

WORKING PAPER 492

BERMUDA : THE FAILURE OF DECOLONISATION

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June 1987

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## BERMUDA: THE FAILURE OF DECOLONISATION?

The political system of the British colony of Bermuda has long been an enigma to external observers, who were largely unable to develop a comparative perspective on the unusual socio-economic system. The influential Wooding Commission on the 1968 civil disorders<sup>1</sup> referred to Bermuda as an 'artificial society' and that description has been eagerly taken up subsequently. For Wilson 'affluence and racial disharmony characterise the artificial society that is Bermuda<sup>2</sup> and for Ryan it was "an island on which live a distinct people with a political system and style of life which are equally unique"<sup>3</sup>. In the past decade the artificial society has been consolidated through economic growth and what once seemed artificial and unique has now become a partial model for other small island states. Uncertainty over the political and economic future has been largely removed by continued prosperity and only the perceived external threat of an imposed independence is felt by many to constitute a future problem. The apparent anachronism of the world's richest colony freely choosing to retain colonial status rather than move towards independence consequently suggests that Bermuda remains distinctive, if far from unique, in a largely decolonised world. This paper therefore examines recent political changes in Bermuda to consider the extent to which the present political status can be conceived as a 'failure' of decolonisation.

The isolated islands of Bermuda, now one interconnected chain, cover some 53 square kilometres. With a population at the 1980 census of 54,670 estimated at 57,145 at the end of 1985, it has a population density of more than 1000 per square kilometre, one of the highest in the world. Population growth has placed extreme pressure on land and sea resources, agricultural land is almost exhausted and there are conflicts between aesthetics and economics in the continued expansion of the critical tourist industry<sup>4</sup>. About 60 percent of the population is black<sup>5</sup>, of Caribbean ancestry, and of the remainder who are white, a significant proportion are of Portuguese (mainly Azores) ancestry and there has been continued migration into Bermuda in the post-war years. Some 25 percent of the 1980 population were overseas born, including 4844 from the United Kingdom, 4222 from the USA and Canada, 1763 from Portugal and 1759 from the Caribbean (especially Jamaica). Hence Bermuda's population is characterised

by continued immigration which has resulted in high priority being given to the Bermudianisation of employment.

Bermuda formally became a British colony in 1612 after the hitherto unoccupied island chain was first tenuously settled in 1609. In the seventeenth century the English settlers undertook whaling, shipbuilding and tobacco growing, introducing black slaves from the West Indies. Slavery appears to have been more paternalistic and less harsh than in the West Indies and, by the time that slavery was abolished in 1853, there were more blacks than whites in Bermuda<sup>6</sup>. In the eighteenth century the trilogy of sailors, cedar and salt (from Bermuda's dependency, the Turks and Caicos Islands) dominated the economy and military bases in this strategic frontier post brought some income. Agriculture became the most important sector of the economy in the nineteenth century, following Portuguese migration, but, alongside fisheries, has now almost disappeared. From the start of the present century tourism grew to become the dominant sector of the economy after the second world war. More recently international finance, especially insurance, has also expanded rapidly and these two sectors now wholly dominate the economy. Dependence on two economic sectors that barely have even tenuous ties with the natural environment, and 'the artificiality of the Bermudian society with its emphasis on holiday living and easy money'<sup>7</sup>, have suggested the unique nature of the Bermudian economy.

After its tentative nineteenth century start tourism has grown in momentum. From less than 75,000 visitors a year in 1950 tourist numbers passed 600,000 in 1980 and have more or less maintained that number in subsequent years following the maintenance of controls on the frequency of cruise ship visits and a moratorium on new hotel construction. This has resulted in one of the highest tourist:visitor ratios in the world. Tourism contributes approximately two-thirds of Bermuda's foreign exchange earnings; a quarter of the workforce are employed directly in the tourist industry and a high proportion of the remainder are employed in ancillary services. Income is also generated through departure taxes and customs revenue on dutiable goods<sup>8</sup>. Bermuda's second industry, international business, essentially developed in the post-war era. By 1970 there were 2000 companies registered in Bermuda and in 1979 there were 4872 exempt companies<sup>9</sup>; by 1983 the number had passed 5000 and it has continued to increase. At the end of 1985 there were 5969 international companies registered, but their expenditure fell in real terms, because of the global depression in the insurance industry. Although only about 300 of the 4872

companies in 1979 had office space and separate staffs registered in Bermuda, they currently employ close to 10 percent of the workforce and further support ancillary service industries. Company taxes contribute a substantial proportion of the national income and the contribution to the island's economy of the international business sector is now not far short of that of tourism<sup>10</sup>. Bermuda also has one of the largest flag of convenience fleets in the world. There are virtually no industries in Bermuda, even such standard import-substitution industries as beer and biscuit manufacture, and the decline of agriculture and fisheries has left the island with only two economic sectors.

A decade ago Wilson concluded that 'Bermuda's boom conditions cannot last indefinitely, dependent as the territory is on the vagaries of the international market'<sup>11</sup> yet the two key sectors have continued to grow and further Bermudianisation has contributed to effectively full employment. Indeed economic growth has produced a situation where Bermuda currently records the fourth highest per capita income level in the world. Inevitably growth has been discontinuous and there is concern over the future of these two externally dependent sectors. During 1981-82 the economy suffered a sharp decline alongside industrial confrontations, and it was not until 1984 that there was real improvement. However 1986 was almost a record year for tourism, stimulated by American fear of terrorism in Europe and the reopening of two large hotels, and the finance sector continued to grow<sup>13</sup>. Thus over a period of several decades the 'artificial economy has been firmly consolidated. The economic recovery that has gone on since 1985 may not be sustained and, as a recent review of the economy concluded:

Although by no means an underdeveloped country, it has in common with those countries a strong reliance upon a very limited number of products. It is, in other words, a 'two-crop' economy - the crops being tourism and international business - and to survive and prosper it needs to be able to compete effectively on the world markets for these 'crops'<sup>14</sup>.

Bermuda is now firmly linked to the North American economy, with the Bermudian dollar on par with the American dollar, which is legal tender to the extent that one third of all currency in use is American.<sup>15</sup> 'Americanisation' has progressed beyond the currency, with virtually all trade being with the United States, some 85 percent of tourists coming from the United States, many Bermudians going to the USA for further education and even shopping, and Bermuda taking television directly from the United States. An important American

military base occupies part of the Island. On a per capita basis Bermuda is the best market for US products in the world. Only tenuous formal ties with the United Kingdom demonstrate colonial status. This dependent economy has contributed to a wider 'dependency complex'<sup>16</sup> and has influenced the particular form of the political system.

### The Rise and Fall of Party Politics

Although Bermuda is the oldest self-governing colony in the British Commonwealth with a Parliament third in age only to those of the United Kingdom and Iceland, there was no written constitution until 1968, black Bermudians were disenfranchised and voting was based on property rights. After struggles against segregation and for universal suffrage blacks were given the vote in 1963; 'the elections of 1963 were a watershed in the political life of Bermuda'<sup>17</sup> since before that there had been no party politics. Many blacks united together to establish the Progressive Labour Party (PLP) and its six members usually voted as a block; although it was assumed that a few liberal whites would support the party, in practice few ever did. Despite white opposition to party politics the appearance of the PLP led the twenty-four white parliamentarians to respond and 'regain the offensive'<sup>18</sup> by founding the United Bermuda Party (UBP) in the following year. Like the PLP, the UBP also declared itself interracial and immediately coopted two of the most senior black parliamentarians; the formation of the UBP enabled it to gain black support which might otherwise have wavered<sup>19</sup>. Nevertheless 'it was clear to everyone that the party at its core represented white power in the same way that the PLP at its core represented black folks'<sup>20</sup>. Until the mid-1970s the UBP consolidated its supremacy; at both the 1968 and 1972 elections it gained 30 of the 40 seats in an enlarged parliament, with 57 per cent and 61 per cent of the popular vote. At that point the UBP seemed 'impregnable'<sup>21</sup> through its continued ability to gain a significant proportion of the black Bermudian vote.

From its inception the UBP was closely associated with the white business community, locally known as 'Front Street' or the 'Forty Thieves'<sup>22</sup>. In 1969 the Wooding Commission noted that 'effective power in Bermuda lay with the white oligarchy and it is not surprising that members of the small oligarchy became in time bankers and commercial entrepreneurs. They had the opportunity, the means and the training and they were thus

able to lead and to entrench themselves'<sup>23</sup>. With largely sustained economic growth it was also unsurprising that many black Bermudians have always regarded the UBP as the best political alternative. In response the UBP were conscious of their unrepresentative Front Street image in a dominantly black colony and at the start of 1972 gave the party leadership to a black Guyanese lawyer, Sir Edward Richards, who had become deeply involved in local politics, though the party was split on the issue. Richards remained Premier until his retirement in 1975. Consequently by the early 1970s almost half the UBP government was black and there were four black ministers; nonetheless at the start of the 1970s Ryan argued that these changes were merely cosmetic though 'blacks still get some satisfaction from the fact that they now hold even symbolic positions of authority'<sup>24</sup>. However even within the UBP there was discontent over the pace of black social and economic progress and in December 1974 a Black Caucus, comprising all but two of the black UBP members in both Parliament and the Senate, was formed to examine this issue. In 1976 the Caucus produced an 'action plan'<sup>25</sup> that was never officially released but which received some sympathetic consideration from the new white Premier, Sir John Sharpe, and his Cabinet<sup>26</sup>. It was a clear indication that the UBP were still far from responding to the aspirations of black Bermudians, even those who were UBP Cabinet members.

At the time that the PLP was formed Bermuda was a deeply segregated society, still characterised by 'invisible apartheid'<sup>27</sup>; this was evident in churches, schools, hotels, restaurants, clubs, transport and sport. The first real breakthrough for racial equality was not until 1959 when a cinema boycott and demonstrations led to the desegregation of cinemas and then restaurants. The enfranchisement of blacks in 1963 speeded up the process of liberalisation, as white politicians recognised the necessity for black support. In 1965 trade unions were legalised and racial segregation in schools ended. Naturally the PLP aimed at this kind of liberalisation and its first 1963 political manifesto set as its goal 'the attainment of social and economic justice for all' with its principal focus improved education (including integration), labour legislation, housing and health care for low income groups, pensions and a more equitable distribution of the tax burden<sup>28</sup>. The broad basis of the 1963 manifesto has been slowly eroded over time as several of the major reforms demanded by the PLP have gradually been appropriated by the UBP and transformed into legislation.

