

'Self-rule a vital necessity'

Following is the text of the address by the Hon. Dr. Eric Williams, Premier of Trinidad, at the second public session of the West Indies Independence Conference at Lancaster House on Thursday:

"ALMOST two years ago, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago officially proposed a firm date for the independence of the West Indies.

"At an informal meeting in Port of Spain in February, presided over by the Rt. Hon. the Under Secretary of State for the Colonies, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago proposed that an independence conference should be convened in London on May 31, following the Inter-Governmental Conference in Port of Spain.

"Her Majesty's Government accepted this proposal and issued invitations to this conference at Lancaster House. The Trinidad and Tobago delegation is determined that there shall be no further delay in the achievement of independence.

"The independence of the West Indies is long overdue. The oldest of the British colonies, the population has been drawn for the most part from subjected peoples and colonial countries — slaves from Africa, political exiles from Ireland, contract workers from China, indentured labourers from India.

Ireland, China, India, many African territories have achieved independence and have refuted the traditional allegation that their peoples are unfit for self-government.

Isolated

"West Indian independence is a vital necessity in the Caribbean area. For four and a half centuries the Caribbean territories have been kept isolated one from the other the pawn of international power, politics, the prey of local tyrants.

"This is not only past history, it is a reality in some parts of the Caribbean today. An independent West Indies Federation therefore, must on the one hand be the symbol of law and order, of stability and democracy. On the other hand, with the end of isolationism in the former British colonies, the Federation must consciously keep before its eyes that vision of a larger regional co-operation which many great thinkers have anticipated for the Caribbean, and which other countries hitherto separated, are attempting in other parts of the world.

"The relations of the independent West Indies with the United Kingdom, involve fundamental questions — the European Common Market, economic aid, defence assistance and migration to the United Kingdom.

"In the contemporary world, both the more advanced nations and international organizations recognise a responsibility to provide economic, technical and defence assistance to emerging countries.

"The West Indies have a very special claim on the United Kingdom. No other former British colony has had a longer or closer association with the United Kingdom. No other British colony can claim a history which is more intimately associated with famous names in British history — Elizabeth I and Cromwell, Drake and Raleigh, Rodney and Nelson, Clarkson and Wilberforce, William Pitt and Gladstone, Adam Smith and John Stuart Mill. No other former British colony can claim as the West Indies can claim, in the words of one of the greatest Royal Commissions ever sent out to the West Indies, that Britain has placed the labouring population of the West Indies where it is, and cannot divest itself of responsibility for its future.

Cannot suffice

"INDEPENDENCE, however, demands a new Federal Constitution. The constitution produced in 1956 by ten separate colonies, creating an eleventh political entity, itself colonial in character, cannot possibly suffice for an independent people who have more or less achieved full internal self-government.

"A substantial measure of agreement has been reached on the new constitution. The Trinidad and Tobago delegation is confident that with goodwill and understanding, outstanding difficulties can be resolved and that this conference can proceed to fix a date for Independence, so that the West Indies can take their rightful place in the Commonwealth and in the family of nations."

—UKIO

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