fraser.

Mr. R. B. Jailal.

Mr. Sugrim Singh.

Clerk of the Legislature—Mr. I. Crum Ewing.

Assistant Clerk of the Legislature—Mr. E. V. Viapree.

Absent :

The Hon. R. C. Tello.

Mr. Speaker : Hon. Members, as you are aware, in the exercise of his powers under the British Guiana (Constitution) (Temporary Provisions) Order in Council, 1953, His Excellency has appointed this day as the opening day of the Third Session of the Legislative Council. I am to express very deep regret that in circumstances that were unavoidable, so far as he is concerned, His Excellency was unable to

give longer notice than he has done, in summoning this meeting to take place today. I hope, therefore, you will accept His Excellency's short notice in that respect. I will now ask the Clerk of the Council to read the Proclamation.

The Clerk read the Proclamation summoning the session, as follows :

PROCLAMATION

No. 722

BRITISH GUIANA

No. 5 of 1956.

**Proclamation Summoning a Session
of the Legislative Council**

By His Excellency Sir
PATRICK MUIR
RENISON, Knight
Commander of the
Most Distinguished
Order of Saint
Michael and Saint
George, Governor and
Commander-in-Chief
in and over the Colony
of British Guiana,
Vice-Admiral of the
same,

etc., etc., etc.

P. M. RENISON,
Governor.

WHEREAS the Legislative Council
was prorogued with effect from Thursday,
the twenty-ninth day of March, 1956;

AND WHEREAS it is provided by
subsection (1) of section 54 of the British
Guiana (Constitution) (Temporary Provi-
sions) Order in Council, 1953, that, sub-
ject to the provisions of subsections (2)
and (3) of section 54 of the said Order,
the sessions of the Legislative Council
shall be held at such times and places as
the Governor shall, from time to time by
Proclamation published in the Gazette,
appoint;

AND WHEREAS it is provided by sub-
section (2) of section 54 of the said Order
that there shall be a session of the Legis-
lative Council once at least in every year,
so that a period of twelve months shall not
intervene between the last sitting in one
session and the first sitting in the next
session of the Legislative Council;

NOW THEREFORE, in pursuance of
the said section, I do hereby proclaim and
appoint Wednesday, the twenty-fifth day of
April, nineteen hundred and fifty-six, at
the hour of two of the clock in the after-
noon as the time at which a session of
the Legislative Council shall be held at
the Chamber of the Legislature in the
Guiana Public Buildings, Georgetown,
Demerara.

Given under my Hand
and the Public Seal of
the Colony, at Gov-
ernment House, Brit-
ish Guiana, this 23rd
day of April, in the
year of Our Lord one
thousand nine hun-
dred and fifty-six and
in the fifth year of
Her Majesty's Reign.

GOD SAVE THE QUEEN,

By His Excellency's Command,

IVOR O. SMITH,
Acting Governor's Secretary.

Mr. Speaker : I now declare Coun-
cil duly constituted, and I would ask the
Most Reverend the Archbishop of the
West Indies to read prayers.

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

OATHS TO MEMBERS

*The Speaker administered the Oath
of Allegiance to Mr. M. S. Porcher,
Chief Secretary (Acting) vice Mr. F. D.
Jakeway, C.M.G., O.B.E., on leave, and
to Mr. F. W. Essex, Financial Secretary,
who took their seats as ex officio Mem-
bers.*

FINANCIAL SECRETARY WELCOMED

Mr. Speaker : I am sure hon. Mem-
bers of Council would like me to offer a
very sincere and hearty welcome to our
new Financial Secretary (Mr. Essex)
and his wife who have recently arrived
in this Colony, and to express the hope
that they will enjoy their stay in our
midst.

MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the
Council held on Wednesday, 28th March,
1956, as printed and circulated, were
taken as read and confirmed.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I propose to vacate the Chair for a short while in order to await the arrival of His Excellency and Lady Renison. Those of you who wish to witness the ceremony attending His Excellency's arrival may do so, but I shall be glad if you will make it convenient to resume your seats before His Excellency enters the Chamber to deliver his address.