For the first decade of its existence the success of the PLP was constrained by at least five related factors. Firstly, many of the most important policies of the PLP were quickly absorbed into UBP policy and eventual legislation; Ryan suggests that throughout this period the 'UBP strategy was to steal as many PLP proposals as their white constituency could tolerate'<sup>29</sup>; there were many such policies, hence their appropriation by the UBP left the PLP with only their more distinct radical policies, such as the introduction of income tax, and consequently a reputation as a party of 'black militancy and revolutionary socialism'<sup>30</sup>. Secondly, in the late 1960s and early 1970s the association of the PLP with radical socialism' and the Black Power movements of the USA alienated professional and conservative blacks; even working class PLP supporters were concerned over the dominant ideology 'since their major concern was economic advancement in Bermuda's capitalist society'<sup>31</sup>. Others regarded PLP ideology as unrealistic, overwhelmingly intellectual or divisive<sup>32</sup>. Thirdly, infighting and factions were invariably characteristic of PLP politics and black politicians 'consumed a great deal of energy fighting each other'<sup>33</sup>. A serious split within the PLP between professionals and trade unionists resulted in unionists gaining the upper hand through their financial support for the party and precipitated a split in the party in the mid-1960s with several professionals forming a new party and others simply abandoning politics<sup>34</sup>. Fourthly, many blacks felt their individual economic status would be threatened if they were to support the PLP; in 1971 for example the Royal Commission into the 1977 Disturbances received 'considerable evidence from blacks and from whites that they had been victimised for taking stands unwelcome to powerful sections of white opinion'<sup>35</sup>. Apathy and deference were also powerful limitations to PLP support<sup>36</sup>. Moreover white Bermudians also faced discrimination by supporting the PLP. At the time of its emergence whites were reluctant to join; 'legitimising the PLP by joining it then was seen as being tantamount to racial suicide'<sup>37</sup>. Fifthly, some of the more able black Bermudians sought power within and through the UBP and so legitimised the status of UBP in the eyes of others; 'many blacks regard membership in and identification with the UBP as a passport to acceptance, or at least towards respectability.. The white power structure on its part is equally anxious to co-opt the black professional elite and in doing so starves the PLP of leadership material'<sup>38</sup>. At the same time the dominance of the UBP has meant that any black Bermudians aspiring to actively, directly and



immediately influence national policy must join the UBP, a situation that has eventually led to significant divisions within the UBP.

In contrast to the PLP the early UBP had largely been free of internal dissent, until the emergence of the Black Caucus, and was supported by virtually the whole white Bermudian community. PLP leaders have been contemptuous of the black Bermudians within the UBP; many saw Richards and the early black ministers as fronts for the 'Forty Thieves'<sup>39</sup> and in 1977 the then PLP deputy leaders, Frederick Wade, saw blacks in the UBP as merely 'window dressing'<sup>40</sup>. In the 1970s black Bermudians in the UBP were 'accused of being Uncle Toms, of accepting the "white superiority" and of looking for material advantages'<sup>41</sup> and excoriated as sinners for 'clasping the hand that gives them money'<sup>42</sup>. Yet many black professionals and businessmen shared business concerns and interests with whites, hence enabling the UBP to capitalise on being bi-racial. However black membership of the UBP has been more numerous and without the disadvantages of white membership of the PLP.

The UBP, from its earliest years, adopted an inter-racial stance, choosing as its slogan 'The United Way'. Its election manifestos made much of the claim that it was the party of national unity; in 1968 the election manifesto was 'Together...the United Bermuda Way', in 1972 it was 'Bermuda on the move together' and in 1976 it was 'The Partnership that Works'<sup>43</sup>. In the 1960s and 1970s the UBP sponsored liberal legislation in the areas of education, race relations, job opportunities and rent controls and 'introduced welfare programs which no one assumed conservative whites would ever sponsor. The party walked a narrow tightrope between the black and white communities and has been remarkably successful in doing so'<sup>44</sup>. Nevertheless despite liberal legislation and black recognition that the UBP had kept in promises on race issues it remained true in 1977 that 'disagreement on political and economic questions between the two major parties springs from white supremacy and black resentment'<sup>45</sup>. Despite social legislation black economic advance had been less successful.

Until around the mid-1970s black Bermudians were effectively excluded from much of the commercial sector; as the Wooding Commission concluded in 1969 'economic power, banking power and political power have been and still are concentrated in the same hands'<sup>46</sup>. Bermuda was said to be run by fourteen families with the most critical decisions being made in the Yacht

Club. 'Every step was taken to thwart [black Bermudian] economic advance and even today it is difficult for blacks to break into the economy in any meaningful way without white patronage'<sup>47</sup>. Attempts to form a black-owned bank and a black-owned insurance company were 'thwarted by the white-power elite under the pretext that new legislation had to be introduced to protect the accounts of depositors'<sup>48</sup>. At the same time unskilled black youths found obtaining employment difficult. However the emergence of the Black Caucus, at a time of continued economic growth, and educational progress, heralded substantial changes in the economy, and a massive increase in black participation at all levels, notably within the public service. The Pitt Commission recorded that 'the history of Bermuda over the past thirty years is one of astonishing economic progress'<sup>49</sup> though racial disharmony, and an affluence that did not trickle down to the whole of black society, still characterised Bermuda in 1977<sup>50</sup>. In the late 1960s and the early 1970s there was substantial black militancy, the emergence of a radical Black Beret Cadre and the first real discussions of the possibility of independence<sup>51</sup> which 'capped an intermittently violent decade. There were earlier riots in 1968 and 1970 and a series of murders in 1972-73 that included the assassination of a British Governor and Police Commissioner'<sup>52</sup>. A period of substantial social and economic change was thus marked by intermittent friction, violence and racial discontent.

Limited social and economic mobility, alongside some absolute and much relative economic deprivation, combined with the growing maturity of the PLP, strengthened black opposition to the UBP. The PLP was still characteristically attacked as advocating 'stark naked socialism'<sup>47</sup> though its platform by the time of the 1976 general election was much less radical than hitherto. Emerging black political consciousness, and discontent with the pace of social and economic change, ensured that the PLP achieved its best election result yet with 16 of the 40 seats and 44 per cent of the popular vote; it was 'within striking distance of a parliamentary majority and riding a tide of growing popular support'<sup>54</sup> following a result that, for the UBP, 'nakedly exposed the racial, ethnic and class tensions beneath the facade of a "united" party'<sup>55</sup>. The Premier, Sir John Sharpe, resigned to be replaced by David Gibbons, a conservative banker, and the only man then able to command enough support in the attempt to unite a badly divided UBP. He was essentially a caretaker and certainly not a charismatic leader. Blacks now held a majority of parliamentary seats, an event which surprisingly passed unnoticed in the Bermudian media, and Gibbons only

narrowly beat a black Bermudian for the party leadership. The UBP was unable to respond successfully to further economic and social problems, crystallised in the 1977 disturbances. Gibbons could not unite a badly-divided party, as evidenced in the strength of the Black Caucus, and the PLP further consolidated its gains in the 1980 elections.

The 1980 elections were the most important in Bermudian history and mark a second watershed in political evolution. Under the continued leadership of Mrs Lois Browne-Evans, a black lawyer who had been in parliament since 1963, the PLP gained 18 of the 40 seats, the closest it has ever come to winning power. At the peak of its success the PLP was just unable to clinch a historic victory. With the highest ever turnout in a national election (79.4 per cent) the PLP received 46 per cent of the vote, also its highest ever proportion, with the UBP gaining 54 per cent and a mere 42 votes being shared by three independent candidates, the usual situation for such candidates. The UBP held on to power, probably primarily because of its successful management of the economy, characteristically campaigning on its role as custodian of the economy<sup>56</sup>. Its record as a pragmatic government gave it enough black middle-class support to win. At the time of the poll tourist numbers were just about to reach their highest ever level and all available indicators suggested further economic growth; a housing programme had finally been introduced, pensions were higher and a new education programme established. In 1976 about 12 per cent of blacks supported the UBP<sup>57</sup> and its proportion is unlikely to have declined significantly by 1980. The PLP, despite a sharp movement to the right in terms of both platform and image (notably in the exclusion of support for income tax from the manifesto) was still marked by dissent. One previous PLP member, Dr Paul de la Chevotiere, defected to the UBP before the election, lost his seat but was given a UBP Senate seat. (A second group of dissidents, expelled from the PLP, formed a short-lived Bermuda Workers Socialist Party in 1980). It was an election marked by an important transition; the UBP now professed 'capitalism with a social conscience', and could point to new welfare programmes, while the PLP had come to represent a more secular and respectable 'capitalism with a black face'<sup>58</sup> though this new ideological conservatism could not defeat the more experienced practitioners of the UBP.

In the belated aftermath of the 1980 elections and a lengthy 1981 strike Gibbons resigned as Premier and the UBP made its most important

internal political decision. The vacant position of Premier was contested by two black Bermudians, John Swan, an estate agent and the most successful black businessman in Bermuda, and Clarence James, a surgeon (once prominent in the PLP). The UBP Members of Parliament voted 12 to 9 in favour of Swan, who became the first black Bermudian and the youngest ever Premier. It was a dramatic change, a result of UBP's conviction that their survival depended on retaining a share of the black vote, as Swan began a steady process of further liberalisation and the encouragement of black Bermudians in politics, despite the continued visibility of 'a small group of hard-core white reactionaries'<sup>59</sup> who steadfastly believed that the party had become too liberal. Though the early 1980s marked a more difficult economic period in Bermuda, with economic recession, high interest rates and airline problems with North America, Swan led the UBP into an early election and for the first time in a decade reversed the tide away from the government.

The 1983 election was fought in part over the nature of Swan's leadership which had come under criticism for being too individualistic. The PLP objected to the early election, at a time when voter registration (an annual event) was low, arguing that it was 'a popularity contest disguised as an election'<sup>60</sup>. The PLP objection was an early indication that Swan had already transformed the UBP. The UBP platform emphasized housing (notably the redevelopment of Middletown, one of the poorer and older areas of Hamilton), the 'climate of confidence' surrounding the economy and especially tourism, industrial harmony and the attainment of a better quality of life. The PLP belatedly published its platform only five days before the election, emphasising social issues such as inadequate housing, a difficult industrial climate that discouraged collective bargaining, the lack of assistance to the employed and the necessity to deal with a growing drug problem<sup>61</sup>. Whereas the 1980 election had been characterised by angry debates and slanging matches, and despite the more flamboyant, highly personalised campaign that Swan led, the election was surprisingly the quietest in recent history and there were no solid or controversial issues since those raised by the PLP, such as drugs and housing, were being tackled in some form by the UBP. Two critical issues of previous elections, income tax and independence were barely mentioned; Swan had increasingly taken up the issue of independence and the PLP declared that it would not introduce income tax in its first term and would do so only later if it received a specific mandate from the people. The party platforms had thus moved much more closely together. Swan led the UBP to a rather more

convincing victory, gaining four seats from the PLP, whose vote fell to 43.4 per cent of the total, as the prospects of gaining power once again slipped away.

