

MOST SECRET.

GOVERNMENT HOUSE,
TRINIDAD.

28th December, 1940.

MY LORD,

I have the honour to invite reference to the late Lord Lothian's telegrams No. 2960 and No. 2961 of the 7th December to the Foreign Office on the subject of United States bases in Trinidad and to give the following summary of what passed at the interview referred to therein. I should mention here that after studying the four Memoranda which I had brought with me and which were enclosed with my Despatch of the 3rd December, 1940, to Your Lordship, Lord Lothian had discussed the question very fully with me on the previous day and had been sufficiently impressed by the facts of the case to decide that it was necessary to give me this opportunity. Besides the late Lord Lothian and myself there were present at the interview on the British side the Naval Attache, Admiral Pott, and the First Secretary, Mr. Hoyer Millar. The United States delegation was composed of Mr. Hickerson of the State Department (European Section), Captain Schurman (Navy Department), Colonel Crawford (War Department) and Admiral Greenslade. The first three of these gentlemen are, I understand, members of the Interdepartmental Committee referred to in Mr. Butler's telegram No. 3106 of the 15th December to the Foreign Office.

2. The meeting opened with a few words from Lord Lothian, who explained that he had thought it might be useful to give me an opportunity of explaining informally the attitude of the Government of Trinidad and the possible attitude of the people of the Colony towards the proposals put forward by Admiral Greenslade for the location of the United States bases, and then invited me to speak. I started by saying that I understood it was rather an unusual thing for the Governor of a British Colony to pay a visit to the United States. If this really was so I was all the more pleased to be one of the first to do so. My wife had been in Washington a few months before with our youngest son, who had just been operated upon in St. Louis, and had told me so much, on her return, of the extreme kindness of everyone there that I welcomed the opportunity of making a personal visit. I then explained that, while I represented His Majesty the King in Trinidad, I was in no position to dictate either to the Government or the people of the Colony. A British Colonial Governor was in no sense an autocrat. It was his duty to consult the representatives of public opinion in the Colony on all important matters and to interpret their views whenever necessary to His Majesty's Government. I liked to think that I was regarded by the people of Trinidad more as their friend and counsellor than as a Governor, and it was as a democrat that I was speaking to the representatives of a democratic Government. I then described the people of the Colony, their loyalty to the British Crown, their war effort, the diverse communities of which they were made up, and the composition of the Executive and Legislative Councils and of the Municipal bodies. I explained that proposals were before Your Lordship for an amendment of the Constitution on the general lines recommended by the Royal Commission which had recently visited the West Indies, and expressed the view that in making arrangements which were to hold good for a century it would be prudent to bear in mind the degree

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE
LORD LLOYD OF DOLOBRAN,
G.C.S.I., G.C.I.E., D.S.O.,
Colonial Office.

of self-government which might be attained by the people of the Colony before the end of that long period. The guiding principle that had informed the whole of my actions in the matter of the proposed bases in Trinidad was that nothing should be done under pressure of war conditions of a nature to impair Anglo-American relations throughout the very much longer period that would follow the conclusion of peace.

3. With regard to the question of urgency, I pointed out that when representatives had been sent by the United States Government to Trinidad only a week before the outbreak of war to conclude secret arrangements for a seaplane base, the matter had been arranged in thirty-six hours, even though this involved obtaining the consent of what was not unfairly reported as being a somewhat difficult body, namely the City Council of Port-of-Spain, to hand back to the Colonial Government a much coveted area of land in the heart of the Capital. I asked the United States representatives to believe that I realised to the full the absolute necessity of prompt decisions being taken in war time on matters affecting defence and the mutual interest of the British and United States Governments. I told them that if I had been able to do a similar lightning deal with Admiral Greenslade nothing would have given me greater pleasure, and it hurt me to see the suggestion made in certain American periodicals that the Government of Trinidad did not appreciate the urgency of the situation but was holding things up in order to make the best possible bargain for the Colony.

4. The last general point that I impressed upon the United States representatives before embarking upon details was that the proximity of Trinidad to America naturally led the people of the Colony to look up to the United States in a great many material matters. For example, they regarded the United States as leaders of the world in such matters as the construction of automobiles, the provision of electric power, and every form of public works. They read with interest of the vast schemes undertaken by the United States Government in the way of reclamation (such as that which was at the moment proceeding for the Washington Airport), water works, dams, &c. They had been very much impressed by the fact that schemes which had been merely spoken of as dreams in Trinidad for the last 20 or 30 years were now taking concrete shape under the guidance of the distinguished American engineer who had generously offered his services as Housing Commissioner and Town Planner at a nominal salary for the period of the war. The people of Trinidad were animated by the most friendly feelings towards the United States of America and it was of the utmost importance that these feelings should be cherished and developed to the greatest possible extent. It was, therefore, vital that I should be in a position to explain to them that any views put forward in their interest by the Trinidad Government had been thoroughly and sympathetically examined and that if the proposals of the Trinidad Government were not accepted it was for unanswerable reasons which any sensible person would at once accept.