GOVERNOR'S ADDRESS

PROPOSALS FOR AMENDED CONSTITUTION

Council resumed at 2.34 p.m. when His Excellency, accompanied by the Speaker, entered the Chamber and addressed the Council as follows:—

Mr. Speaker:

I owe to you and to Honourable Members, and to those "strangers" whom you have invited to be present, my apologies for summoning by Proclamation this new Session of the Legislative Council at such short notice. I am grateful to you, Sir, for arranging it so impressively. I was advised only four days ago, and it was finally confirmed only yesterday afternoon, that the Secretary of State for the Colonies would today reply to a question in the House of Commons, and would at the same time circulate a statement which would give Her Majesty's Government's decision about political progress in British Guiana following my recent discussions in London. Arrangements were made for the same statement to be orally given in full at about the same time in the House of Lords. I thought it only proper that I should make this important statement public in British Guiana by first announcing it to the Legislature.

I will now read to you Mr. Alan Lennox-Boyd's reply and statement, delivered to Parliament about three hours ago. Copies will be given to each Honourable Member.

Reply: "Following my recent discussions with the Governor of British Guiana about the present political situation in the Colony, Her Majesty's Government have decided that the time has come when some progress can safely be made in the direction of a return to democratic institutions. It is intended therefore to take steps to introduce an elected element into the Legislature and Executive. Details of the proposals are being circulated with the official report."

Details of Proposals: "Briefly, there will be a Legislative Council of twelve elected members, four officials, and not more than eight nominated members. The Executive Council under the Governor will normally consist of four officials, one nominated and five elected members of Legislative Council:

Preparations will be put in hand forthwith for the necessary amendments to the Constitution and for setting up election machinery. The Governor will settle a suitable date for elections. This will probably be some time next year, but may have to be even later.

Her Majesty's Government hopes that this substantial step forward will encourage healthy political development and enable experience to be gained upon which further progress can be based. Until more of the people understand the dangers of communist leadership which could only bring a second collapse like that of 1953, we cannot run the risk of restoring the type of Constitution which was suspended.

Meanwhile the Development Programme will be pushed ahead, and whatever is necessary will be done to prevent or counter dangerous activities promoted by the handful of communist-trained agents, who are causing the interruption of constitutional progress."

Hon. Members will know, Sir, that Her Majesty's Government and I have been very eager to find a way ahead and to end this frustrating period of marking time. Since I have been here I have shown my personal confidence that this is possible, by encouraging political activity through progressive steps to relax restrictions and to prepare for further elections. I believe and pray that the promised step forward, for which Her Majesty's Government have by today's statement authorised the

necessary action, is a sound step which will prove to have been a renewal of true progress on the road to that practicable self-government within the Commonwealth which is our aim.

But whether you will think Her Majesty's Government are going too fast or that they are not going fast enough—and there will be many who will think one or other of these opposites—at least you cannot say that they have not been absolutely clear and definite in repeating the reasons for their firm action in the past, and in pointing the dangers against which they, and we, must still guard. I am authorised to say that so long as there are those dangers, so long will Her Majesty's Government take any steps necessary to oppose them. And that implies the continuation of the powers of the Emergency Order and, if necessary, additional powers.

Some may think, and probably shout, that there is too much emphasis on communism; they will say that it is just a trick to perpetuate boss rule by dividing the common people from those who promise to champion their cause. I would agree that the mass of the voters is not concerned with communism; they don't even know or care what communism is; they are concerned with fair play and better standards of living. They will always vote for whoever they think will help them best. And help they certainly need; for out-of-date attitudes and indifference to the people's problems are by no means extinct, even if they are dying.

I'm not resurrecting the old war-cries against a tyranny of the bosses. World opinion is rapidly making such tyranny impossible. Nor am I frightened that world opinion will not equally reject the opposite evil of a tyranny of the masses. The future of the world does not lie in class conflict. But if

you will allow me, as a comparative newcomer, to generalise on seeming failings, where I have so often and with equal sincerity showered praises for other qualities, I must tell you that I am worried at what seems to me the selfishness which blocks the balance and progress of our society. I find in too many places, where people can be looked upon as rivals, too great a prevalence of an ungenerous, unneighbourly, personal outlook, and too much of the envy, malice and frustration of effort which it breeds. It seems to me in all humility that until more people are jostled out of complacency and learn the brotherhood of man, to sink their own personal advantage for the sake of defeating a common danger and improving general attitudes and conditions, so long will our development be slow, and so long will the demagogues and destructionists have fertile soil on which to work to the bewilderment of the people.