For the PLP defeat was demoralising; after twenty years of opposition it concluded that 'we must try harder'<sup>62</sup> but entered into a period of severe internal dissent. There had been earlier criticism of the leadership of Lois Browne-Evans, a charismatic leader with a confrontationist style, both within Parliament and within the PLP itself. The leadership crisis came to a head late in 1984 after a long drawn-out dispute over leadership, with Mrs Browne-Evans criticised by a group of PLP members and by the most prominent union on the island, the Bermuda Industrial Union (BIU), largely over their perception that she was both incapable of leading the PLP through changing social and economic times and was increasingly dogmatic, individualistic and unwilling to respond to criticism of her leadership or the party programme. The dispute culminated in disciplinary panel hearings for six leading members of the PLP (including 4 MPs) for 'actions which are contrary to the constitution of the PLP and inconsistent with party membership' including addressing policy issues in parliament without adequate discussion in the party caucus. The four members of parliament were expelled from the PLP and, in the wake of bitter disputes and attempts to regain admittance, formally established the National Liberal Party (NLP) in August 1985 under the leadership of Gilbert Darrell, who had been defeated 43-17 by Lois Browne-Evans in a PLP leadership challenge shortly after the 1983 election. Although the history of third political parties in Bermuda has been dismal, with the Bermuda Democratic Party, an early (1967) breakaway group of members of parliament from the PLP failing in the next election and a second offshoot, the Bermuda Workers Socialist party, being even more shortlived in 1980, the NLP began with significant popular support and included two of the most popular MPs in the country.

The PLP thus entered the 1985 elections in disarray. The NLP had been formed only two months weeks before the polling date, hence it was not well organised and there was nothing distinctive about its election manifesto, which had been mainly borrowed from the PLP. Once again John Swan had called the election early, officially to deal with the problem of a divided opposition, which was argued to make government more difficult. Not surprisingly the PLP claimed that the country was being bulldozed into an unnecessary election, that Swan wanted to neutralise his own

backbenchers and exploit the split in the PLP<sup>63</sup>, a claim which was wholly correct. Several calls for the NLP and PLP to form an electoral alliance were considered by both parties but, so soon after the bitter split, came to nothing. The NLP took a position between the PLP and the UBP, requesting campaign funds from local businesses 'to protect democracy'<sup>64</sup>; one of their candidates stressed 'we are a moderate party..we will support any government when it is right and oppose it when it is wrong'<sup>65</sup>. The UBP took little interest in the NLP, regarding it as simply a splinter group of the PLP, and UBP supporters argued that the party was identical to the PLP with the split resulting only from a hunger for power on the part of the NLP leaders<sup>66</sup>, whilst PLP supporters attacked the NLP as 'capitalist' and 'another arm of the UBP' that would introduce tough labour laws<sup>67</sup>. With the UBP becoming more liberal and the PLP more conservative it would, in any case, have been difficult for a moderate centre party to find an ideological niche, especially where the party had emerged from personality clashes rather than ideological schism.

As the election campaign progressed it became apparent that the PLP were in no position to fight a general election. Though they attacked the government's record with what was now a conventional liturgy of economic mismanagement, inadequate housing and inflationary house prices, promising more subsidised housing and higher priority to education, the campaign was unusually calm, with no critical issues to generate public interest. Throughout the preceding month the PLP pointed to the necessity for the electorate to actually vote and stressed that the PLP should not be seen to have narrow sectarian interests. As Lois Browne-Evans argued shortly before the election: 'we have exploded the myth that there is no room in the party for young people, we have exploded the myth that there is no room in the party for white people. We have assured all businesses large and small, domestic and international that all we desire is to govern well in the interests of the people'<sup>68</sup>. The PLP Public Relations Officer and Senator, David Allen, then stressed: 'the PLP has put forward a very reasonable platform. It is something that is not revolutionary by any stretch of the imagination, but it does make the reforms necessary for Bermuda'<sup>69</sup>. The attempt to secure the middle ground fell on stony ground, especially since the PLP had effectively conceded the election by not running candidates in the safe UBP seats of Southampton West and Smith's South and by running only a single candidate in seven other constituencies. Since all constituencies had two members (and all electors two votes) this ensured

that the UBP already had ten members a fortnight before polling day. Although the UBP would certainly have held nine of those seats, even had the PLP mounted a challenge, it demonstrated how difficult it had become for the PLP to mount an effective challenge as their list of candidates was the shortest for a decade. One result of this was that, although the PLP had blamed split voting (where electors give one vote each to the UBP and the PLP), for its narrow defeat in 1980 this time it was encouraged<sup>70</sup>. The NLP eventually fielded eight candidates, though hoping for more, so that the NLP and PLP together had less than the PLP had offered two years earlier and less than the UBP's standard full complement of 40 candidates. A sole independent (who polled ten votes) also took the field.

The UBP campaigned on its reward, stressing twenty years of economic stability, the revitalisation of tourism, the expansion of the housing programme, the strengthening of anti-drug legislation and improvements in public education. John Swan constantly stressed the image of unity in diversity and the quality of life in Bermuda: 'Bermuda is a mixture of things that come together and function well. We are an orderly society'<sup>71</sup>. He later adopted religious overtones, long familiar in Bermudian politics<sup>72</sup>, but mainly associated with the PLP, declaring on the eve of the election that, 'I believe God almighty had a chosen people and I believe we are the chosen people. I believe we have a mission in the world. No other country in the world has managed to bring its people together like Bermuda. When the moment is right God will tell us what the mission is'<sup>73</sup>. None of the parties hinted at anything new hence UBP's stress on continuity and consolidation was more important than usual. The issues traditionally associated with the PLP including 'moral-religious concerns such as the integrity of the family and the spiritual wellbeing of Bermudian society'<sup>74</sup> had been firmly appropriated through Swan's style and his emphasis on the quality of life. The writing was already on the wall when a by-election in a safe UBP seat (Pembroke West), three months before the general election, gave the UBP 80.3 per cent of the vote and saw the PLP candidate obtain only 9.1 per cent of the vote, slipping behind a good local independent candidate who obtained 9.4 per cent. Relegation to third place in an election had hitherto been unknown. In the face of a demoralised PLP and an infant NLP the UBP achieved a landslide victory in the general election, giving it the biggest parliamentary majority since the advent of party politics. The UBP gained five more seats from the PLP, to have 31 of the 40 seats; the PLP lost half their 14 members and the NLP won two seats, both

those of prominent, popular and well-respected PLP members who had moved across from the PLP. The turnout (69.7 per cent) was a record low, especially in PLP strongholds; UBP support remained around 1983 levels but PLP support fell away dramatically, falling to 31 per cent of the total. The NLP, with 7 per cent of the vote, announced their pleasure; the NLP leader, Gilbert Darrell, pointed out 'For us its a victory. We're eight weeks old. It was expected we would get wiped out. We have achieved legitimacy'<sup>75</sup>. Though the NLP became the only third party to gain a seat in parliament it was a Pyrrhic victory as two of their four previous members had lost their seats and neither elected member had a majority of more than 16 votes. Curiously the NLP polled exactly the same proportion of the popular vote as the Bermuda Democratic Party polled in 1968, shortly after which it became defunct. The PLP blamed the NLP for their heavy defeat. Only the UBP could take genuine pleasure in the result though their lavish success was primarily the result of the opposition's fragmentation.

The immediate outcome of the election for the PLP was the resignation of Lois Browne-Evans from a decade of leadership, to be replaced as leader by Frederick Wade. The inevitable change was scarcely novel. Wade was also a lawyer, a member for the same urban constituency since 1968 and even a partner in the successful Browne-Wade law firm; lacking the charisma of Mrs Browne-Evans he had previously been Deputy Leader of the PLP but had been defeated in that position. The PLP had become too brittle to respond to criticism; as one PLP supporter argued 'Lois Browne-Evans, like so many charismatic leaders, failed to obtain sufficiently independent and objective advice and the PLP was both slaughtered in the polls in 1983 and failed to take meaningful corrective action...[Wade] may never equal his predecessor as a leader, but he may well equal her as a politician'<sup>76</sup>. The NLP had belatedly achieved its earlier goal. To Wade fell the task of reconstructing the bitter and demoralised PLP but there have been no changes in direction within the PLP. Two years after the election he stressed the need to 'return to our roots and try to broaden the base of the party. We must be more cohesive ideologically, based on the party platform, be tough-minded and be willing to stay small if necessary. Though this will mean slower growth, that growth will be more solid when it begins moving'<sup>77</sup>. It was a statement inadvertently reminiscent of Manning's comment on the 1976 election that 'association with socialism alienated many conservative blacks, driving them into the UBP and leaving the PLP a small but purified radical left'<sup>78</sup>. However the PLP has continued in a



broadly pragmatic vein, free of socialist ideology, so much so that the PLP were unable to join the Socialist International. Wade now stresses that 'we are only "Sunday-afternoon socialists", everything in Bermuda is in pastel shades. Our continued commitment is to social justice rather than socialism, to revitalising the welfare state and ensuring democratisation'<sup>79</sup>. By contrast Wade had argued in 1972 that the PLP was a 'socialist party and will move in that direction'<sup>80</sup>. The PLP has long since abandoned outright criticism of international business and overseas ownership of the tourist industry, though stressing the need for more effective company taxation, and both the introduction of income tax and the need for independence are no longer prominent themes. The 1985 election platform advocated making Bermuda 'an international hub of computer data dissemination [which] would complement closely the international business industry and would enhance the role of Bermuda as the Switzerland of the Atlantic'<sup>81</sup>. Greatest stress is placed on housing problems and the need for more and cheaper housing programmes, to cater especially for the large number of single-parent households; emergency housing is argued to be oversubscribed, high rents are difficult to pay and the sale of government housing emphasises that the UBP programme is a 'middle class housing programme'<sup>82</sup> of little value to those who are close to the poverty line. The PLP has retained its commitment to the welfare state and to a redistributive taxation system that differentiates more effectively according to the ability to pay. Policy itself has been largely unchanged under the present leadership.

