

INDEPENDENCE AND THE TOOLS TO BRING US TOGETHER

By Senator E.T. (Bob) Richards, JP.

This paper has three parts: Part I analyses independence from an international, economic and historical perspective; Part II examines other relevant issues that flow from examining the topic, and Part III sums up the discussion and reaches certain conclusions. This paper is not intended to cover all aspects of the subject and opinions expressed here are personal. I have tried to use a different perspective from most discussions I have heard and seen on the subject of Bermuda's independence to date.

Part I

Independence. What does it mean? My first memory of this issue takes me back over 36 years: I hear a local politician ask the question, presumably rhetorically, "Independence, independence from what? Independence from whom?" That politician was my father, then, E.T. Richards MCP. The rhetoric was greeted with a rousing standing ovation from the audience; and most of Bermuda of the late 1960's, across all political and racial lines appeared to agree with that general sentiment. His words have been echoed by other politicians over the years. As a member of the baby boom generation I disagreed with his view. Many years after that speech, he did allow that "Independence is probably inevitable."

Inevitable because a colonial status is an anachronism in this modern age. A colony, or dependent territory or overseas territory, appears to have no place in today's world. Why has Bermuda, which is modern in so many other ways, been reluctant to modernize its political status? Bermuda has set a record in the history of the world because it is now undertaking a national debate on independence for the third or fourth (depends how you count it) time in three decades. I am not aware of any country that has engaged in this debate any more than once.

COLONIALISM

Colonialism in Bermuda has been very different from most of the other former British colonies around the world. After World War II Britain was victorious but economically shattered and could not afford to administer her far flung colonies. Most of the people in these colonies had never voted before there was a general election to decide on independence. None of the black African countries had ever had the vote, they had been ruled directly from Whitehall. Their British Governors were absolute rulers. Neither had Britain made any significant investment in infrastructure to develop these countries. Under colonialism colonies were there strictly to provide materials, mainly raw materials, to Britain or the rest of the world via British companies; and also to provide markets for British manufactured goods. Little thought and few resources were devoted to making these countries better places for the indigenous peoples to live,

particularly if such efforts got in the way of commerce. All the power, influence and control in the territories lay with representatives of the Crown or their favourites.

So independence was not only seen as an avenue for liberation, freedom, and self determination for most of the former British empire, there was also an overriding economic imperative for independence, as independence was seen as the initial access point on the highway leading from underdevelopment and poverty to economic growth and prosperity. That's why these countries (unlike Bermuda) never had to debate the subject of independence more than once (if at all). Clearly, independence was the way to go.

Many of them had a terrible time managing their new countries:

- \$ While most political leaders were well educated, (mainly lawyers) they had little previous experience at running a government.
- \$ Most major local businesses were "Empire Companies", British companies like Tate & Lyle (sugar), British Petroleum and Shell (oil), Cable & Wireless (telecommunications), British Tire & Rubber (rubber), Barclays Bank and banks that are now part of HSBC (finance) etc. These companies' allegiances were to the home country and they carried on economic colonialism long after the colonies became independent.
- \$ Upon independence some of these companies were nationalized but locals had little or no previous experience in running businesses and many nationalized companies failed or became mired in corruption. (Alcan in Guyana and Kaiser Aluminum in Jamaica) Besides, the nationalized companies did not have the international marketing and distribution networks that the Empire Companies had.
- \$ Their economies were highly dependent on the export of raw materials and commodities which were undifferentiated in the world marketplace. As such they were hostages to the wide swings of global commodity prices. If commodity prices fell their exports sold at a loss and there were no financial resources to modernize aging plants to lower their costs. (Examples include, sugar, bauxite, tin, copper) Under such conditions there was also no money to invest in infrastructure, education and health care. Moreover, many new nations found their exports encountered tariff barriers that did not exist before independence. (Bananas).
- \$ Many of these countries sought financial help at the IMF and World Bank. The record of these institutions in helping developing countries has ranged from abysmal to scandalous. They have provided financial assistance while imposing so called "economic adjustment programs" that have left many countries worse off than they were before.
- \$ Many ex-colonies were synthetic countries, the product of arbitrarily drawn lines on a map, without regard to ethnic, cultural and, yes, tribal rivalries that existed. There lay the seeds for internal strife and instability, seeds that in the past 50 years have sometimes yielded a very bitter harvest

\$ There was no tradition of democracy in most of the former colonies; democratic institutions had not had time to take root, therefore, dictatorships were more easily accepted by the general population. After all, colonialism, especially a Crown Colony, was a form of dictatorship.

