

British Parliament Files on Guyana (1953-1970)

182. British Guiana Constitution — Misrepresentations of the British Government in 1953

BRITISH GUIANA CONSTITUTION

HL Deb 07 July 1975

2.45 p.m.

[Lord HALE](#)

My Lords, I beg leave to ask the Question which stands in my name on the Order Paper.

The Question was as follows:

To ask her Majesty's Government whether in view of the additional facts now available, they will make a statement on the suspension of the Constitution of British Guiana in October 1953 and in amplification of the White Paper published on 20th October 1953.

[The PARLIAMENTARY UNDERSECRETARY of STATE, FOREIGN and COMMONWEALTH
OFFICE \(Lord Goronwy-Roberts\)](#)

My Lords, I understand that my noble friend is referring to recent reports of certain hearings in Washington. I have asked for further details, which I shall study carefully.

[Lord HALE](#)

My Lords, while thanking my noble friend for that Answer, may I say that I am not referring to reports which appeared recently in Washington, but to statements made in every American newspaper and copied in *The Times* and the *Guardian*? Will my noble friend recall that some of us in another place at the time, including my noble friend Lord Brockway, challenged this whole White Paper? Does the Minister also recall that the whole story of the plot to burn Georgetown was never substantiated at all and that the trade union now proves to be fictitious? This is the almost-accepted

result of the very useful and internationally very important Senate Committee under Senator Church, which is now making a full and clear investigation into all these matters with the intention of—

A Noble Lord

Speech!

[Lord HALE](#)

—cleaning up history a little. We may have to give some assistance.

[Lord GORONWY-ROBERTS](#)

My Lords, I recall the involvement of my noble friend in this matter some 22 years ago. He was most ably seconded by my noble friend Lord Brockway and, to some extent, I helped a little. It is not a question of ignoring reports. Ministerially, of course one is not expected to proceed on newspaper reports, however well-founded. Without in any way impugning the integrity of these reports I ask my noble friend and the House to accord that I am required to rest on official information which I am in the course of securing now. In due course no doubt my noble friend may feel he would like to put down another Question.

[Lord BROCKWAY](#)

My Lords, is it not a fact that the Minister is asking for information? May I ask whether he remembers the occasion in another place when this White Paper was introduced and its main argument was the storing of petrol to burn down the Governor's House and Government buildings? Was it not proved on that occasion that this plot, with very flimsy evidence, was not discovered until the emergency was declared? In view of this historic misrepresentation of circumstances in respect of a British Colony, and now the allegations of CIA involvement, is it not up to the Government to make these inquiries very thorough indeed?

[Lord GORONWY-ROBERTS](#)

My Lords, I have said that we will pursue these inquiries.

[Lord HALE](#)

My Lords, will my noble friend bear in mind that the point of recriminating about the past is to enforce action in the present, and that I have carefully put down the one example which entirely affects British territory and in which we have a clear responsibility to ascertain the truth. It would be greatly to the service of the world if this move to reveal all the facts continued. I think we ought to be grateful to Senator Church and the American Congress for at last saying that they will no longer pursue this policy, which continued right up to the fall of Chile, and indeed until a murder in Chicago a fortnight ago.

181. Guyana Republic Bill

GUYANA REPUBLIC BILL

HC Deb 27 April 1970

Order for Second Reading read.

8.25 p.m.

The Joint Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Maurice Foley)

I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

This short Bill is a technical Measure which substantively follows the lines of previous legislation in parallel cases. I trust, therefore, that hon. Members will accept the Bill as being non-controversial.

On 23rd February of this year Guyana became a Republic. According to convention, the Governor of Guyana sought the agreement of other Commonwealth Governments to her remaining in the Commonwealth after the change to a republican Constitution. As the Commonwealth Secretary-General announced on 17th September, 1969, all the Heads of Government of the Commonwealth indicated that they would welcome Guyana's continuing membership of the Commonwealth. Guyana has, therefore, become the fourteenth State within the Commonwealth to have opted for republican status.