Throughout its existence the PLP, despite growing conservatism, has never been able to escape the widespread belief that its platform was an advance towards doctrinaire socialism in alignment with radical unionism. Nor, despite white supporters, parliamentary candidates and members of parliament, could it rid itself of the tag of being the black party just as the BIU was also regarded as a 'black union'<sup>83</sup>. Despite the existence of relatively poor whites, the only whites who gave the PLP support<sup>84</sup>, the orientation towards social justice was and is primarily a racial issue as Wade's comments in 1986 suggest:

Today blacks remain outside of the mainstream of economic life in Bermuda...little or nothing is being done to bring blacks into the economic mainstream. In fact the reverse is true. Blacks are being pushed out. There are fewer black owned large businesses now than

there were years ago. An insurance company disappeared, a supermarket fell through, a broadcasting enterprise got gobbled up, many construction firms dried up, a bank was merged and finally the last bank was sold. Black participation in the economy remains largely as servants to it and not as owners of it: form without substance<sup>85</sup>.

Similarly Calvin Smith, formerly both a PLP Member of Parliament and the Government Statistician, argued that

Bermuda society has not begun to address seriously issues of nation-building and nowhere is this more apparent than in the severely restricted participation of blacks in the management of the economy of Bermuda...the educational system is not meeting the legitimate expectations of black Bermudians, to control and direct their destinies, because it was never intended to do that. Historically Bermuda has educated a small, white elite and trained the rest of us. But among the rest of us, the whites were trained to push the pencils and the blacks to lift the hammer'<sup>86</sup>

Such views on white control of the economy, and the disadvantaged status of black Bermudians, which have important implications for the debate on independence (below), are continuous in The Workers Voice, the organ of the BIU, and in the speeches of PLP politicians. By contrast the UBP (and the NLP) never address such themes, stressing only themes of unity, hence the PLP continues to be characterised as a black party, despite its attempts to suggest otherwise, and the UBP maintains a bi-racial image.

The PLP faces a series of problems in any attempt to regain its earlier strength, some unchanged from two decades earlier. Firstly, several of the key elements of PLP policy have continued to be incorporated by the UBP. Wade argues that 'our success has been our greatest failure'<sup>88</sup> in two respects; the UBP has adopted good PLP policies on education and employment, hence reducing the distinctive appeal of PLP's platform and, as those policies have been implemented, many black Bermudians have become economically successful, 'becoming YUPPIES, attributing their success to UBP policy and seeking to retain the status quo. They have sold their souls in the company store'<sup>88</sup>. Secondly, the haemorrhage from the PLP to the UBP (and the NLP) has continued, especially when after twenty years in opposition the prospects of electoral victory became more elusive than

ever. Prominent critics even within the PLP have noted an aura of defeatism; the black Bermudian social historian, Eva Hodgson, wrote immediately before the 1985 election that 'the PLP leadership has shown a self-destructive determination not to win the Government or take on the responsibility of actually making policy and has limited itself to criticism and opposition'<sup>89</sup>. Such criticisms, sometimes without basis, have inevitably encouraged defections in the search for plausibility and power. Thirdly, PLP policies have been oriented primarily towards the needs of the black working class and even though their platform is diverse and their policies towards business relatively conservative they are widely perceived as being narrow and sectarian; moreover, despite substantial housing, crime and drug abuse problems, and high levels of relative deprivation, the poor population of Bermuda has substantially declined in the past decade. Although the NLP emerged out of personal rivalries, its immediate orientation was towards the middle-ground of politics, partly in recognition of the diminution of the 'natural constituency' of the PLP. Largely deprived of that possibility, the PLP has not escaped the kind of problems that have beset the British Labour Party with the emergence of the Social Democratic Party and the Alliance. Finally the senior ranks of the PLP are largely occupied with older conservatives, isolated and largely self-selected, who are less conscious of the need for change. There have been no new PLP members of parliament since 1976 (although the Senate has proved a testing ground for promising young politicians) and the prospects of a revival in party fortunes are now as poor as they have ever been.

Indictive of the problems faced by the PLP was its belated decision not to fight the Smith's North by-election of April 1987. Three weeks before the by-election, after first considering the adoption of a candidate in this safe UBP seat, the PLP decided to boycott the election but canvass the constituency to point out the unfairness of constituency boundaries. The POP thus campaigned for the abolition of parish boundaries in determining political constituencies, the abolition of dual seat constituencies and Bermudiarisation of the vote to end the vote of non-Bermudians<sup>90</sup>; the UBP and the NLP duly observed that the PLP had never been concerned about these issues when they came close to winning 1980 general election. The Bermudza Sun noted: 'There may be justice in the party's call for electoral reforms....Nevertheless the PLP has made a poor decision. It has exchanged the right to demonstrate its usefulness as a political party for what is ultimately little more than a publicity

stunt'<sup>91</sup>. Eva Hodgson however pointed out that, 'A society with a developing dictatorship is not in the interests of Bermudians generally...The PLP's belated attack on our racist constitution which ensures that the vote of wealthy Whites in spacious areas is worth two or three times that of poor blacks in congested areas is no less valid because it is belated' but felt that the boycott would have been more convincing had the POP urged its supporters to go to the polls and leave their ballot papers blank.<sup>92</sup> The by-election turnout fell from 71.5 percent in the 1985 general election to 62.7 percent which suggested to the Royal Gazette that, despite POP claims of a successful boycott, 'it is clear now that the PLP would have come last in Smith's North and that is exactly what it did not want...The PLP is a long-term loser because it disenfranchised its voters, made it clear that it is frightened of the NLP...and has left unanswered the question of whether it would stick to its boycott philosophy if there was a by-election in a solid PLP constituency'<sup>93</sup>. Thus by April 1987 the PLP was in perhaps the most difficult situation in its history.

Though the NLP has negotiated its first hurdle, its task of gaining wide popular support for a programme that is barely distinctive in any way is enormously difficult. Its 1985 election platform was a model of blandness; although its taxation policy was more like that of the PLP: 'the party will revise existing taxes [and] implement equitable systems of taxation which will relate to the tax-payer's ability to pay'<sup>94</sup>, its support for the business sector was no less than that of the UBP. In this support the NLP found one means of distancing itself from the PLP, which, if no longer regarding big business as a complete anathema, still retained strong suspicions and was firmly allied to the BIU. Two years after the election its policies were barely more coherent: its candidate in the April 1987 Smith's North by-election, former PLP Member of Parliament Walter Brangman, stressed that the NLP represented a 'conservative capitalism...[since] there are no really poor in Bermuda, other than a few single mothers'<sup>95</sup>. The conservative Royal Gazette had earlier described the NLP as 'comprised mainly of professional men with a leftist learning. [It] reflects nothing new and offers nothing new being born from dissidents in the right wing of the PLP'<sup>96</sup>. That situation was broadly unchanged. The NLP stressed that, unlike the PLP, it was 'the party of the future' and appealed to the public on the grounds of honesty and accountability. Its Public Relations Officer, Kath Bell, a white former PLP parliamentary candidate, has argued that in Bermuda politics is about personalities and

styles rather than philosophy<sup>97</sup>. In the absence of a PLP candidate the NLP gained 32.9 percent of the vote in the Smith's North by-election, suggesting that where the UBP fielded highly conservative candidates it could perform well, even without raising any issues, so suggesting to the Royal Gazette 'a slight indication that the more moderate NLP can emerge as the opposition'<sup>98</sup>. While the NLP has some distinctive personalities, notably its two parliamentarians, and its novelty passes for style, the lack of substantial grass roots support, the lack of a financial base (unlike the business and union support that sustain the other two parties) and the lack of a distinctive philosophy and programme nevertheless point to a limited future.

Five years after barely clinging to power the UBP had secured its best electoral result in the 1985 election, even though the island economy had only just regained the rate of economic growth that had been achieved in the 1970s. Much of the credit for this reversal must be attributed to John Swan, who had introduced more black Bermudians into politics. In this context the style was as important as the substance. After the 1983 elections the PLP had lost its only white member of parliament while the UBP had become increasingly black. After the 1985 election the UBP had 16 white and 15 black members, though the Premier and half the other cabinet members were blacks. Such a transition had clear electoral advantages, and was bitterly resented by the PLP whose criticisms of the new UBP took two broad but related forms. Firstly, it was argued that as blacks took power within the UBP the UBP lost control of the economy, which remained in the same hands. An editorial in the Workers Voice, edited by Barbara Ball, previously the PLP's sole white member of parliament stated, after Swan's replacement of David Gibbons as Minister of Finance, that the 'move out of Government represents a natural progression, as blacks in the UBP increase their control over Government. However in the process of acquiring this control, they have had to trade away much of Government's traditional powers...Mr Swan has seen the dismantling of central government, from an organisation with sufficient clout to manage the Island's economy, to an organisation designed to collect taxes, maintain law and order and diminish the role of welfare services'<sup>99</sup>. Secondly it was argued that, in fact, there had been no significant change as the UBP had never exercised, as a government, strong control over the economy. As one long-time PLP supporter Alvin Williams wrote in the context of the 1983 election campaign and the rise of black politicians:

...a closer look at Bermuda's political scene will reveal that the real centres of power have not been touched. The business community still has the greatest influence in what policies will be put forward by a UBP government and the white community still has dominant control of Bermuda's economic system...The biggest phenomenon in this election is the new born-again black UBP member. A look at these so-called new black members will find them to be, in the main, black businessmen who have mainly been up to this point on the fringes of Bermuda's economy or they are people who have burned their bridges behind their working-class origins...The role Mr John Swan would play if his party got back in would be this for the black UBP businessman - they hope he would become the black Messiah come to open the doors of Bermuda's economic heaven. For some in the white community he is the Bermuda Muzorewa of Zimbabwe fame - better him than a nationalistic PLP under Mrs Lois Browne-Evans. What a price the white community is prepared to pay to keep influencing Bermuda's political economy...Bermuda has never been known as a country with strong class distinction among its black population. The class distinction has always been based on race, but now there are signs that this might be changing<sup>100</sup>.

