

Statement to the House of Assembly

on

Friday 10 December 2004

by

Premier, the Honourable W. Alexander Scott JP, MP

regarding

The Bermuda Independence Commission

Mr. Speaker and members of this Honourable House, I am pleased to stand this morning to announce the formation of the **Bermuda Independence Commission.**

The BIC as it may come to be called will be an **independent** body of persons drawn from the widest, most representative cross-section of individuals, groups, unions and organisations in Bermuda.

The Bermuda Independence Commission will have the express purpose of educating, informing and encouraging discussion and debate on the subject of Independence for Bermuda.

Mr. Speaker, the issue of Independence or the right to choose one's own destiny has been under consideration in Bermuda since the 1960's.

In fact, Bermuda's Constitution, the Bermuda Constitution Order 1968 was drafted in contemplation of Bermuda moving towards Independence or self-determination in the **then** not too distant future. That was some thirty-seven (37) years ago.

In the 'Foreword' of the then Government's Green Paper entitled, ***"A Green Paper, the Implications of Independence for Bermuda"***, presented to the House of Assembly on the 3rd February, 1995, it stated that:

“The question of independence for Bermuda has been under consideration periodically since the 1966 Constitutional Conference in London which led to Bermuda’s present form of responsible government”.

Mr. Speaker, the issue of Independence was first comprehensively reviewed in a Green Paper – a discussion paper – and presented to the House of Assembly on the 15th of July, 1977.

That Green Paper was followed on the 9th November, 1979 by a White Paper.

But, Mr. Speaker, it was not until 1994 that the Premier of the day, in addressing the issue of independence, stated in the House of Assembly that: *“this is an appropriate time for a reappraisal”*.

Mr. Speaker, that was **over ten (10) years ago!**

Mr. Speaker, the former U.B.P. Government and Party must be applauded for the important work that they accomplished regarding Bermuda's constitutional status from 1966 until 1995.

In that regard, public records held within the Government Archives outlining the United Bermuda Party's work on Independence have been placed on the Bermuda Government portal within the Cabinet Office website so that the community at large can take advantage of the information that has already been developed on this subject.

The Government makes this information available not only to provide the community with an immediate source of information, but also to illustrate that Independence is too important a subject to be explored only from the perspective of the Government of the day.

Independence is an issue that must be discussed by all of the people of Bermuda.

Mr. Speaker, Bermuda is long overdue for a reappraisal or review of its position on Independence.

The Bermuda Independence Commission will be responsible for carrying out that review.

The Bermuda Independence Commission will be independent of the Government and be a representative body of the community of Bermuda.

Following an initial meeting which I will host to lay out the terms of reference for the members, the Government will have no involvement with the BIC except to provide input to the process in the same manner in which the rest of the community will be asked to provide input to their work.

The BIC will explore many issues related to Independence, share their findings with the community and provide opportunities for the public to have input to the process.

The BIC will hold its first meeting in January 2005 and it is anticipated that they will conclude their work after a three (3) to six (6) month period of deliberations, public meetings and addresses from legal and constitutional scholars, academicians and other practitioners.

At the conclusion of those deliberations, the BIC will prepare a comprehensive report with recommendations on the subject of Independence and submit that report to the Cabinet.

It will be at that point that the Government will consider their recommendations and establish **its** view on the way forward and

present that to this Honourable House in the form of a Green or Discussion Paper.

Mr. Speaker, it is important to note that although the latest polls highlight the percentage of the community who are either for or against Independence at this time, a separate and independent poll, commissioned by the Government earlier this year also found that **eighty percent (80%)** of the population would like to have **more information** on the subject of Independence.

The Bermuda Independence Commission will be responsible for providing that information.

The terms of reference for the BIC will include but not be limited to distributing information to generate broader public understanding of the subject of Independence;

promoting and organizing a national dialogue or debate via the media and public meetings and forums;

collecting and collating relevant data regarding Independence; and

identifying and procuring the requisite services of expert consultants on legal, constitutional, consular (diplomatic and external affairs including costs) and other relevant matters.

Mr. Speaker, it is my intention to hold a press conference before Christmas to introduce the public to the faces and names of those persons who have agreed to serve on the Bermuda Independence Commission.

The public of Bermuda will immediately recognise that the BIC represents a microcosm of the Island of Bermuda.

The BIC will draw their diverse experiences and background together to explore and generate information and discussion on Independence for Bermuda.

To assist the BIC in the development of this work, Mr. Phillip Perinchief has been seconded to the Central Policy Unit to act as liaison to the BIC. In this role, he will undertake research and establish the appropriate running of the BIC as determined by the Chair and membership.

Mr. Speaker, I conclude this morning by repeating the words that I used in this Honourable House on the 12th March 2004,

We have invited the Opposition to join us and the Leader has expressed his appreciation of the invitation. It now remains for me to: **“Challenge my colleagues across the floor of this Honourable House to enter into the discussion with us. There will be time to debate the subject of Independence and at an even later point still, there will be time to mount our respective**

campaigns, but right now must be the time for a comprehensive, fact-finding, analytical and reasoned approach”.

Mr. Speaker, this morning I have presented an outline for a comprehensive, fact-finding, analytical and reasoned approach.

Therefore, let the national dialogue on the issue of Independence for Bermuda begin.

Thank you