Guyana's change of status was anticipated during the preparations for its independence. As hon. Members will be aware, the [Guyana Independence Act, 1966](#)—and the Guyana Independence Order made under it—provided for Guyana to become a republic on the passing of a resolution by its National Assembly not earlier than 1st April, 1969. Such a resolution was passed by an overwhelming majority in August, 1969.

The Bill before the House provides that the law of the United Kingdom—and the law of the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man—as it applies to Guyana, will not be affected by the fact that Guyana is now a republic. The Bill will not apply generally to the law of Dependent Territories of the United Kingdom but only to Acts of the British Parliament and Orders in Council applying such Acts which extend to such territories. This is the common-form provision in such cases.

I am sure that hon. Members will join me in wishing the Republic of Guyana and its people continuing peace and progress for the future under their first President, Mr. Arthur Chung.

8.28 p.m.

Mr. Bernard Braine (Essex, South-East)

I thank the Joint Under-Secretary for explaining this non-controversial Bill in his customary lucid and courteous fashion. I begin by joining with him in extending the good wishes of my hon. Friends on this side of the House to the new republic. We are glad that Guyana has elected to remain in the Commonwealth.

It is a good many years since I was last in that fascinating country. Here we have a new nation composed of six different races; a microcosm of the Commonwealth itself. It has faced extraordinary difficulties in the past and it faces many challenging problems in the future. It occupies a unique position in South America. Indeed, it was a Guyanese scholar who summed up his country's political and social isolation from its Latin American neighbours by describing it as an island almost entirely surrounded by land. Happily, these difficulties have at last produced a robust leadership which augurs well for the future of this new State.

I must express some surprise that although the new Republic was formally proclaimed on 23rd February two months should have elapsed before the Bill comes to the House. We should like an explanation, and some assurance that any future legislation of this kind will be dealt with more expeditiously. I cannot see why it should take two months from the declaration of the republic for what is purely a consequential Measure to be brought here.

As the Bill touches on the relationship between Guyana and Britain, I have three questions of substance to which I should like answers. The first concerns the provision in the 1966 independence Constitution for appeals from the High Court of Guyana to Her Majesty in Council in cases relating to the enforcement of fundamental rights or the interpretation of the Constitution. This provision seems to me to be anomalous now that Guyana is a republic. It will, presumably, be changed, but there is no reference to that in the Bill.

My second question concerns the long drawn-out border dispute between Guyana and Venezuela. Venezuela claims over half the territory of Guyana. She maintains that an agreement reached between Britain and herself in 1899 is invalid. In February, 1966, a mixed commission was set up to seek a solution to the dispute. It was decided that if the commissioners were unable to find an answer fully by 1970 they should refer the outstanding questions to the two Governments concerned, which should then choose one of the means of peaceful settlement set out in Article 33 of the United Nations Charter. If the two countries are unable to do this the matter of the choice of the means of settlement is referred to an "appropriate international organ" on which they both agree or, failing agreement on this point, to the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

On 28th February, 1966, the right hon. Gentleman the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary told the House: "I believe that this agreement has dispelled the cloud which threatened to overshadow the independence of British Guiana, and I hope that it paves the way for a friendly relationship between independent Guyana and Venezuela."—[[OFFICIAL REPORT, 28th February, 1966; Vol. 725, c. 895.](#)] Our country is not a party to the mixed commission, but it did sign the agreement which brought it into existence.

I raise this point now because no agreement has been reached on the border dispute, and the matter remains very much as it was in 1966. I believe that the mixed commission is expected to produce its final report in a few months' time. Unhappily, its setting up did not bring a cessation of border

clashes. This is not the occasion to go into the matter in detail and I shall not detain the House on it, but it raises an important question in regard to our own country's relations with Guyana.

As I understand it, we have not undertaken any formal or contractual obligation in regard to Guyana's defence. However, on 18th July, 1967, the Prime Minister told the House: Her Majesty's Government would take all appropriate action to help any fellow member of the Commonwealth which was the victim of unprovoked aggression."—[[OFFICIAL REPORT, 18th July, 1967; Vol. 750, c. 1711.](#)]

Exactly what does this mean in the context of any difficulties which may arise in regard to Guyana in the future? Is there or is there not an undertaking on defence? The House should be told.