\$ The state of the infrastructure and living standards for the average citizen was very low. Therefore they were starting out from a position of weakness.

The foregoing description covered all of Africa, excluding South Africa, most of the Caribbean and most parts of Asia.

Britain treated its colonies that had the potential to be ruled by whites differently from those that would be likely ruled by non-whites. Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and South Africa, all had internal self governments long before independence.

THE THREE B'S

What happened in the Islands of the Atlantic basin? There one could find, "The three B's," Barbados, Bahamas and Bermuda. Of the majority black colonies in the entire British Empire the Three B's were the first ones to be granted a form of internal self government, along with elected parliamentary assemblies etc., all the while still being colonies. Some of the other islands followed later. What was different about the three B's?

The three B's shared one peculiar characteristic: they had a group of white resident citizens, mainly descendants of Britons, who were in full control of these territories and loyal to the Crown. In Barbados they were members of the plantocracy, in the Bahamas they were known as the "Bay Street Boys" and in Bermuda they were called the "Forty Thieves."

BERMUDA

Of the three B's Bermuda is the only B not yet independent. The ugly truth is that colonialism is an institution that is intrinsically bound up with the enslavement of generations of Africans and subsequent systematic racial exploitation and discrimination of their descendants after the abolition of slavery. This is the essence of the dichotomy of perception between the black and white communities in Bermuda. The elimination of colonialism for blacks is the shattering of the last (albeit metaphorical) fetter of an institution that enslaved our forefathers and discriminated against our parents and many of us. For whites it appears to be principally an economic issue, more specifically, an issue of cost.

So long as our whites in Bermuda dismiss the black attitude toward this issue as mere emotionalism or false pride, as someone wrote in a recent edition of the daily, we will never resolve this issue. Such attitudes demonstrate a complete disregard, disrespect and insensitivity to issues that are intrinsically important to every black person in this Island.

Are we as blacks wrong to think this way? We look around us and see the skewed distribution of wealth, income, opportunity and power between the races in Bermuda and the western world and we know it is the legacy of racial discrimination, slavery, and ultimately colonialism. (Either that or blacks are intrinsically inferior, take your choice) So maybe whites are right: it IS an economic issue, but not in the way they mean it. It is an economic distribution and opportunity issue. Colonialism and its legacy are the essence of what divides the races in Bermuda.

Today, of course, Bermuda's economic circumstances in no way resemble those of the ex-colonies just before independence in the 1960's. Luckily, (contrary to conventional wisdom) we had few commodities to export, so we have had to invent less tangible ways to make our way. These less tangible exports, exports of services like international business and tourism, have not suffered from uncontrollable price swings, have been highly differentiated in the marketplace (we have brand recognition) and have developed us as a labour force like no other. Our service industries have put us at least a generation ahead of our counterparts to the south. So today:

- \$ we have experience at running our own government (both parties),
- \$ there are those of us who have experience in successfully managing business enterprises,
- \$ we have long established institutions which are necessary to run an independent country and ensure the continuance of democracy.

Unlike those ex-colonies that had the desire for self government but few of the tools, Bermuda has all of the tools for independence. There has never been a colony more prepared for independence than Bermuda is right now.

But there's the rub. It is because we are ready, it is because we have the experience, it is because we have seen the pitfalls of others; ironically, it is because we have all these things, that we PAUSE. We ask "why?", instead of "why not?"

It is also because we are NOT a less developed country. It is the complete lack of an underlying, undisputed economic imperative that we PAUSE.

Those ex-colonies never spent much time considering the risks of independence, because they didn't have very much to lose. When considering any strategy, if you want to want to find out what the risks are, just ask someone who has a lot to lose. We Bermudians have a lot to lose ! That's another reason why we PAUSE.

Part II will consider several other important aspects of independence for Bermuda.

PART II

Part I explored independence from an international, historical and economic perspective. There are other questions that demand our attention today that weren't on the table in 1968, some of them were not even on the table in 1995:

1. How does the concept of independence impact on the fact that all Bermudians are now full British citizens, and many of us have British passports.
2. What does independence mean in a world of globalization?
 - a. Can a micro-state ever be truly 'independent'.
3. What about the judiciary?
4. Prosperity, the British connection and Relations with America, how does that work?
5. What happens when Bermuda's interests and Britain's conflict ?

