

Address of His Excellency David Granger
President of the Republic of Guyana
On the Occasion of
The 49th Anniversary of Guyana's Independence

26 May 2015

Fellow Guyanese,

Guyana, today, celebrates the Independence it gained on 26th May 1966 after 350 years of Dutch and British colonisation. We are assembled at this national monument in solemn remembrance of the lives and labours of our heroes.

We are assembled here to pay homage to those who agitated for decades to achieve national Independence. We are their heirs. We have a duty to actualise the vision of our nation's founding fathers who fought to create the new state. We have a duty to continue the work they started to transform a divided colony into a united 'Nation.'

Today is a day of thanksgiving. We give thanks for the gift of Independence

Independence was not the work of one person or one party. It was the product of a movement of the Caribbean people. It was a process that took place over a long period of 50 years.

Workers were the true pioneers. It was they who rebelled against British Colonialism first, during the distress after the First and Second World Wars in 1918 and 1945, respectively. During the 'Labour Rebellion' of the 1930s, 29 workers were killed and 115 injured throughout the West Indies and British Guiana. We pay homage to the workers for their sacrifice.

Legislators followed. Theophilus Lee, the first President of the British Guiana Trades Union Council – BGTUC – a Chinese-Guyanese and a member of the Legislative Council, moved a motion there that led to the establishment of the Waddington Commission which, in turn, led to the introduction of universal adult franchise. This is the same franchise which we exercised 15 days ago. The Commission's recommendations also led to internal self-government and, finally, Independence. We pay homage to our legislators for their leadership.

It was the ordinary people, however, who bore the brunt of destruction during the 'Disturbances' of 1964. The government-of-the-day employed every devious device – including arson and murder – to delay elections under the proportional representation system. This is much the same system which installed a new government 10 days ago. We pay homage to the more than 176 persons who were reported to have been murdered in that awful year during the struggle for Independence.

Independence came in 1966 after decades of distress and distrust. Let us not now dwell on the pain of the past but look with faith to the future. Let the sacrifice of those who struggled and died inspire us today and guide generations to come tomorrow and beyond.

Independence meant change – from colony to nation; from subject to citizen; from subjugation to liberation and from discrimination to dignity and equality.

Let us recall the wise words of our first Prime Minister who said: "Independence ... is a means towards an end. The end must be the changing of our society and the revolutionising of the economy". Change is a never-ending process and we must not cease.

Let us resolve to work together, therefore, to change our society into one of greater equality. Let us strive to change our economy into one of greater prosperity. Let us our country to a nation of peace and unity.

Happy Independence Day. May God bless Guyana!