My third question concerns our present and future relations with Guyana in the economic sphere. I believe that since independence trade relations between our two countries have developed smoothly, and that is good. Britain is an important buyer of Guyana's main currency earner, sugar, but we are providing aid to Guyana which is currently running, I believe, at about £2 million a year, mainly in the form of loans. Thus, we have a close interest in seeing that Guyana's economic development is encouraged, and that nothing happens to diminish or injure her trade with our country or with the rest of the world.

I understand that under the Commonwealth Sugar Agreement producers, of whom Guyana is one, are paid between £43 10s. and £47 10s. a ton for their sugar. In the European Economic Community, the comparable overseas producers receive about £79 a ton. It therefore follows that if Britain were to adopt the common agricultural policy of the Community without adjustment the Commonwealth Sugar Agreement would disappear, consumers in this country would pay considerably more for their sugar, and Commonwealth producers, or many of them, would be ruined.

I do not take a pessimistic view of this matter, since an enlarged European Community would be deficient in sugar supplies, and there should be room for Commonwealth producers without detriment to the existing European Community. I seem to recall that the French were very successful in getting special arrangements for their own overseas territories.

This is not the occasion to argue the matter in detail, and I do not propose to do so, but it would be helpful if the hon. Gentleman were able to give an assurance that in the negotiations with the Community which lie ahead, the interests of a sugar producing country like Guyana will be borne in mind, and that we will seek to secure the best possible terms for her.

I thought it right to ask these questions because they all touch on future relations between the new Republic of Guyana and Britain. Hon. and right hon. Members on both sides hope that those relations will be cordial, and that our two countries will grow in understanding in the years ahead. For these reasons, we are very glad to support the Bill.

8.38 p.m.

Mr. Bert Oram ([East Ham, South](#))

Introducing the Second Reading of this Bill, my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary said that it follows the conventional lines of a series of Bills which have taken account over the years of territories which

have opted to become republics. This Bill does that, but there is an unusual and to me a most welcome feature of Guyana's declaration to which I call attention.

The Prime Minister of Guyana, when declaring his Government's intention to become a republic, dubbed it the Co-operative Republic of Guyana. That is very welcome to me and to a number of my hon. Friends who have the privilege of serving in this House with the support of the British Co-operative Movement. If I had any criticism to offer of the Bill it would have been that I hoped the title would have included that unique name which the Prime Minister of Guyana has chosen for his republic.

I can say, I think on behalf of those hon. Friends who share the co-operative philosophy, and the British Co-operative Movement and many millions of co-operators throughout the world, that we very much welcome that the Government of Guyana have taken this unique path. I am glad that the Guyana High Commission has made available in London the text of the speech which the Hon. Shirley Field Ridley, Minister of Education in the Guyana Government, made on the occasion of their Assembly's decision that Guyana should be a republic. It warmed my heart to read such a forthright declaration of the co-operative philosophy for a country embarking on an exciting new era in its life.

I look back on five years' service in the Ministry of Overseas Development. During that period I came to know more intimately than before I took that office the very great importance of co-operative societies of all kinds for the economic development of developing countries. Therefore, I take the opportunity of wishing Guyana well in embracing this philosophy so clearly as the basis of its new move forward. The International Co-operative Movement, through the International Co-operative Alliance, has recently declared its intention of operating an enhanced programme of activity in developing countries in the next 10 years to form part of the United Nations Second Development Decade. I look forward to the people and Government of Guyana making a commendable contribution within that 10-year programme of development of co-operative societies in the developing world.

I welcome the Bill, not just for the conventional reasons which have been adequately voiced from both Front Benches, but for the rather unusual and special reasons which relate to the co-operative philosophy which I have very much at heart and which I am glad to find that the Guyana Government also have at heart. I believe, as they appear to believe, that co-operative societies of all varieties are an important means of establishing economic viability on a democratic basis for a new country. I wish them well in this vast experiment upon which they are embarking. I hope that they will regard this new republic not merely as a new way of exercising political suffrage, but as a way of exercising economic suffrage through a practical application, in the building up of the many co-operative societies which the Hon. Shirley Field Ridley mentioned, of the co-operative philosophy they have espoused. I warmly support the Bill.