At the heart of these kinds of criticism was the argument that the UBP government, by its nature, could neither control the national economy nor would develop policies in the interests of relatively poor Bermudians. Black critics of Swan's leadership, such as Alvin Williams, argue that he 'has taken over much of the old patronage system that whites used, to gain political support from blacks'<sup>101</sup>, or, like former UBP member and subsequently PLP candidate Julian Hall, 'crony capitalism is now so rife that we have begun to accept it as a norm'<sup>102</sup>. Through one means or another such comments demonstrate that some blacks had made progress within the economic system, although many saw no evidence of real changes. In 1987 Walter Robinson, leader of the PLP in the early 1970s, commented that despite the transition in the racial composition of the UBP, 'the same white oligarchy which existed before the constitution is still in power, in spite of the window dressing of putting a few black faces in the Cabinet, on boards and as directors of bank. Bermuda is not yet out of control of that oligarchy...I don't think Bermuda is ready for a genuine black and white party yet'<sup>103</sup>. Yet, justified or not, such criticism now finds less

response amongst the electorate; the desire for personal material achievements has successfully diverted black attention from their hitherto collective economic status emphasising growing 'ideological conservatism fostered by an affluent but totally dependent economy'<sup>104</sup> and reflecting the gains of the past decade. The rhetoric of a brusque, uncompromising PLP stand on racial issues has thus increasingly diverged from reality.

One of the results of the massive electoral triumph of the UBP, the demise of the PLP and the attraction of those who sought power into the UBP, was that there was now a much greater range of opinion within an already invariably pragmatic party. After the 1985 general election a leading article in the Royal Gazette had emphasized that the Premier 'would have to assume some of the responsibilities of the opposition to keep his party in tune'<sup>105</sup> and in the aftermath of the election a tradition of dissent and criticism within the UBP grew to an extent unfamiliar to observers of many democratic states. Criticism of UBP policy from UBP members and candidates has always existed. Typical of this was in the 1985 election when the UBP candidate in Southampton East claimed that 'upward mobility amongst Bermudians is not fast enough' because it was held back by long-term foreign residents<sup>106</sup>, a direct attack on the governments' slow pace of Bermudianisation. Other criticisms were directed at individuals as much as at policies; during the 1987 budget debate the UBP backbencher, Mr Doc Hall, launched what the Royal Gazette termed 'a spirited and vicious attack' on the Minister for Works and Housing, the Honourable Quinton Edness, arguing that the portfolio was too big for one person 'especially when the Minister is continually out of the Island. The Minister does not know what's going on in the country with housing; it's a pathetic state of affairs...Look at him sitting there and smiling. that's all he ever does...What are we doing to these people [Housing Commission tenants]? We're kicking them when they're down. And every time it's brought to the Minister's attention he's out of the Island'<sup>107</sup>. This tradition of dissent is nurtured by the UBP tradition of holding primaries in UBP constituencies before elections, with the result that, especially during by-elections, UBP candidates are generally seen as being either in support of the UBP government record or as standing with the pledge of re-directing key sectors of the programme. Consequently in safe UBP seats the primary is much more significant and lively than the election itself.

The extent of dissent and diversity within the UBP was clearly apparent during the primary campaign of March 1987 for the safe UBP seat of Smith's North. Dissent covered a number of issues, but centred around the highly personal style of John Swan's leadership, where key decisions were sometimes taken in Cabinet rather than in the UBP caucus and through whom black Bermudians now hold key Cabinet positions (including Deputy Premier and Minister of Finance). Swan also maintained a strong personal commitment to independence for Bermuda, and it was primarily through his position on this particular issue that he came under criticism, rather than through any direct attacks on perceptions of accelerated promotions for blacks in the UBP, an issue that rankled with UBP conservatives but could not be allowed to surface directly. The Smith's North primary was fought between two white Bermudians, one being Charles Marshall, a Senator and UBP Chairman, officially in support of the Swan government, which had appointed him a Senator, though becoming more ambivalent in the course of the campaign as the tide appeared to be moving against him. The second was Leonard Gibbons, a local auctioneer and former President at the Chamber of Commerce, promising to be a continued critic of the UBP, strongly opposed to independence, representing a conservative backlash against the UBP leadership and privately described by one UBP member of parliament as 'a racist'<sup>108</sup>. Gibbons argued that he would not support independence 'until the majority of Smith's North supports it'<sup>97</sup>. Marshall, seen by some UBP supporters as a 'John Swan clone', was believed to be strongly in support of independence, but proclaimed his own 'undecided' position on the matter, arguing that to allege that he was in favour of independence constituted an 'orchestrated smear campaign'<sup>109</sup>. Independence proved to be superficially the most critical issue in the primary, with allegations of Marshall's support for it being reiterated in detail on the eve of the election<sup>111</sup>, so weakening Marshall's chance of success in the overwhelmingly white electorate. In the end Gibbons won the primary with 381 (60 percent) of the 630 votes. The substantial, but largely unspoken issue, was race; an editorial in the Bermuda Times commented

Arrogance! Threats to individual freedoms! Above judgement! Curiously these are the words that have recently been used to describe the attitude of the Swan government by a number of UBP stalwarts. Are these pronouncements new? Not hardly. For years the PLP and other critics of the government used those same words to describe past UBP governments. The difference is that now the criticism is coming from



within the UBP itself...The ascendancy to positions of influence of Black UBP politicians cannot be overlooked as a factor in the current turmoil within the party. Many White UBP supporters have not adjusted and others are not able to adjust to the reality of Black political power...[such issues] will be put to the test in the coming Smith's North by-election as UBP supporters have an opportunity to endorse or reject Black power within the party<sup>112</sup>.

The conservative Mid-Ocean News saw the divisions primarily as a debate over the style of leadership of John Swan, querying, 'What kind of Premier is John Swan if the UBP candidate in an election has to discover his allegiance to his boss's leadership in an attempt to appeal to the local party faithful?...the country is in neither chaos nor crisis yet there is a distinct atmosphere of disquiet, not only predictable attacks from the opposition but also from the predominantly white UBP beastland'<sup>114</sup>. Even the Royal Gazette noted the massive fall in the UBP vote (from 91.5 percent in 1985 to 66.3 percent) and concluded 'when Mr Gibbons is added to the acrimonious conservatives on the Premier's back bench, the by-election must give the Premier cause to pause'<sup>115</sup>. For Julian Hall there was no question but that 'the cancer of racism has come out of its short-lived remission'<sup>102</sup>. Thus despite substantial changes in Bermuda, and considerable material well-being, at the very heart of politics racial issues remained absolutely crucial. Though open expressions of bigotry would be unacceptable aberrations, the present demise of the PLP has given scope to conservatives within the UBP to vent grievances and resurrect divisions that the struggle to retain power had papered over.

Nearly two decades after the formal end of segregation in Bermuda race remains important, not only in party politics, but also in education, where the Minister of Education has recently described race as a 'critical statistical factor'<sup>116</sup> and a prominent black social commentator has called for the open collection and analysis of racial data to dispel fears of a racial bias<sup>117</sup>. In employment there has been very substantial upward economic mobility of blacks, notably through the movement of women into the workforce, that accompanied the expansion of tourism and the accompanying service sector in the 1970s. This transition was so substantial that Bermuda has the highest recorded female and overall participation rate of any workforce in the world<sup>118</sup>. Over the same period there has been a continued shift from blue-collar to white collar employment, with the

largest increase being amongst clerical workers, and for a decade there has been virtually full employment; only in five months since 1975 has the number of registered employed ever passed a hundred<sup>119</sup>. Nonetheless there are employment problems, which are given high priority by the PLP. The high cost of living has resulted in many workers having more than one job; this dual structure of wage-earning has led to child neglect and other social problems as 'the economic advances of recent years have weakened the family structure'<sup>120</sup>. Social problems are considerable, marked by very high illegitimacy and divorce rates. The 1983 Royal Commission into Illicit Drugs and Alcohol, indicative of other problems, found that approximately 40 per cent of all black school children lived with their mothers only, compared with 14 per cent of white children. At the time of the 1980 census, some 30 per cent of all births were outside wedlock and Bermuda had a divorce rate of 27.4 for 1000 marriages, higher than the USA and more than twice as high as Canada or the United Kingdom<sup>121</sup>. Other problems include overcrowded housing, the emergence of violent crime, and a substantial drug problem. In every case such problems are most severe amongst the black population, who have less adequate education, inferior jobs, lower incomes and poorer housing, accentuated by perceptions of relative deprivation. Moreover in 1985, the black Bermudian, Sharon Davis-Murdoch, could still write of 'de facto segregation'<sup>122</sup>. On every social and economic criterion race remains of critical importance in Bermuda.

Despite their severity acute social and economic problems are those of a small minority. A survey of the quality of life in Bermuda has recorded widespread satisfaction and little evidence of relative deprivation, and despite concern over the cost of living, housing and race relations 'most Bermudians are satisfied with their lives, their work and prospects for the future...[and] almost everyone agrees that life in Bermuda today is at least as good as it is anywhere else'<sup>123</sup>. John Swan has constantly directed UBP policy towards improving the quality of life in Bermuda, organising a consultancy report (the Gurr Report), attacking drugs and promoting housing construction and redevelopment; most recently he has commented that 'it should be possible within a city state like Bermuda to carry out enough social engineering to provide a more caring society, even in opposition to global trends. Already there is more racial mixing here than in the West Indies and everyone has a chance to become established'<sup>124</sup>. Nonetheless other black Bermudians may see the quality of life quite differently; the PLP policy of introducing redistributive

taxation reflects a situation where without income tax 'to even give the appearance of a redistribution of wealth, society becomes increasingly polarized...This frustration, this deep-felt alienation in a society where virtually everything is commodified, where one realises that he or she cannot "make it" simply by working hard, leads to a resentment of power, authority and wealth'<sup>125</sup>. Although the radical Black Beret Cadre<sup>126</sup> no longer exists, some blacks have lost interest in politics several becoming Rastafarians. Some churches, including the Hebrew Israelites, are wholly black and others primarily black; indeed it is sometimes said that Bermuda is never more segregated than on Sunday mornings<sup>127</sup>. Demonstrated in religious observance and reflected in political divisions, 'in Bermuda almost every important issue is first of all interpreted in racial terms'<sup>128</sup> One such important issue is that of independence.

