

6th November, 1974.

Speech By Dr. Eric Williams, Prime Minister Of
Trinidad And Tobago, At Peking Banquet
- NOVEMBER 5, 1974

Respected Vice-Premier,
Representatives of the Government of the People's
Republic of China,
Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have been honoured by your Premier's invitation to visit the People's Republic of China. I come to you as the Representative of one of a long chain of islands in the Caribbean whose discovery, nearly five centuries ago, ushered in the world of Colonialism, production of plantation crops by forced labour for the European Market, and Racism. We in the Caribbean have the dubious distinction of being the first area in the modern world to demonstrate in practice that theory of Economic Development so dear to the Apologists for Colonialism, Nordic Capital directing black labour.

The particular Caribbean country which I represent, Trinidad and Tobago, has a population of one million people, who achieved their independence twelve years ago, in 1962. Thus, since many parts of the Caribbean are still under Colonial rule, direct or indirect, open or disguised, the Caribbean Territories, the first to be enslaved under modern Colonialism, are among the last to be emancipated from it. Like many other Caribbean countries, agriculture is for the most part synonymous with the production of plantation crops for distant markets, particularly sugar, but also including cocoa, coffee, bananas, citrus - cotton and tobacco have virtually disappeared under the stress of competition from other Colonial Territories. The Caribbean countries are small in area and in population, with Cuba the largest of them - the Guyana Territories on the South American Mainland, which are normally included with them, are vast unexplored areas with populations smaller than those of the island territories. Excluding the as yet undertermined potential of the three Guyanas, the mineral resources of the Caribbean are principally bauxite - which is found in the three Guyana Territories, Jamaica, Haiti and the Dominican Republic - and Hydrocarbons, up to the present limited only to Trinidad.

The Caribbean populations are among the most cosmopolitan and heterogeneous which would be found anywhere in the world. To the pitiful remnants of the indigenous Amerindians have been added Europeans from almost all countries in Western Europe and Americans from both North and South America. The Africans originally introduced to satisfy the demands of compulsory plantation labour have been supplemented by Indians and Pakistanis in large numbers in some territories, as well as by some Indonesians in Surinam. Arabs rub shoulders with Jews, and have been doing so from the earliest settlement of the territories.

Over the last century and a quarter a large number of Chinese have been introduced into some of the countries - the majority in Cuba, whilst significant minorities are to be found in Trinidad, Guyana and Surinam. This Chinese migration was part of a larger movement of Chinese workers under contract of the new world to replace the emancipated

Africans or in some cases, to supplement the Africans, where,

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as in Cuba, continued large scale importation of African workers was no longer possible.

Thus, when I say to you that I am happy to be here with you in Peking and to accept your hospitality which I would hope we can soon reciprocate appropriately, I am not merely expressing the sentiments conventional to an occasion like this, I am also happy to be in a country which has contributed to our Caribbean population and if I may be allowed, Vice-Premier, to interject a personal note, is that the country - where the maternal Grandfather of my daughter is one of the oldest of Chinese immigrants in Trinidad, - and a country which, through our Caribbean citizens of Chinese ancestry, has enhanced our development both positively and maternally - in such professions as law and medicine, in business and industry, in the field of education, in sport, in art and culture, and most emphatically in administration and in the highest Offices of State. Until his recent resignation the Governor General of Trinidad and Tobago, appointed by the Queen on my advice as Prime Minister, was a Chinese who has risen to the highest position in the Public Service.

This is perhaps one of the best manifestations of the equality of opportunity for all ethnic groups of which we often boast in the Caribbean, at least because it stands in such sharp contrast to the social realities in mixed societies in other parts of the world. Whatever may have been the fate of your compatriots in other parts of the world, including the New World in general, in Trinidad and Tobago, at least, there has been, and there is, no Chinatown. It would not be easy to estimate the number of our teen-age students of Chinese ancestry who have been able to proceed, solely on the objective criterion of merit, at the expense of the Government, to advanced University and Professional training in various parts of the world - and if and when they return to their native home, they find no doors closed in their faces and no obstacle to the pursuit of their profession on equal terms with any other National, irrespective of race or colour or religion, in the service of the National Community.

I hope you would allow me to add, in my purely personal capacity, as a student of the history of the entire Caribbean Region, that, by this visit to China, I have completed my personal familiarity with all the major regions of the world whose peoples have contributed to the development of the Caribbean region of today.

Thus Trinidad and Tobago has this in common with China, that we are joint victims of European Colonialism and have messed out of, the same pot of injustice, humiliation, servitude in one form or another, and racial prejudice and discrimination.

But Trinidad and Tobago - and in fact the Caribbean generally - has another bond in common with the People's Republic of China - we both have been making, and are making, common efforts in the field of de-colonisation, the control of our national destiny, and the struggle against apartheid and racism.

We have watched with interest the achievement of the People's Republic of China in the development of Agriculture with adequate supplies of indigenously produced food, the development of indigenous industry and manufacturers, with particular emphasis on the steel industry, and its current emergence as a major producer of oil in the contemporary world. All of these have enormous significance for us in Trinidad and Tobago.

With our one million people, we cannot possibly hope to emulate either the science or the technology or the organization which produced the nuclear capability of the People's Republic of China - that is to say, we cannot escape the reality of the fundamental divergence between a large country of the Third World like yours and a small country like ours. But historically the product of an Economic Regime in which a substantial proportion of our basic food supply has been imported from outside, thus leaving us vulnerable to the vagaries and inconsistencies and inflation, I repeat, and inflation of the world market, in our current efforts to achieve economic independence, we have much to be

inspired by and to learn from the success of the green revolution of the People's Republic of China.