8.44 p.m.

Mr. Edwin Brooks (Bebington)

I am sure the whole House will endorse the remarks made by previous contributors to this short debate, particularly with reference to the hopes which we share in a new phase of our relationship, with an interesting and valuable member of the British Commonwealth.

Guyana is a country I recently had the privilege of visiting for an all-too-brief stay. Like all who have been able to visit this outlier of Anglo-America in the heart of Latin America, I came away with a strong sense of a vivid culture and enormous economic and political potential. Nevertheless, as I think the hon. Member for Essex, South-East (Mr. Braine) pointed out, there are several problems which it is perhaps appropriate to raise, if somewhat fleetingly, this evening, as they seem to involve one or two problems of interpretation of the Bill.

First, as I understand the comments made by Lord Shepherd in the other place, there is some discretion available to the Guyanese Government as to whether they wish to avail themselves of the right of appeal to the Privy Council. The noble Lord said in the debate in the other place: "I believe it is the intention of the Guyanese Government to withdraw from the ambit of the Privy Council; they will be taking the necessary action."—[OFFICIAL REPORT, House of Lords, 26th March, 1970; Vol. 308, c. 1506.] If I interpret those words correctly, they seem to imply that there is discretionary power available to the Guyanese Government and that they are not necessarily bound so to withdraw.

I should be grateful for the comments of my hon. Friend the Joint Under-Secretary on this point, because it touches upon a problem which gave me some concern when I was in Guyana. It is the problem of a country which has had a somewhat stormy history of racial tensions. At a moment like this, when we are only too painfully aware of the fragile peace in the Caribbean in this respect, it is appropriate to clarify what the future holds, particularly for some of the small minority groups.

I refer especially to the position of the Amerindian population of Guyana which shows, as does the Amerindian population throughout the whole of South and Central America, grave problems of adjustment to the modern world. About 15 months ago there was an uprising in the interior of Guyana which led to 48 hours of bloodshed and attempted secession from the State. This uprising in the Rupununi Savannas was—so we understand—engineered and led by some of the ranchers who have over some generations opened up this cattle country, but it inevitably involved the Amerindian population, who form the great bulk of the inhabitants of Guyana's almost unpopulated hinterland.

Since the uprising in Lethem, which was speedily crushed by the Guyanese defence forces, there have been reports, some of which I am confident have been grotesquely distorted and exaggerated, about the treatment of the Amerindian population by the Guyanese Government. Having myself been able to visit the Rupununi last October, I was able to satisfy myself about the exaggeration included in those reports.

Nevertheless, a population of relatively primitive peoples in a maelstrom of complex racial tensions is bound to be anxious about a change such as that which we are discussing, which might entail their no longer having the opportunity to take their grievances, legitimate as they no doubt would see them, to a higher court elsewhere. It would be helpful if my hon. Friend were to say a little about this aspect of what I am sure causes some of these people anxiety, however misplaced.

My second and final point has also been touched upon by the hon. Member for Essex, South-East. I refer to the rather curious position which Guyana finds herself in following her independence. No other Commonwealth country which has gained her independence has done so shadowed by a territorial anxiety on the scale which faces Guyana. It is a large country, of about 80,000 sq. miles, inhabited by a population about the size of and about as heterogeneous as that of Liverpool, of which 50,000 sq. miles have been traditionally claimed by Venezuela. Further, in recent months, Guyana has been involved in some frontier dispute with Suriname; and, although I understand from recent reports that this dispute is well on the way to peaceful reconciliation, the same cannot as yet be said, unfortunately, for the much more serious dispute with Venezuela.

