

It was a truly joyous feeling when I read the first two paragraphs of the Constitution Amendment Bill submitted by the JSC.

I cannot understand why the JSC had to spoil it all by attempting to undertake what was intended to be a Tobago exercise.

1. You are offering a readymade Tobago Island Government.
2. You are offering your take of Service Commissions.
3. You are naming Premier and Administrator.
4. You are offering a unicameral Legislature of twenty-six members.
5. You are offering 6.8% of the budget.
6. You are putting in place safeguards to ensure accountability.

**You set about to do for Tobago what Tobago is best qualified to do for itself.**

We need to look back to the 1880's when Britain disregarded the protests of Tobago people and lumped Tobago on Trinidad for ease of administration. This was followed in the 1960's when discussions were held concerning Independence. The Governing party and the Opposition party worked out what was satisfactory to them, with no thought of getting the views of Tobago which was, and still is, a distinct and separate community, This achievement of Independence signalled that Tobago must tag along with what was satisfactory for the competing interests in Trinidad.

**I submit that the current efforts of the Government to direct the political future of Tobago is unacceptable.**

The Government is once again taking it for granted that Tobago is satisfied with Trinidad acting for and on behalf of the people of Tobago. This is contrary to the UN policy of self-determination for all peoples by action and effort of the people themselves.

Perhaps the Government is seeking to hasten a process which it deems to be long drawn out, the reality is that the discussion is far from over.

We look on with interest at the mathematical gymnastics moving from "one from ten leaves nought" to "one from two leaves two." To be more direct, if Tobago withdraws, is expelled, or is in any way separated from the unitary state of T&T, the remnant of the State can only be Trinidad, (not Trinidad and Tobago).

To be clear on this matter, before the divorce proceedings begin we must determine a definition of Tobago and an equally precise definition of Trinidad.

This should be easy because both Tobago and Trinidad existed as separate islands before the union. There is also the approved international practice in the Law of the Sea convention of determining the median line between islands to properly demarcate their maritime boundaries. It seems logical to me that the primary constitutional change should focus on the separation of the Governmental structure linking the two islands with the legal authority being available to either island to structure the Government that its people may approve.

**The Red House discussion should therefore aim at the constitutional separation of Tobago from Trinidad to be followed in due course by the people of Tobago consulting among themselves on the nature of their Governmental structure and systems.**

Submitted by Reginald O. Phillips (29th April, 2021)