1) How does the concept of independence impact on the fact that all Bermudians are now full British citizens and many of us have British passports.

In the past year or so Bermudians have been granted true full British citizenship (including the right of abode) and therefore access to the whole of the EU. Like it or not, and some don't like it at all, WE BERMUDIANS ARE BRITISH. That means that we all are technically "Europeans", irrespective of our cultural, ethnic or racial attributes. With this backdrop what would independence mean to Bermudians going forward. Would we continue to be "Europeans." It appears likely that independence would end the access of Bermudians to live and work in the UK and Europe. Perhaps those who already have taken British passports will be able to retain that right but it is unlikely that the next generation of Bermudians would be entitled to it.

In any case, what's the point of independence if all of us remain British citizens?

It appears that independence would force us to choose between being solely Bermudians or Bermudian/British/ EU citizens. Before these latest changes there was an issue between so called "Status Bermudians" and "Born Bermudians" The issue was that status Bermudians always had a default citizenship, usually British, to fall back on if things didn't work out in Bermuda, but born Bermudians (read, black Bermudians) didn't have this fall back option. This issue was raised to question the ultimate commitment of status Bermudians to Bermuda. Now that all Bermudians are full British citizens this issue is dead.

Bermudians' access to the entire European Union in terms of job opportunities is huge, particularly for young people. Bermuda can be quite restricting for young people and the kind of

breadth of exposure and potential for career opportunity is inestimable and is not something one would want to put at risk. For baby boomers like myself, or older folk, living or working in Europe is not that important, we've already made our choices, but for younger and future generations it is a very important issue. This could prove a big obstacle for the pro-independence argument.

Bermudians' favourite pastime, bar none, is travel. We have got to be one of the most traveled people on earth. Today travel has become a hassle in so many ways, sometimes including having a Bermuda passport. A British passport makes traveling much less of a hassle. There's nothing we can do about the other hassles.

2) What does independence mean in a world of globalization?

This question probes the very core of the concept of sovereignty, and its meaning in today's world.

In this world of the internet and globalization, geography is often meaningless. Is any country truly independent? Even the world's only superpower is not independent. On the political front the US has found, to its chagrin, that world opinion really does matter. That despite its arsenal of nuclear weapons it cannot just do what it likes to whom it likes with impunity. World opinion does matter because it is only with the approval, or at the very least, acquiescence, of other countries can one country's actions and policies be viewed as legitimate.

Despite being by far the world largest economic entity, the US cannot conduct economic policy independent of the rest of the world. The US trade deficit is financed by selling US treasury bonds to foreign countries. If these countries disapprove of US economic policy they will sell these bonds and drive down the value of the dollar and drive up US interest rates. Nations of the world are interdependent. If the mighty USA cannot be independent in today's world, who can be. Can little Bermuda?

Let's look at the European Union. The countries in the European Union have given up their complete independence to form the EU. Member states of the EU have given up important parts of their sovereignty for various pan European goals. A country's currency is an important element of nationhood, but most EU countries have given it up in favour of the Euro. More importantly, they have given up control of monetary policy to the European Central Bank and fiscal policy, a unique power of government, is overseen and controlled by formulas emanating from the Maastricht Treaty.

Moreover, a myriad of regulations governing movement of people and commerce across borders is formulated and administered in Brussels by a faceless army of bureaucrats who are not elected and their accountability is at best nebulous, at worst nonexistent. The ultimate proof that EU member countries have given up parts of their sovereignty is the existence of a European Parliament and a European Court.

Even Britain has given up some of her sovereign rights. She is the maverick of the EU group, because she has kept her own currency, fiscal and monetary policy making apparatus. In the macrocosm there is sovereignty, the microcosmic equivalent is citizenship. If this is true then EU citizens who have subordinated their national citizenship in favour of being a citizen of Europe collectively subordinate their country's sovereignty to Europe.

Therefore, moving from the microcosm to the macrocosm, it logically follows that as Bermudians are indeed British, then Bermuda must be Britain, or at least an integral part thereof, like a town in Surrey would be. This might be similar to the French Caribbean islands of Martinique and Guadeloupe being departments of France, not French colonies. Thus our parliament would be a sort of "city council", our Premier the equivalent of Mayor etc.