The position in effect is that in 1966 when Guyana became independent, her future territorial integrity was not safeguarded in the same secure fashion as that which we would normally like to bequeath to former dependencies. The Geneva Treaty attempted to set up some machinery for ending this ancient and, in so many ways, fruitless dispute. It is nevertheless a dispute which awakens deep echoes going back into the middle of the 19th century and beyond, and anyone who has read, as I have tried to do recently, something of the intricate diplomatic history of the 1880s and the 1890s will understand how sensitive Venezuela is on this matter.

Nevertheless, there is no doubt that the Venezuelan and Guyanese Governments are sincerely trying to find some peaceful solution to what has become a festering sore which can do no good to anyone, least of all to the two countries concerned. Such an outcome, if it can be achieved, can presage a new and happy relationship between two countries which have got so much to give to one another. Therefore, it will be appropriate if my hon. Friend the Joint Under-Secretary of State will say a little about how Her Majesty's Government see the eventual outcome of these continuing uncertainties along Guyana's western frontier.

Having asked these two questions, I reiterate how much I hope that, after our long and somewhat stormy but nevertheless basically friendly links with this fascinating country in South America, although tonight we are bringing down the curtain on one phase of our history we shall tomorrow night be opening another Act which will contain much of mutual interest and of hope to both sides.

8.52 p.m.

Mr. Foley

With your permission, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and that of the House, I should like to reply to the points which have been raised in this debate.

The hon. Member for Essex, South-East (Mr. Braine) and my hon. Friend the Member for Bebington (Mr. Brooks) raised the question of appeals to the Privy Council. It is true that the Guyana Government have indicated their intention eventually to abolish all appeals to the Privy Council. I apologise if there was some delay in bringing the Bill before the House. We were trying to get clarification on this point, and that is the reason for the slight delay. Those appeals which were pending to the Privy Council on 23rd February will continue, and so will others from Guyana. The provisions of the 1966 Act will still apply until the Guyana Government introduce legislation which is passed by a two-thirds majority to alter the system.

It will be well known, too, that at the meeting earlier this month of Heads of Government of the Commonwealth Caribbean countries there was some discussion about establishing a Caribbean Court of Appeal and machinery for its further consideration. In this context, the general but not unanimous view was expressed that it would be desirable that the Commonwealth Caribbean countries should move towards the termination of appeals to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council. But at the moment appeals are still available to the Privy Council, and until the Guyana Government introduce this legislation, this will continue to be the situation.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bebington has referred to the Guyana-Venezuela border dispute, as did the hon. Member for Essex, South-East. The hon. Member has certainly done his homework, and there is no point in my recapitulating the history of the setting up of this mixed commission and our involvement in the agreement, even though we are not participants. We all share a measure of anxiety that so far it has failed to produce a conclusive, final report on its deliberations.

It is our sincere hope that the problems between the two parties will be solved peacefully by the two independent countries concerned, as provided for in the Geneva Agreement. It imposed obligations on both sides. It established the procedure which they should follow if they failed to agree. They are still discussing, so we must hope that they will reach agreement or otherwise follow the procedure in the agreement as outlined by the hon. Member for Essex, South-East. I did not share the hon. Gentleman's pessimism, although we should like to feel much more optimistic. The commission has been discussing the matter for almost four years, and there must be a measure of anxiety.

This leads me on to the hon. Gentleman's question about defence. He rightly said that there have been statements in the House by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and other Ministers, in answer to Questions, on our relationship in defence matters with the Government of Guyana. I want to make it clear that we have no defence agreement with the Government of Guyana. This is in accordance with our practice not to conclude defence agreements with countries in which we have no direct defence interest. But a military attack against Guayana would naturally be a matter of serious concern to Britain. The action that Her Majesty's Government might take in such an event would be determined in the light of all the circumstances prevailing at the time. I am reiterating what has been publicly stated in the House. This is still our policy, and will continue to be so.

The hon. Gentleman also raised the question of Guyana being a new country with a precarious economy trying to get on its feet, and the importance of aid and technical assistance, and the implications to her of the Commonwealth Sugar Agreement because of her primary produce. Our capital aid to Guyana is running at about £2 million a year, and in addition there is the development and technical assistance of which we are all aware. Naturally, Guyana, like many other Commonwealth countries which are primary producers of sugar are anxious about what will happen to the Commonwealth Sugar Agreement.

