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CABINET OFFICE
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30th SEPTEMBER, 1953.

CABINET

BRITISH GUIANA

Memorandum by the Secretary of State for the Colonies

A new constitution was introduced in British Guiana last April conferring adult suffrage, an elected House of Assembly and elected Ministers. Although formally introduced under the present Government, we were already committed to it by the previous Government, which accepted the recommendations of an independent constitutional commission. Similar constitutions had already been granted to Jamaica (in 1944) and Trinidad (in 1950). Any attempt to postpone a similar step for British Guiana in the circumstances would have had a very bad effect in British Guiana and the rest of the West Indies and I felt that I should not go back on the late Government's decision. However, at the elections at the end of April, the only organised party in the Colony, which was dominated by Communists, gained eighteen out of the twenty-four seats in the House of Assembly. Since last April British Guiana has had elected Ministers who are under strong Communist influences.

I was initially prepared to accept the verdict of the electorate and let the Party have its chance to govern the Colony, despite the risks involved, in the hope that the Governor by tact and patience could win the Ministers away from the extremists in the Party and that the responsibilities of office would modify their views.

It is clear, however, that the Ministers have no intention of working the present constitution in a democratic manner nor have they any real interest in the good of the people of British Guiana. They have taken every opportunity to undermine the constitution and to further the Communist cause. Typical of their actions has been the withdrawal of the ban on the entry of West Indian Communists, the moving of legislation to repeal the Subversive Literature Ordinance, the refusal to move a loyal address to Her Majesty on the first meeting of the House of Assembly or to send a delegation from the House to meet Her Majesty in Jamaica. They have been the moving force behind the strike which has paralysed the sugar industry of the territory for the past four weeks and which at one time showed signs of spreading to the whole country. Their actions have completely destroyed the confidence of the business community and all moderate opinion and the economy of the territory is well on the way to ruin. Their sole aim appears to be complete totalitarian dominance of the territory which they are seeking to achieve by the classical Communist technique of penetrating trade unions and local Government. Their leading figures are in close touch with the World Federation of Trade Unions in Vienna.

In these circumstances I have no doubt that a halt must be called and that we must take away the Ministers' powers, imprison the extremists and suspend the Constitution at the earliest possible moment. I propose to advise Her Majesty to make the necessary Orders in Council. Troops and emergency legal powers will be needed and may take some fourteen days to arrange. I am concerting the necessary arrangements with the Governor.

Colonial Office, S.W.1.
25th September, 1953.

O.L.