There are, however, some major anomalies with this small town paradigm: whilst we are part of Britain we pay no British taxes, neither do we receive any kind of financial assistance from the UK. Britain does not build or maintain our roads, nor provide us with transportation to the rest of Britain (like a motorway system would), nor educate our children nor provide our electricity. Even on the defense/security front, where Britain has clear responsibilities, we have to pay Britain for the use of her forces. Doesn't this make them like mercenaries in this context? Most significantly, we Bermudians cannot vote for our representative in the mother of Parliaments. I guess there being no taxation there is no representation.

Bermuda is in a constitutional halfway house (some would say no man's land): on the one hand integrated into the bosom of British citizenry, yet on the other hand, by virtue of our geography, culturally and economically distinct from the mother country. And we have no UK franchise. Our current status redefines what it is to be a "colony." There's never before been a colony like today's Bermuda. These conflicts are additional reasons why independence is such a difficult and divisive subject for Bermudians.

Why would countries voluntarily cede important parts of their hard won sovereignty? What is this unseen tie that binds? The answer is trade, commerce and the financing thereof. So like it or not, and in many cases national leaders don't like it, nations are dependent on each other because of trade.

If Britain, like the US, cannot be independent in this modern world, how can little Bermuda? The EU recognizes the true fact that in today's world no country is independent. The EU is an attempt to advantageously govern and manage, if not totally control, the interdependency of a group of nations in this modern age.

Britain, a country that has spilled millions of its citizens' blood to retain its sovereignty, has given up a part of this sovereignty, to be a member of the EU. Wouldn't independence for Bermuda, at this point in history, be going counter to the world trend?

A similar phenomenon is taking place in the Caribbean where independent nations, former British colonies, are moving in a determined and public fashion, towards economic integration. This regional entity, called CARICOM, is intended in many ways to be like the EU and it's

impetus stems from the same forces that have driven disparate European nations towards ceding parts of their sovereignty to a regional structure. However, it doesn't take much analysis to see that these regional structures, like EU or even NAFTA, are not a agglomeration of equals. They're more like economic solar systems with a large entity at the centre with orbiting satellite entities of varying sizes. You could say the EU is a double star system, the two suns being Germany and France.

*The problem with CARICOM is that there is no strong economic power to act as the natural star around which the other smaller nations can orbit. In CARICOM they're all planets with no star. This is an intrinsic weakness of CARICOM. Notwithstanding this issue, the point here is that the impetus to strengthen CARICOM is solid evidence that the world has moved from a colonial age through a post colonial age (an independence age), to today's post independence age (an age of regional agglomeration). Why would Bermuda want to move to independence when the actions of other nations, large and small, clearly imply that the state of independence in today's world no longer works best for the people of those nations. ***

3) What about the judiciary?

The recent flap about the Chief Justice (CJ) highlights that the UK has the right to appoint the CJ over and above any opinion of the local government. Is this a serious issue? Yes it is, but is this an issue critical enough to proceed to independence over? Certainly as a micro-state we would like to think that we should be able to choose the CJ for ourselves. How much power does this UK appointed individual have? It certainly is an important and powerful position. He/she not only is the head judge on Island but would be critical in the appointment of other officers of the court beneath him/her. As a body these judges interpret the law and administer justice. And as a country of laws, and not men, the judiciary occupies an essential place in the construct that makes a civilized democratic country.

On the other hand the laws that judges interpret are, "Made in Bermuda," and if the legislature does not like the way judges interpret them, local legislators can amend the laws to clarify what the elected body intended should happen in particular circumstances.

Moreover, local decisions can be overturned by appeal to the Traveling Court of Appeal or ultimately to the Privy Council in London. There are many independent Caribbean countries that still, despite their independence, retain the right of appeal to the Privy Council.

The politicization of the CJ's position which took place in the recent controversy also highlighted one of the problems with small island judiciaries. In this case the politicization might not have been about only righting an injustice but also to advance the government's pro independence case. So while the imposition of an outside CJ was not a popular move it doesn't

appear to be sufficiently critical, in the total scheme of things, to reasonably spark Bermuda to “Sue for independence,” (all other things being equal).

4) Prosperity, the British Connection and Relations with America

Bermuda is a wealthy island. Is the root cause of our prosperity due to our British status? If that were true other British colonies or even ex-colonies should be equally prosperous. So clearly it is not that simple. Is our prosperity based on our proximity to the USA ? If so, many of the Caribbean basin islands should be much more prosperous than we are because they are closer to the States than Bermuda. So that’s not it either.