### The Quest for Independence

The first discussions of the possibility of independence for Bermuda came in the mid-1960s somewhat later than in the larger British colonies in the Caribbean. In 1966 the PLP had considered the issue and concluded

Bermuda is a small island and a constitution based on the model of larger colonies may not be appropriate. The party considers that in the interval the constitutions of Jersey and Guernsey, where executive power rests with the committees of the legislature, should be examined. Bermuda is roughly equal in size and population to these islands and it may be that their long tried system of government could be better adopted to conditions in Bermuda than constitutions designed for larger units<sup>129</sup>

Nevertheless the PLP was broadly in favour of independence while the UBP unequivocally rejected the idea<sup>130</sup> but feared that independence might be thrust upon Bermuda<sup>131</sup>. By contrast the PLP included the necessity for independence as a central plank in its 1968 election platform: 'No government can be either responsible or democratic while under the rule of another country. Colonialism is a cancer which must be removed from the tissue of human affairs'<sup>132</sup>. In the following year the PLP remained firmly in support of independence at a time when the United Nations were making tentative calls for Bermuda's decolonisation<sup>133</sup>. Independence was still an issue of no concern to the UBP, the majority of Bermuda's population had little interest in changing the existing situation and by 1972 the PLP had significantly downplayed its earlier demand for independence.

During the mid-1970s discussions of independence became more common, especially as the most British colonies in the Caribbean and elsewhere became independent, leaving Bermuda an increasingly visible anachronism. After 1972 the UBP began to contemplate the possibility of independence when Britain dissolved the sterling area and broke monetary ties with Bermuda, a move that was generally interpreted 'as a signal that the colonial system faced an eventual if not imminent demise'<sup>134</sup>. Arguments for and against independence were regularly paraded in the newspaper columns<sup>135</sup> and by 1975 the PLP was again making a more concerted push for independence, actually arguing in its 1976 election manifesto that 'Bermuda is moving towards independence. To this end a bi-partisan committee should be set up to ensure a national consensus on fundamental issues such as citizenship and the vote'<sup>136</sup>. The issue was first

debated in parliament in 1976 and by then there was some support for independence within the UBP; the Premier, Sir John Sharpe, argued that 'if there is to be constitutional advance it must be independence'<sup>137</sup>, a position broadly in accord with that of the British government. Both in Britain and Bermuda it appeared that Bermuda was belatedly moving towards independence.

A major step in the apparent trend towards independence was the Government's commitment in the 1976 throne speech to examine and report on the question of independence. In July 1977 the Government duly produced a 54-page Discussion Paper (the Green Paper) on Independence for Bermuda, in which it concluded that the Government has kept its options open regarding independence' and no early decision could be expected<sup>138</sup>. The Green Paper reviewed all the critical issues that would be involved and it is a measure of the thoroughness of this review that virtually nothing of substance has changed, though some issues are now perceived differently. The review noted that Bermuda was essentially cost-free to the United Kingdom, even paying the salary and expenses of its Governor, though the United Kingdom charged nothing for its support in defence of external affairs, and queried

it is often argued that Bermuda is effectively as independent now as it would be if it were nominally and constitutionally independent, and that it is in effect better off. Also the question is often asked - Independence from what or from whom? The answer is that with independence Bermuda would be free of the limited restraints which can now be imposed upon it by the United Kingdom. Support for independence is most likely to stem from considerations of national confidence and pride in self-sufficiency<sup>139</sup>

The limited restraints were those of a lack of independence in international affairs (and defence), internal security and the police; independence would offer benefits in terms of the ability to formulate international treaties and regulate shipping and civil aviation although, in the latter case, the review was uncertain that greater control would necessarily be advantageous<sup>140</sup>. The review also argued that the present defence arrangements, with indirect membership of NATO, were adequate and that independence offered no perceived advantages to the key tourist and international finance sectors, but that both critical areas were highly sensitive to any political instability<sup>141</sup>. The final issue considered in the review was that of constitutional change; the paper anticipated that no substantial changes were to be expected but that electoral

reform would probably be necessary to ensure greater equality in voting strength between parishes<sup>142</sup> and that there would have to be a clear consensus on Bermuda's citizenship. Overall therefore the document provided a comprehensive review and set the stage for politicians and others to debate the merits of particular aspects of the independence issue.

The Green Paper was debated in Parliament in November 1977. The Premier, David Gibbons, stated that he could identify no benefits from independence amongst the scores of countries that had obtained it, other than an emotional one, and argued that in the majority of cases independence had resulted in the loss of democracy. The vast majority of UBP members supported the Premier, generally arguing that the status quo contributed to political, economic and social stability and avoided unnecessary costs. The PLP leader, Mrs Lois Browne-Evans, remarked that the Government opposed progress and had not changed its political outlook in twenty years; others reiterated the PLP platform that democracy and colonialism were incompatible<sup>143</sup>. Public meetings in Bermuda confirmed that conservative sentiments prevailed and in 1979 the Government issued a White Paper, Independence for Bermuda, which noted that the majority of Bermudians were opposed to independence:

The situation is unusual, if not unique. Bermuda has a viable and unusually prosperous economy. Unlike other territories, including relatively small ones, there are no neighbouring countries near enough to pose problems over international boundaries or illegal immigration. There are no Bermudian communities abroad of significant size requiring consular support and no exports or foreign markets which need to be protected or developed. The main industries are tourism and international business, the maintenance and development of which are already efficiently organised. For these reasons independence for Bermuda is a development that can reasonably be contemplated.. At the right time, independence, cautiously and carefully implemented, would enable Bermudians to have the satisfaction of becoming a nation without the excessive cost and trappings that have so often been associated with it. Government therefore accepts independence as a goal to be worked towards and prepared for, but believes that ... it would be morally wrong to take Bermuda into independence without a clear indication that a majority of Bermudians supported it<sup>144</sup>

The Government thus rejected the notion of a Constitutional Conference to negotiate an independence constitution with the British government and, on some

particular issues, watered down the proposals in the Green Paper. For example, with reference to electoral reform, the White Paper proposed that the Boundaries Commission 'would continue with such terms of reference as are in effect at the time of independence'<sup>145</sup>, a proposal which would only allow revision of electoral boundaries within parishes and not across the island. The White Paper otherwise again reviewed the key issues, especially those relating to constitutional change, without any substantial changes from the preceding Green Paper.

The parliamentary debate on the White Paper was predictable in its outcome; opinions were largely unchanged in two years. The majority of UBP speakers were concerned about the economic costs of independence, and argued that if independence occurred under the PLP government it would have alarming social and economic consequences. The UBP member for St Georges North stated

If a PLP government wants to give independence to Bermuda and if they have been promising the people who are calling out for independence that things will be different, all the non-Bermudians will have to get out of Bermuda. If there is a PLP government and they give independence, the very next day these people will demand everything they have promised them and if you cannot give it to them you will see something worse than we saw in 1960 and 1977<sup>146</sup>

Such alarmist sentiments, though conflicting with official PLP attitudes which had never stressed other than psychological advantages, did coincide with conservative opinion, which recognised that many black Bermudians perceived a much greater extent of black participation in the economy after independence. The PLP remained in favour of independence, with its 1980 election platform continuing to regard it as inevitable, and independence remained broadly a party political issue, with the majority of the UBP implacably opposed to any constitutional change.

Conservative fears over the PLP push for independence were accentuated by the publication in 1978 of the Pitt Report, the Report of the Royal Commission into the 1977 Disturbances, which examined the riots that followed the execution of two convicted murderers. The Report argued that the 'irregular economic structure', lack of support for black businesses, housing problems and a lack of a sense of national identity all underlay the riots. The basic conclusion of the Report was that 'the polarization of Bermuda's society, the lack of national

feeling, and the lack of identity felt by many blacks could be improved by the attainment of independent status. Moreover the report concluded that the belief of the commission that those 'alienated from the social order would identify themselves more effectively with an independent Bermuda' actually constituted the principal argument for constitutional change<sup>147</sup>. Although the white community did not need independence to become fulfilled or feel emancipated, the black community could never be freed from their colonial heritage without independence. In this psychological and ideological arena lay the core of PLP support for independence.

Despite continued official PLP support for independence it was increasingly apparent that public opinion was strongly opposed to independence. A study sponsored by the UBP in 1972 revealed little public enthusiasm for independence, mainly on economic grounds<sup>148</sup>, and strong reaction had come from many individuals, such as Donald Smith, who published a pamphlet referring contemptuously to West Indian nationalism and also forecast economic disaster<sup>149</sup>. Even after the Green and White Papers, and widespread debate and discussion, opposition to independence remained substantial; a 1976 survey found that a trivial 2 percent of whites believed that 'Bermuda should aim at gaining national independence' and only 44 percent of blacks were in support<sup>150</sup>. Opposition was strongest amongst lower and middle class blacks and 'independence remains, as it has been in the past, basically a cause of the black bourgeoisie'<sup>151</sup>. Within the UBP only 2 percent of whites favoured independence compared with a quarter of their black colleagues, a situation 'that supporters of the dissident whites find particularly disturbing'<sup>152</sup>. Overwhelmingly then there was minimal support for independence in the 1970s, the UBP had effectively rejected further movements towards independence and the PLP were becoming less likely to stress independence, recognising that there were few if any votes to be won from this particular issue.

The decline of the PLP after the 1980 elections might have been expected to extinguish any subsequent discussion of independence, were it not for two critical factors. Firstly, the United Kingdom was continuing the process of decolonisation, most obviously in the South Pacific, where countries without nationalist movements and without having expressed an interest in independence, effectively found independence thrust upon them. For a rich colony like Bermuda, the constant fear that this would also occur there, prompted continued if intermittent debate on independence. Secondly, the new Premier, John Swan, was strongly committed to independence, primarily on the grounds that colonial



status was an 'affront to equality', where Bermudians had secondary status as British Dependent Territory Citizens (thus necessitating visas for EEC countries), and secondarily on the grounds that Bermuda's interests in civil aviation and the shipping registry could better be served through direct negotiations. Finally, Swan has argued that the 'psychic trappings of independence are extremely important' and that it was necessary to be Bermudian in every way. Since ties with Britain had declined; as Britain increasingly became 'an island state with reduced global importance' Bermuda had to safeguard its own interests<sup>153</sup>. An attempt by an Independent Senator, Hugh Richardson, to organise a referendum on independence in 1986, was defeated in the UBP caucus, despite Swan's support. Swan was opposed in his own constituency of Paget East (the safest UBP seat and 90 percent white) and the Chamber of Commerce council voted unanimously against a referendum<sup>154</sup>. In the Senate the PLP and UBP combined to oppose the proposal for a referendum, which was defeated 8 to 2, with only independent Senators supporting it. This was a powerful setback to Swan's perceived aspirations to lead Bermuda to independence hence despite the strength of his personal support for independence, some continued PLP support and the constant fears of a non-negotiated independence, public opinion has broadly remained in the 1980s as it was in the 1970s. Although a 1982 survey found that 31 percent were now in favour of independence<sup>155</sup>, an increase from three earlier surveys, there remained a substantial majority in opposition.