I might welcome communism if it were only concerned with uncovering social evils. To hard-pressed and not very wealthy governments that may be an inconvenience. But to the country it is not a danger. The danger is the long-term plan of communist leaders to replace the system of government with another. This, I think, makes clearer the reason why Great Britain remains so firmly resolved in its refusal to run any risk of allowing a communist state to be created in British Guiana. The determination is not a pawn to be played in a struggle for world domination. It is not an attack on the simple or frustrated people (and some intellectuals too) to whom communists, with their detailed and careful training, appeal. It is not an arrogant insult to the personalities or mental processes of those who devote their lives to the communist doctrine (though they collect some peculiar followers among their disgruntled hangers-on). It does not seek to dispute whether such leaders know or care

where they are leading. It is not an intellectual argument of theories. It is the outcome of the factual certainty, proved in countless countries, that communism as a system of government does not bring happiness. It is the result of complete faith that our own ideals and our own beliefs are best, however imperfectly we succeed in attaining them. Individual freedom and communism cannot mix. For all the difficulties to be overcome we are determined in our Commonwealth to base the life of all its peoples on individual freedom.

I think I can explain it more clearly by telling you something which communism is not. Her Majesty the Queen, in her last Christmas broadcast from Sandringham, said these words:—

“There are certain spiritual values which inspire all of us. We try to express them in our devotion to freedom, which means respect for the individual and equality before the law. Parliamentary government is also a part of this heritage. We believe in the conception of a Government and Opposition, and the right to criticise and defend. All these are part of the natural life of our free Commonwealth.”

The communists do not believe in these things; they do not even pretend to believe in them. They believe in a one-party state; they believe that the state is paramount, and that the individual must obey or be suppressed. Death or disappearance of inconvenient opponents, or removal into exile or slavery are regular occurrences. Now a posthumous reappraisal is added; but they cannot recall dead errors from the grave. They allow no criticism; indeed they allow no information except that which follows the line dictated by the state. Individual freedom does not exist. Ponder why it is that every month hundreds and hundreds of people abandon their friends and all their possessions and prospects, risk their own lives and those of their children and

relatives, to escape from the guarded Soviet Zones and to start life again in the West. The only people who have ever voluntarily left the West for Russia are a few perverted intellectuals and neurotics.

And what has this to do with British Guiana? The Queen gave me this honourable responsibility to bear and I should not feel that I was striving for Her Majesty if I did not warn her peoples in this country when I sincerely believe, as I do, that there is a possible danger of their throwing away that individual freedom which Her Majesty so surely commends for all the peoples of Her Commonwealth. I must do more than warn; I must do all in my power to guide and strengthen my fellow subjects to recognise, withstand and overcome such danger. It is tragic that those few leaders here who have been driven by the difficulties of life in countries such as this, or by other motives, to embrace communism and to follow its guidance so enthusiastically, cannot see the darkness into which they are leading. I ask them to turn back or at least to continue alone and not to try to draw the country after them.

As Her Majesty's representative, I try very hard to keep out of politics. Indeed I resist, I hope with courtesy, many ingenious attempts to draw me in, particularly at times like this, when elections might possibly be said to be in the air. I must not possess party sympathies, but I have considerable fellow-feeling with politicians. If I were a Guianese, I expect I should be an ardent Nationalist. I am sure we need ardent Nationalists, whom the people trust and whose feet are on the ground, to give the spark which will set alight the real development of a country.

But communism is a different thing. I speak against communism

because I see it as a threat to everything which my religion and my education, and my upbringing, and my experience and my human faith have taught me of the dignity of man. I make no apology therefore for being drawn into local politics to the extent of trying to clarify this threat—to the extent of declaring that if communism plays a major part in the future government of the country there will be more misery for its people than they or their ancestors through the centuries have ever known.

The time to stamp out or isolate a pest or disease is in its early days before it has taken hold. Too many miserable countries have tried to save themselves too late, have found how few trained devotees in the key positions can hold down a whole people and terrorize or indoctrinate them into submission and despair; or drive their braver spirits to this dark night creeping through harbed-wire and mine-fields to freedom. To students of communism practice the classical methods were clear in this country in 1953. Abuse or threats to all who had other ideas; "join our party, our union, our strike, or you or your family will be beaten-up"; the proposals for party police, for party control of education without the help of the Churches: party supporters and nobody else on all boards and committees. You were here and I wasn't. I am sure I have said enough. You don't want to re-live such days when many people were afraid to say or show what they really believed.