When one searches for the root causes for Bermuda’s economic success one can easily come up with many valid reasons. But there is an overarching relationship between our success over the course of our history and our geographic location. It’s not that we’re that close to America, it’s the parts of America we’re uniquely close to: New York, Washington, Boston, Philadelphia. These are cities where most of America’s heavy hitters, political and financial, live. Bermuda has had a unique and close relationship with its large powerful neighbour since the gunpowder cavern plot. After the war of 1812, America and Britain have become close allies and that has been important to Bermuda’s fortunes, during peacetime and war. So the British-Bermuda-America connection has had a positive impact on our economic development. It’s had an impact in respect of providing America with an unusual level of comfort with Bermuda, in terms of placing strategic assets in Bermuda (the bases), doing business and having fun (tourism). How would independence impact this comfort level ?

The importance of this comfort with Bermuda cannot be overemphasized. For instance, of all the countries in the world the US has pre-customs clearance in only two countries: Canada and Bermuda. There is no pre-customs clearance with the UK, its closest ally, or the Bahamas or Cayman. Another example is the tax treaty between the US and Bermuda. For the US Government to use up its resources, to take the time and trouble to negotiate a treaty with a country that is smaller than a small town in the Mid West is incredible. But such is the “special relationship” between the United States and Bermuda.

While the fact that we are closely connected to their closest ally is part of it, clearly the conduct of the Bermudian people and its successive governments have also had a great deal to do with it. Bermuda has usually conducted its own affairs in a manner that the US could be confident about, cooperating on many things over the years. So Bermudians have greatly enhanced that positive background that the close relationship between the US and the UK laid down and made it into a “special relationship.”

Despite foreign relations being within the purview of the UK government, Bermuda has had a long string of “Ambassadors” to the US. Every Premier of Bermuda (and some ministers too) has conducted talks with US officials on matters of mutual interest. In addition we have had the

benefit of ambassadors like Hubert Smith and the Talbot Brothers and others who have made no small contribution to the special relationship between the leviathan and the minnow.

Independence would impair this relationship only if we as a people and our government acted stupidly. American business takes comfort in our British legal institutions. That could remain in an independent Bermuda, as Premier Scott has recently asserted. But we must act like we understand that our relationship with America is in our own hands, whether we are independent or remain in our current status. Utterances of government ministers in recent years have left one wondering if there is a clear understanding as to the importance of this special relationship and that it must be preserved and nurtured.

As a micro-state Bermuda is not interdependent it is DEPENDENT. Our current status can be clearly stated as follows: Bermuda is legally dependent to some extent on Britain and in virtually all other aspects DEPENDENT on America. If we remove the legal relationship with the UK we will still be dependent on America, probably even more so. Any elected Bermuda government that does not fully recognize these realities and fully incorporate them into its strategies and policies does not deserve to be there.

Therefore, any discussion on independence needs to have as one of its core elements the issue of what our relationship with America will be. Our economic success going forward will depend on how that relationship will be managed and/or nurtured.

It's always better to be lucky than smart. I maintain that Bermuda has historically been very, very lucky. Our geographic location (luck) and British heritage (also luck) have been keys. Stupidity, however, can undo good luck.

5) What happens when Bermuda's interests and Britain's conflict ?

There have been times, thankfully very seldom, where Britain has imposed her will on Bermuda by threatening to use an order-in-council (their ultimate weapon). Back in 1997, in matters relating to the promulgation of the Proceeds of Crime Act, Bermuda was, understandably very reluctant to include "Fiscal Offences," otherwise called tax evasion, as one of the crimes covered by the Proceeds of Crime Act. But enormous pressure was applied on Bermuda by the UK and a subtle, but clear threat was communicated that if we didn't include fiscal offences the ultimate weapon could be used to force us to do so. Was this a reason for Bermuda to "Sue for independence?" To my knowledge, which is limited in this regard, this was the closest the Bermuda/UK relationship came to a legitimate impasse whereby the UK was pressuring Bermuda to take an action that was in its interest that clearly was not in Bermuda's.

In the event, Bermuda's economic interests were not significantly harmed, but this is the kind of issue if unresolved could rightly lead Bermuda to change its relationship with the UK. In such a circumstance Bermuda would have to weigh the costs and benefits. If the costs, both economic and social, of acquiescing to the UK's objectives outweigh the benefits of the status quo then that

would be a valid reason to, “Sue for independence.” Such a situation would have to be a very real and critical one (a clear and present danger). The issues would have to be fully explained to the Bermudian people. A public debate would be necessary. Only with the people’s specific approval could action be taken to “Sue for independence”. We have no such situation today.