Fear of an independence thrust upon Bermuda has constantly generated demands for more debate and education on independence. Thus the President of the BIU and PLP Member of Parliament, Ottiwell Simmons, has stated that 'independence is imminent...Britain would have no hesitation in sitting down and negotiating an Independent Constitution for Bermuda...Colonialism has become very unfashionable and I am satisfied that Britain is offering Bermuda independence'<sup>156</sup>. He and others were concerned that the UBP would negotiate independence without adequate debate and discussion; the former PLP parliamentarian, Calvin Smith, who had earlier stated that 'Bermuda will probably make history as the first nation that was kicked into Independence'<sup>157</sup> has also argued that John Swan intends to take Britain into independence' and the British government is collaborating with that desire'<sup>158</sup>. Despite the statement in Bermuda by Miss Patricia Hewitt, the Press Secretary to the British Labour Party leader, Neil Kinnock, that the Labour Party is in favour of full independence for the colonies but only 'as quickly as those countries wanted it'<sup>159</sup>, there are persistent fears of a Labour government imposing independence. This concern is attached to the possibility of John Swan, or any other prominent

politician, taking Bermuda to independence for personal prestige; Eva Hodgson has commented, 'I fear that independence would only mean that members of our current government would, if possible, give away more for less, than in the past, just for the sake of their own personal image, status and personal relations with various American policy makers'<sup>160</sup>. Calvin Smith, feared 'an independent Bermuda, under a group of black ultra-conservatives...we [must] discuss the issue of independence fully, before giving John Swan the mandate to sell us back into slavery'<sup>161</sup>. Over time concern over the impact of independence was increasing, especially within the PLP, long suspicious of the motives of John Swan and the UBP.

Both UBP and PLP politicians have called for more political education on independence, with the PLP demanding that political science be introduced into school curricula<sup>162</sup>. Both parties opposed the 1986 referendum proposal on the grounds that there was inadequate knowledge of the independence issue. John Swan himself has stated that there would be no move towards independence without a national referendum on the matter, (since a general election covers other issues), that political education must precede a referendum and hence that there would be no imminent referendum, let alone independence. His grave doubts over future support for independence in a referendum have ensured that, despite his belief that both the strength of UBP in Parliament and a strong national economy suggest that this is an appropriate time to move forward, it is no longer the high priority that it once was<sup>163</sup>. The extended debate over independence, mainly hostile to it, provoked by the Smith's North by-election, demonstrates that there is still minimal public support for independence, and that a UBP government seeking to move Bermuda towards independence would face a split in its ranks and hostile public opposition.

The recognition by PLP that independence was not an issue destined to win votes resulted in their more obvious focus on domestic issues. In this they took refuge in a concern for electoral and constitutional issues. Lois Browne-Evans, in the PLP newspaper, stressed, 'I have been for Independence for fourteen years now - but let's do the necessary groundwork that must be done to remove the three year residency vote, equalise the constituency populations and stop the gerrymandering, so that when we do move to independence, we have a good basis and a well-run country without problems thereafter'<sup>164</sup>. This position has been maintained; Wade currently argues that the two preconditions for independence are 'one man-one vote, one vote-one value' and the removal of the 'foreign vote'<sup>165</sup>. The PLP opposes the manner in which electoral boundaries

must not cross historic parish boundaries, resulting in constituencies of unequal size, and argues that within parishes electoral boundaries have been gerrymandered to ensure very large majorities in PLP areas. In practice the average number of registered voters in PLP constituencies in 1985 was 1588, not substantially larger than the UBP average of 1467 and gerrymandering may now have minimal importance. The eligibility of an unknown number of non-Bermudian Commonwealth citizens to vote after three-years residence has been strongly criticised; though the number of such voters is unknown, it can be presumed both that it is large, because of the large overseas-born population, and that most vote for the UBP. The PLP also strongly argues for accelerated Bermudianisation, to reduce the necessity for migrants (with votes) to be resident on the island, although with virtually full employment it might not have that effect. Such views of the necessity for constitutional change are deeply entrenched in an island where political parties roughly approximate to racial divisions and where the majority race has never gained political power.

Formal support for independence, but strong opposition to independence without constitutional reform, has enabled the PLP to effectively remain ambivalent. The 1985 manifesto stated: 'The road now lies ahead to Independence. However, before Independence, we must reform our electoral system so that each vote is of equal value and Bermudians are firmly in control of the electoral system'<sup>166</sup>. At a rhetorical level PLP politicians remain as committed to it as they have ever been and Wade is openly scathing over the NLP 'opposition to independence because of the necessity to protect their backsides'<sup>167</sup>. Some, like Ottiwell Simmons, are convinced that there is now majority public support for independence<sup>168</sup>. The former PLP leader, Walter Robinson, has declared, 'we should sever our colonial ties and with independence achieve Bermudian citizenship and be a nation - the sooner the better'<sup>169</sup>. Before the 1985 election, Lois Browne-Evans stated: 'Nothing but independence will bring us together. The drumbeat of independence is within us all'<sup>170</sup>. At an ideological level, references were occasionally made to the West Indies; an anonymous article, entitled 'Bermuda: the mirage of paradise', noted how few people had gained substantial real advantages in the colony of Bermuda and consequently,

Bermudians must not know that Bermuda is one of the most politically backward countries in the British Commonwealth. Bermudians must not know how many West Indian islands, with less economic resources, produce better students than wealthy Bermuda. Bermudians must not know that Bermuda is,

in reality, now the only black majority in the world, outside of South Africa, still effectively under white minority rule<sup>171</sup>.

However, although those kinds of views prevailed there were also powerful voices of dissent with the PLP. Eva Hodgson wrote

Independence will merely mean increased taxes for the people, increased posturing and trappings for the politicians- the sense of national unity will be no greater. It will increase the arrogance of politicians and the bitterness of the struggle to acquire the increased political power, prestige and social rewards...The Bermudian society cannot afford this...[we] do not need Independence to fuel either our gratitude, our pride or our concern for our traditional values and culture<sup>172</sup>.

Nonetheless although this perspective was certainly shared by others, and adhered to by many in the UBP, the PLP remains committed to independence.

The same kind of rhetorical perspective on independence was widely shared and offered in independent states, especially in the Caribbean, where the status of Bermuda was seen as anachronistic. The former Prime Minister of Barbados, Bernard St John, declared 'All you need is courage, conviction and the damned confidence that you can pull it off...the expense of being independent should not be a problem to Bermuda. It has one of the highest per capita incomes in the world'<sup>173</sup>. Before the 1985 elections the Jamaican socialist politician, Dudley Thompson, urged the PLP not to be afraid of independence but 'to win the election and take their place amongst the nations of the world'<sup>174</sup>. However because Bermuda was a colony inhabited as much by white landowners as black slaves, it was not under direct colonial control, as were the West Indian colonies, hence the structure of decolonisation in the Caribbean has been quite different from that which would occur in Bermuda, where the increase in powers would be minimal.

Throughout the debate on independence there has been no argument that there would be any material gains from independence, although such feelings may have been implicit in the support of blacks in the PLP. Perceptions that there would be benefits from independent negotiation of aviation rights and greater control of the shipping registry were generally counteracted by arguments that the costs of diplomacy were considerable and that there were potential costs through the possible decline of the international business sector. Support for

independence followed ideological and psychological arguments and related to attitudes to the anticipated historical destiny of Bermuda. However Bermuda's historical experience, of relative prosperity and security, has produced no shared visions or solidarity; despite its isolation a national consciousness is weakly developed and there is little indigenous cultural identity. There has never been a strong, anti-colonialist nationalist movement; the struggle for civil rights never developed into a nationalist movement and a strong trade union movement has usually overshadowed the political strength of the PLP.

In such unusual historical circumstances there were two important elements. First, despite the pervasive significance of race as the single most important and social economic variable, and the role of race in the 1977 riots, compared with many other places race relations were and are unusually harmonious. Secondly, in almost a quarter of a century of party politics, with a UBP government, most Bermudians had gained substantial material advantages. Many black Bermudians had shifted their allegiance to the UBP and feared that independence would affect their economic status. In 1979 the then Governor of Bermuda, Sir Peter Ramsbotham, observed 'I don't know of any place in the world where you have to start planning for a satiated, surfeited economy. Bermuda could be a model for the world, in terms of race relations as well as economics'<sup>175</sup>. The cost of affluence was only sometimes perceived to be colonialism as blacks transferred their allegiance to UBP; yet, as Alvin Williams argued, 'the colonial question and the question of real political power being held by the black people must be solved. John Swan may be black and the UBP may have black support, but the great masses of black Bermudians do not control real political power any more than they control the economy of the country'<sup>176</sup>. However, irrespective of race 'economic self-interest is the major factor in decision-making and little emphasis is placed on sentimentality or political conviction'<sup>177</sup>, hence in circumstances of economic gain, the choice of independence was largely irrelevant to many when the issues seemed superficial.

Nonetheless supporters of independence have primarily emphasized psychological, nationalist and identity issues. Much of this has followed from the final sentences of the Pitt Report, strongly supported by PLP members of the Commission: 'we consider it our duty to declare our conclusion that only with independence can national unity be forged and pride in being Bermudian fully develop. We call upon the people of Bermudaa to act boldly in fashioning their future'<sup>178</sup>. PLP Senator David Allen has stated that 'the biggest argument for independence is an intangible one. It would help weld the country together

in common cause. We still have racial divisions, and it is perceived that whites are still in a superior position, with an ultimate big brother, or broker, in London, which makes black Bermudians eternally junior partners or little brothers'<sup>179</sup>. Such arguments could hold no appeal in the white ranks of the UBP. However critics of independence like Eva Hodgson have claimed

we have not only taken no positive steps to establish a 'national identity' but, since the 1970s, our society and our government have pursued policies which have been deliberately designed to eradicate all of the most positive, traditional values and cultural elements, which not only made Bermuda attractive, but gave us our identity as Bermudians. If Bermudians permit themselves to be taken into 'independence' in our current mode of cultural self-rejection and indifference to our natural environment, we will undoubtedly become a cultural satellite of New York City.<sup>180</sup>

Thus even with the issue of national identity Bermudians were asked to put their own house in order before independence; 'if we cannot solve the problem of drugs and alienation of our young people now, independence will not do it. Today almost our entire economy is being run by non-Bermudians. The illusion of political independence will change neither that, nor the decisions that are taken by that foreign management... Independence will simply mean that a government, which has so often turned its back on Bermudians, Bermudian interests, Bermudian traditional values and culture, will have gained greater power to exercise their indifference with greater immunity'<sup>181</sup>. Similarly Calvin Smith has pointed out that 'independence is not, by itself, a panacea'<sup>182</sup> though appeals to nationalist sentiments have tended to emphasize idealistic and occasionally utopian goals.