5. I then asked whether the representatives would prefer that I should first explain the Trinidad Government proposals or outline the objections that were felt in Trinidad to certain of the proposals put forward by the United States authorities. The general view was that it would be more logical for me to begin by explaining in what respect the proposals of the United States Government were unacceptable and I accordingly did so, having first pointed out the three reasons why I had not put forward my objections at the time of Admiral Greenslade's visit. In the first place, my instructions were to give the Mission every possible facility, which I had endeavoured to do (at this point Admiral Greenslade interposed with a hearty endorsement that he had been given all possible help),

but to incur no commitments of any kind ; as Admiral Greenslade would remember I had opened our final discussion by making it clear that nothing I said should be interpreted as conveying either acceptance or refusal of his requests. In the second place, I had received no instructions at that time about the further facilities which it is true I knew that the Mission were going to ask for, but upon which His Majesty's Government had not, at that time, expressed any opinion, namely an area for the cantonment of an army of thirty to forty thousand men. In the third place, Admiral Greenslade had naturally not been able to formulate his proposals until the day before he was due to leave ; I had then to discuss them with my advisers ; on the following day there were a number of questions I had to put to him in order to ascertain exactly what they involved ; and his reply had only reached me just as the ship was sailing.

6. I then went through the three Memoranda which formed Enclosures 2, 3 and 4 to my Despatch of 3rd December, namely, the Memorandum by Mr. Wharton on the subject of the suggestion that the North-West peninsula should be leased to the United States Government, that by Dr. Rankine on the health aspect of the above proposal, and that by Mr. Brooks on the conditions in the Long Stretch Reserve, Cumuto Reserve and environs. I asked the Ambassador if he saw any objection to these Memoranda being subsequently sent to the Committee so that they might have an opportunity of refreshing their memories on the various points raised, and it was arranged that this should be done. I found the same difficulty during this conversation as I had experienced in Trinidad in finding out what actual facilities the United States required both in the North-West peninsula and in the Cumuto Reserve. With regard to the naval base, it appeared that the number of cruisers had risen from 4 to 6, but there still seemed to be the same doubt whether there was to be a floating dock or not. In reply to an enquiry from Mr. Hickerson, Admiral Greenslade admitted that he would recommend that the risk should be taken of allowing ships to lie in the anchorage without protection, as he had no idea how long it would take for nets to be made available. I also found the same reluctance to discuss the possibility of temporary arrangements being made to cover the war period, though I had armed myself with reports, of which I enclose copies and of which I communicated the contents over the table to the United States representatives, showing to what extent temporary facilities could be made available both at Mucurapo and on the reclaimed area in Port-of-Spain and in the vicinity of the Cumuto site, but outside the area condemned by the Conservator of Forests. With regard to the army and air facilities, Admiral Greenslade pointed out, in the first place, that an air base would in any case require a considerable area of land and that the eighteen square miles for which he had asked could not fairly be ascribed to the new demand for the accommodation of two army divisions. He said that he wished to correct the incorrect impression that "naval and air bases" meant naval bases and naval air bases ; it meant naval bases and air bases both naval and military. With regard to the area condemned by the Conservator of Forests he said that it had never been intended to station troops there, but merely to use the area for storage of supplies and ammunition. Upon my enquiring at this point why in that case General Devers had insisted upon the strip of land to the East of the Long Stretch, he replied that he was "dummed" if he knew. He added that the demand for accommodation for troops had been reduced from 30/40,000 to 9,000, of whom 3,500 would be airmen, and the Ambassador mentioned at this stage that no objection would be raised to the leasing of an area for land forces. It was not, however, made clear whether the area of eighteen square miles that had been demanded would be correspondingly reduced.