The contractual commitment is not due to end until 1974. Nevertheless, all these countries are, and must be, concerned about the implications for them of Britain's move towards joining the European Economic Communities. That is why as far back as 1967, at the time of our application, the then Foreign Secretary made it quite clear in a speech at Western European Union that we had a firm commitment to Commonwealth countries, particularly under the Commonwealth Sugar Agreement. So if there is to be discussion and ultimate agreement with the E.E.C. it must take into consideration

the implications for the primary producers, particularly those which are parties to the Commonwealth Sugar Agreement. Guyana is a member of the Caribbean Free Trade Association, the Council of which has only recently had discussions at an official level with the E.E.C. Commission on matters relating to Britain's entry to the Common Market and what it would mean to its members.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bebington, with his enormous experience in Guyana, referred to the problem of the Amerindians. He is probably more aware than anyone else of how complex are the problems in that part of the world of small ethnic groups differing from one another, and the anxieties that might be caused by an apparent change in their security as a result of the change. I believe that the Guyanans themselves are sensitive to these problems and are making considerable and enlightened efforts to overcome them. It is a measure of their success that in February of this year the Amerindian leaders reaffirmed their loyalty to the Government and State of Guyana and accepted the main recommendations of the Amerindian Lands Commission, which had recently reported on the difficult problems of land titles for a people who traditionally utilised vast tracts of land. This is a most encouraging and healthy development in terms of their history and prospects for the future.

My hon. Friend the Member for East Ham, South (Mr. Oram), with his vast knowledge and experience of the co-operatives, rightly drew our attention to the emphasis placed by the Prime Minister of Guyana on the development of co-operative institutions and the vital and increasing role that they would play in the country's development programme. I am sure that we all support the stated aim of the co-operatives in Guyana, which is to make the small man a real man. In Guyana, as elsewhere in the world, they will be judged by what they achieve.

People in all parts of the world will watch developments with interest. From the expressions of opinion from all sides of the House, it is clear that we wish the Guyana Government well in their venture.

[Question put and agreed to.]

[Bill accordingly read a Second time.]

[Bill committed to a Committee of the whole House.—[Mr. E. Armstrong.]

180. Guyana (British Troops)

GUYANA

HL Deb 21 April 1970

LORD SORENSEN

My Lords, I beg leave to ask the Question which stands in my name on the Order Paper.

[The Question was as follows: To ask Her Majesty's Government whether an agreement exists between this country and the Republic of Guyana in respect of British troops or police being provided for keeping the peace in Guyana, including the cost of this.]

THE MINISTER OF STATE, FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE (LORD SHEPHERD)

My Lords, no.

LORD SORENSEN

My Lords, while thanking my noble friend for that abbreviated reply, may I ask him whether he can amplify it a little and indicate to which portion of my Question his negative refers?

LORD SHEPHERD

My Lords, I have answered the question accurately. I am asked what agreement exists between this country and the Republic of Guyana in respect of the provision of British troops or police for keeping the peace in Guyana; the answer is no, there is no such agreement.

LORD SORENSEN

My Lords, I thank my noble friend.

LORD CLIFFORD OF CHUDLEIGH

My Lords, have external claims on Guyana been modified recently? If not, is there any agreement about British troops going to the assistance of Guyana in those cases?

LORD SHEPHERD

My Lords, I should have thought that that was entirely another question. In regard to the question of the use of British troops, I have already given the answer.

LORD BROCKWAY

My Lords, if the British troops have been withdrawn, can my noble friend say when the withdrawal took place?

LORD SHEPHERD

My Lords, there are no British troops in Guyana. I believe that the training team that was there was withdrawn in the summer of 1968, and the one officer who had been on loan to the Government of Guyana was withdrawn in March, 1969.

LORD HAWKE

My Lords, are there any Venezuelan troops in the disputed territory?