Conservative white opponents of independence have consistently used solely economic arguments, to suggest the impracticability of independence. This emphasis is also apparent in the press; under the headline 'Would independence bankrupt us?' The Royal Gazette quoted a prominent local businessman's warning that 'independence could lead to a recession, the disappearance of international companies and bankruptcy for the Government of Bermuda overnight'<sup>183</sup> although there was no hint of this after the 1967 and 1977 riots<sup>184</sup>. Arguing that Bermuda 'will be dragged, screaming into independence' Calvin Smith has suggested that preparations should now be taken: "Black Bermudians must be prepared, at all deliberate speed, to share equally in the management of

Bermuda's private sector'<sup>185</sup>. Such 'preparations' cause consternation in conservative ranks. White Bermudians thus generally exemplify 'economic determinism, the principle that political thought is an expression of economic interests and class position'<sup>186</sup>. The psychological elements of an emerging nationalism had no place in their ideology and nationalism as an act of consciousness has been ignored, displaced by mundane arguments about the cost and practicability of independence, with several estimates (from the Green Paper onwards) drawing up detailed balance sheets of costs and benefits.

A parallel theme in conservative opposition was to point to the apparent failures of decolonisation elsewhere. For example the Royal Gazette ran a story entitled 'Bahamas shows how nationalism can go astray'<sup>187</sup>, focussing on one of the few countries that have any similarities with Bermuda (notably in economic structure) and pointing to gerrymandering, corruption in the Ministry of Immigration and 'disquieting rumours about the country becoming a republic'. Such a report obviously struck a sympathetic chord as almost a year later, on the day of the Smith's North primary, a dissident UBP committee member in the constituency called for the article to be reprinted, opposed 'a dangerous rush to Independence instigated by secret meetings' and stressed that 'we need time to avoid a repeat of the Bahamas' experience that included civil service growth, corruption within government, unemployment and public debt'<sup>188</sup>. After UBP primary candidates in 1976 'raised the familiar Caribbean scare', it was argued to be 'a tactic whose political mileage has been rather exhausted'<sup>189</sup> but, a decade later, it appears to have lost little of its potency. Within the PLP there was also some concern that if independence were gained it raised the question of whether 'the people who now control the great bulk of Bermuda's economy remain patriotic, or will they, instead, seek to sabotage the economy, once they no longer have political control'<sup>190</sup>. Evident differences between Bermuda and other former colonies, notably economic growth and racial composition, are invariably ignored in these kinds of simplified arguments.

Though conservative objections to independence were formally directed to its cost and practicability, the assumption that there would be associated constitutional change, ensured that implicit in this opposition was the view that, following constitutional change, the PLP would gain power in an independent Bermuda (which, of course, reflected the PLP's own demands for constitutional change). Dire consequences were expected to follow. As one educator warned, 'it was important not to be misled by propaganda which in some cases leaned to the left and could be taken for the preachings of Karl Marx'<sup>191</sup>.

The elderly former politician, Sir John Cox, has summarised most conservative objections, arguing that it would be 'absolutely absurd' for Bermuda to become independent, the cost would be excessive and Bermuda already has control of the means of maintaining public revenue; 'we might even be subjected to the same sort of thing that Grenada was subjected to a few years ago, if we were independent. There are no advantages in Bermuda becoming independent, and such a step would only invite a dictatorship. What island of twenty square miles has an identity? Our greatest identity is being part of the British Empire or what's left of it'<sup>192</sup>. Underlying such arguments were fundamentally racial arguments, as the debate around the Smiths North Primary suggested, and an overwhelming fear of the future in the wrong hands.



Whither the fates may lead us<sup>193</sup>

Independence for Bermuda has never been a burning issue, but it is one that is unlikely to disappear. Britain governs foreign relations, retains a responsibility for defence (though this, in practice, depends on the USA and its Bermudan base) and controls the police. Otherwise Bermuda is largely independent, a result of a history of white settlement and early self-government by a landed oligarchy. Although, in recent years, Bermuda has been unable to impose sanctions on South Africa or obtain the extradition of a wanted man from the USA, without British approval and intervention, such dependence is minimal in contrast to that of other contemporary colonies. Britain opposes further devolution of powers without independence, rejecting responsibility without authority. Bermuda thus remains an apparent anachronism: an affluent colony in a largely decolonised world. Moreover there is no evidence, despite fears within Bermuda, that independence will be thrust upon the colony against its wishes; the Labour Party has expressed no interest in this, long-term British attitudes to Gibraltar<sup>194</sup> and even the defence of the Falkland Islands appear adequate precedents for current government attitudes. Although Bermuda's future as Britain's oldest colony cannot be guaranteed it is probable that if Bermuda is to gain independence change must primarily come from within, yet it is mainly inside Bermuda that continued colonial status appears to deny it respectability and legitimacy. Colonialism may be an injustice, even an indignity, but it is not necessarily a cause of poverty and nor does it necessarily produce a nationalistic response. For Bermuda, 'the colonial yoke has been more like a badge of importance and the desire for change has been allayed by the promise of affluence'<sup>195</sup> and the achievement of economic growth. The limited extent of dependence in Bermuda is substantially less than that in many independent island micro-states, where continued aid and remittances from emigrants are often two key components of the economy<sup>196</sup>. Indeed it is ironic that not only has Bermuda imported skilled workers from the West Indies, in the manner of the United States or the United Kingdom, but the success of tourism, the financial sector and also marine science research have made it a model for several independent West Indian states, who have sent delegations to Bermuda or benefitted from Bermuda's technical expertise.

Bermuda is neither too small nor too isolated to achieve independence. There are several smaller independent states, such as Nauru, whose per capita income is much like that of Bermuda, and others like Tuvalu, that are much

poorer. Bermuda could not defend itself but there are few countries anywhere that have not concluded defence pacts and the United States would be sure to retain its base. Persistent comments that Bermuda is 'not ready' since 'we can't feed ourselves' have no meaning in an interdependent world, where nationalistic self-reliant development policies are being dismantled. There is no necessary conflict between nationalist aspirations for independence and participation in an international economy.

Material wealth, economic mobility and satisfaction with the quality of life have contributed to blocking constitutional change. In this there are some parallels with the situation in French overseas departments such as Martinique where 'a plunge in the productive capacity of the island, a shift from the primary to the services sector (with no intervening expansion of industry)...combined with a visible heightening in the population's standard of living, health, education, services and level of infrastructure, could only intensify Martinicans' perceived political dependence on, and the fireceness of their loyalty to France'<sup>197</sup>. Yet, apart from declining Bermudian identification with Britain, there are two important differences. Firstly, Bermuda generates its own wealth, whereas Martinique and other French 'consumer colonies' are almost solely dependent on the transfer of resources from France. Secondly, France does not regard its overseas departments and territories as colonies and wishes to maintain their current status. In New Caledonia, where there has been a violent Melanesian struggle for independence in a territory where only 43 percent of the population are black, a significant proportion (about a fifth) of Melanesians do not support the independence movement, in part because of their own present well-being and in part through concern over the economic future of an independent state<sup>198</sup>. Thus the individual and national concerns of Bermudians recur elsewhere, but in situations where that income is primarily or wholly dependent on colonial ties. Continued colonial status is only rarely perceived as one cost of a high quality of life.

Demands for further information, education and discussion in Bermuda have become stalling devices on all sides, since in no other colony has there ever been such extensive consideration of the issues before independence. Even a referendum, highly likely to produce a conservative response, has never been used in any colony (except Djibouti) before a move to independence. The PLP do not trust an independent Bermuda, and what is currently an inevitable UBP government, to be concerned with the critical problems affecting black Bermudians, hence PLP enthusiasm for independence has waned as their prospects

of gaining power have faded. Conservatives within UBP fear the possibility that independence would disrupt the economy, perhaps lead to a PLP government (with constitutional change), whose lingering socialist emphasis and inexperience would, it is assumed, result in massive problems in a dependent two sector economy. Though racial divisions are now less critical they nevertheless underly the quest for independence; two decades of more widespread affluence have not wholly blunted feelings of deprivation, nor have they quashed nationalistic aspirations. 'Despite the fact that Bermuda is probably one of the most prosperous multi-racial societies in the world, it nevertheless has substantial social and human problems'<sup>199</sup>. While independence is no panacea it is equally idealistic to anticipate that all problems can, and must, be removed as the precursor to independence, or to deny that independence might resolve certain problems.

Though Bermuda is unique in its history, social structure and contemporary economy it is much like every other colony in the contemporary world in that there is no nationalist struggle for independence. Most contemporary colonies have no historic colonised people to legitimate a nationalist movement. Only Namibia and New Caledonia provide exceptions. Many colonies, including several French territories, the Netherlands Antilles and the Virgin Islands (both British and American), are more affluent than nearby independent states and have largely rejected the movement towards independence. Although in the French territories this rejection is largely on economic grounds, in that a high proportion of domestic resources are transferred from France, elsewhere income is almost entirely generated locally. Thus Bermuda is neither unique nor anomalous. Equally its economy is in no sense artificial. It has successfully achieved economic growth (although not without costs) independent of colonial direction. Through this economic growth, an unusually evenly balanced racial structure and political parties associated with races, independence has consistently been rejected as a priority. For its own unusual and particular reasons Bermuda's choice of continued colonial status is nevertheless like that of almost all the worlds remaining colonies. Without internal pressures Bermuda's political future is dependent on external fates but those fates have given the colony a substantial measure of independence. Decolonisation has not failed, it has not yet been sought.

Footnotes

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22. F.E. Manning, Black Clubs in Bermuda (Ithaca and London, 1973), 17-18, 23, 115-116.
23. The Wood Commission, op. cit., 9.
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26. Wilson, op. cit., 260.
27. Ryan, op. cit., 163; cf. Manning (1980), op cit, 34.
28. Progressive Labour Party, PLP Platforms 1963-1980, (Hamilton, 1982), 7-8.
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