In Part III we will try to put these ideas together and come to some conclusions.

PART III

In Part I we examined the experience of ex-colonies from an historical, and economic perspective and compared that group to Bermuda’s circumstances. In Part II we looked at specific issues such as citizenship, globalization, sovereignty and relations with both America and Britain. In Part III we sum up some of these points and introduce some new issues to reach some conclusions.

Some would argue that Bermuda currently has the best of all worlds: we make our own laws, we manage our economy, internal affairs, and some of our external affairs, notwithstanding what the Constitution says. We effectively manage internal security, even though the Constitution says that this is the purview of the UK. After all, we have the power of the purse. We are UK citizens but pay no UK taxes. World travel, our national passion, is easier with British passports. The global network of British embassies and legations is available to us at no cost when we travel. Our children and young people have the option of training and working in the EU and, in time, bringing that knowledge back home. Most importantly, from an economic analyst’s perspective, there is no economic imperative for independence. I can find no flaws in these arguments.

Even though it is clear that colonialism is an institution intrinsically connected to racial discrimination, it does not logically follow that independence, the antithesis to colonialism, will be an antidote, a solution or magic bullet to eradicate the inequities that colonialism has wrought. **It’s like smoking causing lung cancer, once you have contracted lung cancer, merely quitting smoking will not cure it.**

Proponents of independence suggest that independence will force everyone in Bermuda to think about what is good for our Island because we will have no one else to turn to; independence will “Bring us all together.” As all of us can live and work anywhere in the EU, this scenario will never happen, even if we are independent, because we DO have somewhere else to which to turn. I would like to think that we live and work here because we want to not because we have nowhere else to go. Moreover, individuals make decisions based on their own personal circumstances, objectives and prejudices, not having anything to do with the UK. Independence will not change that.

Independence will not, in itself, redistribute wealth, income or economic opportunity in this Island. Such redistribution can take place right now by the fiscal actions of the Bermuda Government, if that is what the Government wants to do. No reference to the UK would be

required because such matters already constitutionally fall under the purview of the local Government. The fact that no Bermuda Government has enacted such a policy is that it would necessitate the introduction of income tax, a fiscal policy that would ultimately kill the golden goose and Bermuda's economy with it.

We should remember that the racially discriminatory practices and laws of the past were not imposed on us by Britain; they were "Made in Bermuda." Mind you, Britain did nothing to stop or change them either. We had to change them ourselves. The United States has been independent since 1776 and the remnants of colonialism, slavery, "jim crowism" and discrimination are still with them today, 228 years later. Clearly independence didn't help them with race relations.

The impetus to "Bring us all together" must be in the hearts and minds of the majority of Bermudians for it to happen. A legal or constitutional arrangement won't affect that. Strong and enlightened leadership from political leaders, of all stripes, would definitely help to; "Bring us all together," not a new constitution. The tools to bring us all together are already in our hands, we just need the will to use them.

The facts are clear that although colonialism is the root cause of many of our social problems, we have moved so far through time and economic development that mere eradication of the institution will not eradicate these issues. These issues have metastasized and now have a life of their own because they live in us, every one of us, and they will not go away until we have the collective will to make it so. Independence will not make that happen.

What about sovereignty? Why should we, as a prosperous, developed country, not seek full sovereignty? As we have discussed, sovereignty in today's world has become a somewhat amorphous concept with many countries deliberately giving up parts of theirs for practical reasons. One of the secrets to Bermuda's success is that we have been a very practical people. We must be practical about independence. Although, as a Bermudian, I am very proud of what we have achieved on this Island, I admit that I feel uneasy when my Caribbean friends ask me, "Are you guys STILL a colony?" But what are the practicalities, how much are we willing to pay, collectively through increased taxes and other costs, to proudly reply, "Not any more," to that question?

Much discussion has focused on cost. In the final analysis it is not an issue of cost, we're a wealthy country. Instead, it is an issue of value, i.e. "Are the benefits of independence worth the price?" As a country we must lay down specific criteria to be met to affirmatively assert, "Yes, the benefits of independence are, indeed, worth the price." I believe an economic imperative, and a policy impasse with Britain are key criteria that have to exist for there to be value in paying for the additional apparatus necessary for full sovereignty. These two key criteria do not exist today. The future's not ours to see and perhaps one day the situation may change. Until then Bermuda should remain in its current status.

E.T. (Bob) Richards.

June 2004.

** This text was added May31st 2005.