LORD SHEPHERD

My Lords, not that I am aware of.

179. Guyana Republic Bill (in House of Lords)

GUYANA REPUBLIC BILL

HL Deb 26 March 1970

11.32 a.m.

LORD SHEPHERD

My Lords, I beg to move that this Bill be now read a second time. The Bill is short and will, I think, be generally accepted as non-controversial. Guyana became a Republic within the Commonwealth on February 23, 1970. This change of status was anticipated during the preparations for Guyana's Independence and, as your Lordships will know, provision was made in the [Guyana Independence Act 1966](#), and the Guyana Independence Order 1966, made under it, to enable Guyana to become a Republic on the passing of a resolution by its National Assembly not earlier than April 1, 1969. The Guyana National Assembly passed such a resolution by an overwhelming majority in August, 1969.

As a matter of interest, the new Republic of Guyana is the ninth country among the present members of the Commonwealth to have become a Republic after a short period of having a monarch as Head of State. When the five countries which adopted republican status immediately upon independence are added, this makes Guyana the fourteenth State within the Commonwealth to have opted for republican status. One more will give the Republicans a majority within the Commonwealth. But I think one can say, from one's experience of the Commonwealth, that being a Republic does not in any way reduce the affection which the people of those countries have towards Her Majesty The Queen, as Head of the Commonwealth.

This Bill is in fact a technical measure and substantively follows the lines of previous legislation in parallel cases. It provides that the operation of the law of the United Kingdom—and the law of the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man—as it applies to Guyana will not be affected by the fact that Guyana is now a Republic. The Bill will not apply generally to the law of Dependent Territories of the United Kingdom but only to Acts of the British Parliament and Orders in Council applying such Acts which extend to such territories. This is the common-form provision in such cases.

In accordance with the accepted convention, Guyana sought the agreement of other Commonwealth Governments to her remaining in the Commonwealth, despite the change to a republican Constitution. As the Commonwealth Secretary-General announced on September 17, 1969, all the Heads of Government of the Commonwealth indicated that they would welcome Guyana's continuing membership of the Commonwealth. On March 17, the Guyana National Assembly elected Mr. Arthur Chung as the first President of Guyana under its republican Constitution. I am sure that all noble Lords will join me in extending to Mr. Chung, representing the Government and people of Guyana, our sincere wishes for their future peace and prosperity. My Lords, I beg to move.

[Moved, That the Bill be now read a second time —(Lord Shepherd.)]

11.35 a.m.

THE MARQUESS OF LANSDOWNE

My Lords, I thank the Minister for his explanation of this Bill. From these Benches we also should like to extend our good wishes to the new President of the Republic of Guyana. There are just two points over which I should like the Minister to help me. Under Article 92 of the 1966 Constitution the people of Guyana had the right of appeal to the Privy Council. I should like to know whether this right of appeal will persist. Perhaps the Minister can give me an answer to that.

I think we were all pleased to note the way in which the economic strength of Guyana had steadily progressed since it became a member of the Caribbean Free Trade Area. We all know that the principal export of Guyana is sugar; they depend very largely on that crop. As a firm supporter of our entry into the Common Market, on the right terms, I should like to receive an assurance from the Minister that the interests of the Guyanese in their export of sugar will be kept well in the mind of Her Majesty's Government when we are conducting negotiations to obtain admission to the European Economic Community.

I am sure all of us on this side of the House share the feelings of delight of Her Majesty's Government at knowing that the Guyanese people, although they have become a Republic, are no less devoted to the person of Her Majesty the Queen. With those words, I should like to wish the Guyanese people and their President well.

11.37 a.m.

LORD BOOTHBY

My Lords, may I be allowed to say that the noble Lord, Lord Shepherd, has surely confirmed what I have long believed: that never in human history has a great Empire been liquidated with such skill and grace. But I also think that as shortly we are likely to have a majority of Republics within the Commonwealth it follows that the Commonwealth, as I said last week, does not mean quite so much as it used to do, either in political or in economic terms.

11.38 a.m.