Her Majesty's Government isn't afraid; nor am I. I have no doubts for the people of British Guiana if the issues are put to them clearly and early enough. The common sense and good humour and unwillingness to be "pushed around" of the real village leaders have impressed me. The problem is to give them the chance of teaching others whose unthinking emotions are too easily

aroused. Don't let dissatisfaction with things as they are blind us to the dangers of what they might become were individual freedom lost.

When these misguided leaders and their lieutenants with their slogans and their hatreds recite their appeals to "suffering masses" and talk of "the struggle against imperialism", let people ask them what masses suffer in Russian slave mines and slave factories and concentration camps; and ask them what sort of imperialism they mean; the British, which in the ten or twelve years since the war has given peacefully, with continued friendship and mutual assistance, the full freedom of sovereign status to four hundred and sixty-seven million people — I think that is almost exactly the right figure—and is now in West Africa and Malaya and the West Indies, to mention only three areas, pushing forward the last stages towards a worthwhile self-governing nationhood for many millions more? Or do they mean the Russian brand of imperialism, that in a similar period of years has wiped Estonia and Latvia and Lithuania off the map, has held down by force and imposed the communist will on a hundred million Europeans in the satellite states, and in Asia has, as an instrument of policy, deported from their home lands to bitter Central Asian or Siberian wastes, whole communities of people with intent to destroy them as national entities; a million Muslims, six hundred thousand Volga Germans, thousands of Buddhists and Greeks. Individuals may have survived in their miserable exile. The national unity and culture of these peoples cannot. These are the people who vilify our colonialism. Some of these, no doubt, were Stalin mistakes. May we never be numbered among the mistakes of future dictators.

I think Mr. Lennox-Boyd's statement makes the present issues clear. If people want to split our proliferation of

political parties into two camps let them ask the party leaders whether they believe in a future for British Guiana based on Her Majesty the Queen's definition of spiritual values and Commonwealth freedom, or whether they think that devotion to the principles of a materialistic one-party state will bring more happiness to our people. If some of them hedge with a little of what *they* would probably call "right-wing deviationism", don't be surprised or deceived. It is a shameless part of their training, a part of the published doctrines of Marx and Lenin, and of the discredited Stalin, that the end justifies the means. But whatever you believe of the possibilities of peaceful co-existence between sovereign states with differing ideologies, don't let anybody believe that co-existence is possible with communism within a party or coalition for any political purpose whatever, whether elections or agitation. Study what the Bureau of the Socialist International said about it this month. Communists follow their star—a red star whose fires are fed in Moscow, not by any love of British Guiana. They would not seek alliance unless, for their own purposes, they needed your money or support. And if you are a local merchant making even a little money, don't be led astray by glib talk of the imperialist exploitation of British or foreign companies and businessmen. Remember that the communists want your money: that once in power their hated enemy is capitalism: and that means you, small traders and merchants as well as big.

I suppose the immediate reaction of the local communist leaders will be to try to intensify their present "struggle against imperialism", their present clever policy of trying to appear a normal national people's party like every other party. They will continue to try to raise a united clamour for greater political advance without the restrictions which they caused to be imposed, and which will continue to be imposed

so long as persons are considered a threat to our freedom. They will no doubt seek to form a common front with others in agitation that the advance now promised is not enough. This "united front" propaganda is the latest communist line. I think that if other parties and politicians are so silly as to join them it will almost prove, like the immature tendency to rely on political stunts, that even this advance is premature, that people have not even yet come down to earth from their clouds of personal ambition, have not yet clearly seen the danger which faces the country.

I don't want to stop anyone from saying what they think of the proposals. On the contrary I look forward to studying the various shades of opinion. But if politicians want to talk I hope they will think it out for themselves with all its ramifications, as I have had to do. And I hope they will say what they think without meekly following the dictation of a party which openly boasts that it is making monkeys of the others.

We all want better conditions, quicker development, more good employment, brighter prospects for our children and most of the other things which politicians promise and plan. But I profoundly believe that the time for personal political ambition, for the niceties of political theorising and the intricacies of party programme-making, even for the biggest national questions like federation, is *after* the overwhelming majority of British Guiana has clearly shown that these are things which it doesn't want or believe it possible to enjoy, under the shadow of communism. It means hard work by everyone, and an end in political leaders of any trace of the selfishness of which I spoke: those who believe in what I am saying must get about with a common policy and tell people what communism is and who are the small number of trained leaders here who are working

to establish it. I think we should try to let the people know too soon rather than too late. People will need an organised party for which to vote as they showed in 1953. If there are split votes and no organization, all we have been through will have been in vain; there will be another collapse of confidence from which it will be much more difficult to recover, and the marking time will, I suppose, have to begin again on this next rung of the ladder.