Historically also we have been the victims of a deliberately imposed Colonial Policy of subjecting Colonial Territories to an exclusive concentration on primary raw materials, whether agricultural or industrial, whilst we bought our processed food and manufacturers from the imperialist country. Here again our current efforts to achieve economic independence can find much to emulate and much to adapt from the success in the manufacturing field of the People's Republic of China.

The so-called world energy crisis of the past twelve months has brought this home to us dramatically, especially in Trinidad and Tobago. If this world energy crisis means anything at all, it means emphatically this: whatever the complaints or the outcries of the so-called developed countries, the oil-producing developing countries are taking advantage of an unexpected opportunity to correct the historical imbalance between developed countries and developing countries, by greater national ownership of their oil resources and by conscious direction of these resources and the revenues generated by them for the development of large-scale indigenous industrialisation, highly diversified, for the complete and total rehabilitation of their agricultural organization - in short, for the restructuring of the economies bequeathed to them by Colonialism on its deathbed.

We in Trinidad and Tobago, about the smallest among the oil producers, constitute an integral part of this world movement. Our oil resources on land, always small, have been rapidly disappearing, but they are now being supplemented by important and potentially substantial off-shore discoveries of both oil and gas. At the same time we have, over the years, developed an important refinery capacity based on large imports of crude oil to supplement small and dwindling indigenous land production. The immediate result has been not only that we have been spared the balance of payments problem which so many developing countries are encountering, but we also have the basis for development in the petrochemical field and in industries requiring substantial supplies of energy. All these developments are based on majority government participation in joint ventures with outside corporations who assist with the investment, entrepreneurial skill, technological expertise and marketing experience which we lack.

Among the major opportunities we are now actively pursuing are - in specific relations to agriculture, petroleum-based substitute for the stock feeds that we must now import and the production of substantial quantities of fertiliser for all our Caribbean neighbours - in the field of human nutrition, the development of a petroleum-based source of protein that we so urgently need - in the field of industrial diversification and the urgent need for ever more jobs for our people, a domestic supply of the synthetic textiles we now import for our labour-intensive garment industry, and development of such new industries as aluminium produced from bauxite imported from Caribbean Territories, and steel based on iron ore imported from Brazil - and the inevitable concomitants of such economic progress, for example, an indigenous shipping organization to rescue us from the tender mercies of the shipping cartels of the developed countries.

Our present plans include the dedication of a substantial part of our oil revenues to the supply of food for the Caribbean population and the general improvement of agriculture, including forest products.

Fertiliser, steel, aluminium, food processing, industries for furniture, building materials and paper, merely to mention these sufficiently indicates to you the significance - to us, and, we hope to you - of our visit to the People's Republic of China. Our visit is not divorced from purely material considerations. We know from UNCTAD and the non-aligned conferences, the importance of interchanges.

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and trade between Third World Countries. If we need to remind any Third World Country of this, it is surely not the People's Republic of China, with its record in this field going back as far as twenty years to Bandung.

Implicit in all our efforts to restructure our economy and take greater control of our national destiny, is the determination to break through the narrow confines of the Colonial trading pattern and to seek new trading partners. The People's Republic of China and the Government of Trinidad and Tobago (it will not be long before you will have to refer to us as the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago), are currently discussing the possibility of our supplying the Republic of China with some of our own

indigenous production of fertiliser. But with your gigantic needs in this field as you continuously expand your agricultural revolution, I ask you to remember that, within three years at most, we will have substantial supplies of fertiliser for export.

It is in this context that we hope to be able to discuss with you some areas of cooperation between our two countries. Such cooperation should be not only economic but also cultural. It is against this background that we were very happy to reach agreement with the People's Republic of China on the establishment of diplomatic relations. And it is against this background that our Cabinet decided, in our budget earlier this year, that Chinese must be included among the international languages which we will henceforth emphasise in view of our developing international relations.

In all of this, Trinidad and Tobago faces one overpowering handicap - the continued fragmentation of the Caribbean Region involving both direct foreign control of large areas and the continuing psychological dependence produced by many centuries of Colonial rule. Your own protracted struggle in China to achieve national unity and remove the vestiges of the foreign spheres of influence which made the China of the past century the football of rival imperialisms will perhaps allow you to view with sympathy the fragility of our efforts at economic integration and our almost pathetic lack of a national identity - the unfortunate combination of the Trinity of ethnic jealousies within each territory, the isolation of one territory from the others, and, worst of all, the insularity, both individual and collective, inevitably associated with Island States and particularly small Island States.

If I have given emphasis to our Caribbean relations, this is not to be construed as indifference to or subordination of other aspects of our international relations. Our Caribbean perspectives embrace the entire Caribbean region irrespective of historical background or national sovereignty. In our Latin American relations we have unequivocally stood for the incorporation of all countries, I repeat all countries, in the Western Hemisphere fraternity. We support fully Latin America's insistence in national ownership of their resources and better terms of trade, with special emphasis on their policy on the Law of the Sea. We stand resolutely opposed to the perpetuation of Colonialism in any shape or form, whether in Africa or elsewhere we denounce unambiguously the pernicious practice of apartheid and the degradations associated with it. We maintain the close relations with the oil producing countries of the Third World, and stand ready to support generally, what we have already put into practice in respect of our Caribbean colleagues, assistance by the oil producing countries to their less fortunate brethren in the Third World.

And now, as I look forward to closer links with the Government and People of China and to our forthcoming discussions and frank exchange of views, I propose a toast.

Toasts were made to:

The National Leader, Chairman Mao, the Premier Chou En-Lai, to the Vice Premier, and to the Government and People of the People's Republic of China, to the Health of the Missions and their wives present.