LORD SHEPHERD

My Lords, I am grateful for the support the two noble Lords have given to this Bill. I believe it is the intention of the Guyanese Government to withdraw from the ambit of the Privy Council; they will be taking the necessary action. In regard to sugar, I would agree with the noble Marquess. We ourselves attach great importance to the Commonwealth Sugar Agreement, in which Guyana is a participant. I can assure the noble Marquess that we have very much in mind the position not only of the sugar producing countries but of all those other countries within the Commonwealth, and of course outside, which depend upon commodities such as sugar, and the effect on them of our entry into the Common Market. We can confirm our assurance that we will do all possible to get the best terms for them. The noble Marquess will also be aware that when discussions and negotiations take place those countries which are interested will be able to be represented to express their points of view.

I can only disagree with the noble Lord, Lord Boothby, on his speech last week. I personally believe that the Commonwealth still has much to offer, not only to ourselves but to the world. I think the world would be a much poorer place without this great community of nations, going right across the board in religion, politics, colour—"You name it, they've got it." It would be a poorer world without them. But I also disagree with the noble Lord because he is slightly inaccurate. We have not exactly liquidated our colonial Empire. We still have quite a few—some 5 million— people to look after; and I hope we shall have the noble Lord's support in looking after them.

[On Question, Bill read a second time; Committee negatived.]

178. Guyana

Guyana

HC Deb 02 March 1970

Mr. Brooks

asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will pay an official visit to Guyana.

Mr. M. Stewart

I have no plans to visit Guyana at present.

Mr. Brooks

As we are now beyond the deadline set by the 1966 Geneva Treaty for submitting the frontier dispute with Venezuela to the United Nations, has my right hon. Friend any proposals to help ease the constant friction along Guyana's frontiers, not least those with Suriname?

[Mr. Stewart](#)

My hon. Friend will be aware that the Geneva Agreement provided for a period of four years, but the agreement does not come to an end. After that, it is for the countries concerned, in consultation with the Secretary-General of the United Nations, to try to seek a pacific settlement of the dispute. This I hope they will do.

177. Venezuela and Guyana (Border Dispute)

Venezuela and Guyana (Border Dispute)

HC Deb 02 February 1970

[Mr. Brooks](#)

asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he is yet in a position to announce the results of the work of the joint commission set up at Geneva in February, 1966, to investigate the border dispute between Venezuela and the then State of British Guiana; and whether he now proposes to have discussions with the Governments of Venezuela and Guyana to consider further steps towards a peaceful outcome of the dispute.

[Mr. M. Foley](#)

No, the Mixed Commission has not yet made its final report. Discussions on all aspects of the border dispute are a part of our day-to-day diplomatic contacts with the Governments of Guyana and Venezuela.

176. Death of Sir David Rose —Scaffolding (Safety)

Death of Sir David Rose —Scaffolding (Safety)

HC Deb 29 January 1970

[Mr. Fisher](#)

asked the Secretary of State for Employment and Productivity what regulations she has made to ensure the inspection and safety of scaffolding.

Mr. Harold Walker

These matters are covered by the Construction (Working Places) Regulations 1966 (S.I. 1966 No. 94).

Mr. Fisher

Is the hon. Gentleman aware that I wonder whether they are adequately covered? In view of the tragic death of Sir David Rose, the Governor-General of Guyana, in Whitehall, is the hon. Gentleman entirely satisfied that existing arrangements adequately safeguard the public, since if scaffolding is expected to be used for only six months the Factory Inspectorate does not have to be informed? Is he aware that in those cases there is literally no safeguard for the public as to how it is used?

Mr. Walker

Without detracting from the proper concern and sympathy over this particularly tragic incident, I do not think that we ought to be stampeded by one or two spectacular accidents from focusing our attention on what are the real causes for concern. If we look at the accidents in the construction industry, those arising from scaffolding collapses form only a minor part. I have had a full inquiry made into this accident, as a consequence of which the district factory inspector has decided to prosecute both the scaffolding contractor and the main contractor for breaches of the regulations. The case is expected to be heard early in February.