If I may say so, having had so much hand in it, I think that one of the wise things about the constitutional advance which is announced today will be its flexibility. As in the British constitution, it is not intended to specify too much in legal instruments. Ministerial and executive responsibility and the balance between the official, nominated and elected elements will be changeable by administrative act or convention as experience is gained. Whoever is elected, I shan't be shy in taking risks, nor in correcting things if they go too far wrong.

The intention is that free elections should be held under universal adult suffrage, and that the existing constituencies should be combined so that twelve elected members will be returned to the Legislative Council. The Council will be completed at the Governor's discretion by not more than the same number of official and nominated members. There will of course be a Speaker, and Deputy Speaker as at present. The Governor will choose who should serve in the Executive Council, and who should hold ministerial portfolios. Modifications of past constitutions suggested by the Robertson Commission for future constitutions have not been overlooked.

It is in the nature of a controlled experiment to end this period of marking time, in the hope that it will get us back on the right road; shall I call it the Queen's Highway?

Preparation for such a modified interim constitution will involve not only the revision of electoral rolls, which, as you know, is being undertaken, and other administrative organization for an election, but the drafting and presentation to Parliament of amendments to the constitutional instruments. This must be fitted into the United Kingdom Parliamentary programme which necessarily takes time. Weather and crop seasons must also be considered. It is not therefore at present possible to say when an election will be held. It will be for me to decide what time in 1957, or even later, is suitable.

I think I should make it clear that although, of course, I have eagerly discussed with unofficial members of my Executive Council, as with countless other persons, many aspects of our political situation, I did not think it fair to associate them in any way with the views or recommendations I put forward to the Secretary of State and discussed with him and his officials. My views and recommendations were entirely my own, and unofficial members of the Executive Council, as indeed all other unofficial members of this Honourable Legislature, have had no part in them, nor knowledge of them.

Mr. Speaker and Honourable Members, I have now been in your country for six months and have learned to be as eager as you are for its progress. It is because of that eagerness that I speak so straightly. It is almost exactly six months since, in this Chamber, I issued a challenge and a call to the people. It is still too soon to know whether it will be answered. When I was recently in London I discussed many of the problems which face us besides political progress. I am, for instance, particularly worried at the exceptional difficulties and slowness of recruiting the qualified staff which we must have if we are to get ahead as successfully as we hope with our very large development

programme. If my representation and suggestions do not bring early results I shall wish to discuss the difficulties further with Honourable Members. In normal times I should particularly have wished to have spoken at some length on the Development Plan. I should also have wished to tell you what progress my Government is making in its main objectives, and what legislation it intends to introduce in this new Session. But I do not wish to detract from the importance of today's statement by delaying your deliberations further with extraneous matter. I shall leave it to members of my Executive Council to tell you of these things as the Session progresses.

Sir, I am learning that in this country criticisms grow more luxuriously than achievements, so that they often threaten to choke the achievements. Forgive me for adding my criticisms today. I am conscious of the extraordinary difficulties which face a nominated government such as this; I am the more grateful for whatever Honourable Members are able to do to further progress and to tell me and my executive, by their speaking and voting, what is practicable and what the country is

thinking. We in our turn can only do our best, I hope as a team, to secure in the face of all the difficulties as many as possible of the results for which, with your assistance, we have planned so long and continue to plan.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you again for your courtesy in thus arranging for me to exercise my right to address the Legislative Council. I pray for God's guidance to us all in the work of the Session which is now beginning.

Mr. Lee: Your Excellency, may I be permitted, on behalf of the Members of this Council, to thank you for your excellent Address, and to ask that it may be printed and circulated among the Members of this Council. On my own behalf I may say that Your Excellency's return from England was anxiously awaited by the people of this country for some announcement concerning our political Constitution, and with Your Excellency's help we shall endeavour to work it.

His Excellency then withdrew from the Chamber after which the Speaker adjourned the Council at 3.09 p.m. to Friday, 27th April, at 2 p.m.