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7. I then read out Mr. Grinnell's Memorandum, which formed the first enclosure to my Despatch of 3rd December, and after explaining it in great detail suggested that the United States Government should send a competent representative down to examine Mr. Grinnell's scheme and present an agreed report with him and Mr. Beard in order to satisfy the people of Trinidad that it had received proper consideration. I said that I made no claim to be an engineer but that I had a great respect for the opinions of Mr. Grinnell and Mr. Beard and that it did seem to me reasonable to ask that their views should be examined with rather more care than was possible during the visit of the Greenslade Mission. I pointed out that the objections raised by Commander Bragg on the ground of the unsuitability of the soil to bear heavy weights had already been disposed of by subsequent boring, and it seemed to me that further investigation might still more strongly bear out the views of my advisers. Alternatively, I was ready to send Mr. Grinnell and Mr. Beard to Washington to discuss the matter with United States engineers. Neither of these proposals found favour with the United States delegation. Capt. Schurman said that he was a dredging man and pointed out various difficulties in the way of dredging a channel to the Caroni swamp, none of which when I repeated them on my return to Trinidad carried any conviction with Mr. Grinnell or Mr. Beard. Upon my asking whether it was true that there were two large dredgers which could complete the work in the time estimated, I was told that there were, in fact, two such dredgers, one of which was on the Pacific coast and the other in New York Harbour but that it would be very difficult to move them in the open sea. I then said that Mr. Grinnell was under the impression that there was a powerful dredging craft on the Mississippi. Capt. Schurman replied that this was one of the two mentioned above and that it had been moved from the mouth of the Mississippi to New York Harbour, presumably by the open sea. The question of expense was then raised by Mr. Hickerson, who explained that the people of the United States had unfortunately assumed that they would be called upon to incur no expenditure upon the bases in view of the fact that fifty destroyers had been handed over in exchange for them. The Ambassador at once pointed out that the Agreement of the 2nd September had made the position perfectly clear, which Mr. Hickerson readily admitted. He repeated however that the American public were under the impression that no further money would have to be provided, and appeared to anticipate some difficulty in removing it. I then threw out the tentative suggestion that if their own proposals were accepted the Trinidad Government might be prepared in due course to refund to the United States Government the difference between the actual cost of their operations in the Caroni area and an agreed estimate of all the operations that they would otherwise have carried out in the neighbourhood of the North-West peninsula and the Cumuto area, but this suggestion was brushed aside.

8. My explanations, of which this is necessarily an imperfect record, took nearly two hours to make and were listened to with the greatest patience and good humour. When I had finished, Mr. Hickerson told the Ambassador that the position was that the President had accepted the recommendations of the Greenslade Mission and that he did not see what the Committee could do about the question of the choice of site. They had no power to consider this at all, since their terms of reference were merely to advise the President on all questions that might subsequently arise in relation to the bases. I asked the Ambassador whether he knew that the President had accepted the recommendations of the Greenslade Mission and whether he had seen these recommendations, but he

had not, and I do not know whether their text has yet been communicated to the British Embassy at Washington. If it has, I should be grateful if I might be furnished with a copy. Mr. Hickerson did however undertake that the four Memoranda would be carefully considered and answered in detail in a form which I could if I wished lay upon the table of the Legislative Council of this Colony.

9. As reported in my telegram No. 892 of the 10th December, I came away from the conference satisfied that it was virtually certain that the United States Government were not prepared to accept the Caroni alternative wholeheartedly or to use their full resources to make a success of it, but I was under the impression, as reported in my telegram No. 924 of the 21st December, that my personal explanation had removed any suspicion from the minds of the United States authorities that the Trinidad Government were actuated by any motive other than to secure cordial relations between the two Governments for the next hundred years, and the best arrangement in the interest of both parties. Both the Ambassador and Mr. Hickerson were kind enough to say that they thought that the views of the people of this Colony had been well expressed and there was, so far as I could see, no trace of ill-feeling on the part of any individual present at the meeting. It is true that at one stage Mr. Hickerson remarked that in the whole course of his researches into the history of naval bases he had found no precedent for the construction of an artificial naval base where a natural one was available. To this I replied that I doubted whether there had ever been an analogous case where one Power had agreed to the establishment in a small island of a naval base by the other and the only natural site was one the adoption of which might lead to difficulties between them. I see from Mr. Butler's telegram No. 3261 of the 24th December to the Foreign Office that the Secretary for the Navy has quite recently expressed resentment at the fact that the suggestion was made that the United States combined base might be situated in an area reclaimed from the Caroni swamp. In view of the extreme cordiality that marked the proceedings and the patient and appreciative hearing that was given to my arguments, it does not seem to me credible that any of the individuals who were present at the meeting can have harboured any resentment. It was unfortunate, and has since turned out to be all the more unfortunate in view of the lamented death of Lord Lothian, that the Secretary for the Navy was not in Washington at the time and did not attend the meeting. It is also unfortunate that President Roosevelt was unable to extend his tour of the Caribbean from Martinique to Trinidad, as I am confident that if I had had the opportunity of discussing the question with him in the general terms authorised in Your Lordship's telegram No. 884 of the 4th December and subsequently agreed upon more specifically with the late Lord Lothian as foreshadowed in paragraph 3 of His Lordship's telegram No. 3955 of the 7th December to the Foreign Office, any feeling of resentment that might previously have existed in his mind would certainly have been dissipated. The last words that Admiral Greenslade himself said to me before leaving the room were "Almost thou persuadest me".

10. I have sent copies of this despatch with enclosures to the Chargé d'Affaires, Washington, and to the Commander-in-Chief, America and West Indies Station.

I have the honour to be,

My Lord,

Your Lordship's most obedient, humble servant,

HUBERT YOUNG,
Governor.