

Chapter Two

Associated Statehood 1967 to 1983

Following the collapse of The West Indies Federation Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, Barbados and Guyana moved to full independence between 1962 and 1966. The British created an interim status called Associated Statehood for the smaller territories of the Leewards and Windward Islands - Grenada, St. Vincent and The Grenadines, St. Lucia, Dominica, Antigua and St. Kitts, Nevis and Anguilla. Under that system implemented in 1967 the states were internally self-governing and Britain was responsible for defence and external affairs. Each state had a constitution with fundamental rights, the separation of powers and a democratically elected government. St. Kitts, Nevis and Anguilla became the first of the Associated States on February 27, 1967. Bradshaw became Premier of The Associated State but had little or no support in Nevis or Anguilla.

St. Kitts, Nevis and Anguilla had been jointly governed by the British from 1882 much to the anger of the Nevisians and Anguillians. The three islands were different. St. Kitts had been a jewel in the Crown because of its fertile soil and profitable sugar industry. Nevis also produced sugar but less profitably. The industry declined there leaving the lands in the control largely of the Government and in smaller quantities by a substantial number of Nevisian families. The history of sugar in the two islands made the people vastly different in outlook as I describe in the next chapter.

Anguilla is a coral island with rocky soil able to sustain only subsistence farming. Before it developed a tourism industry it had to rely on subsistence farming and fishing. It is blessed with some of the best beaches in the world. Despite their cash poverty the people of Anguilla owned most of their land. Their tough living conditions and ownership of land helped to make Anguillians hardy and proud.

Bradshaw was accused of saying that he would make Anguilla a desert. In fact

Anguilla was, in terms of infrastructure, not far from that. It had mainly dirt roads, no central water supply, few schools and minimal electricity. Despite its magnificent beaches it had no tourism. It was effectively ignored by the Bradshaw Government as was Nevis. Bradshaw was also accused of saying of Nevisians that he would put pepper in their soup and bones in their rice.

Only the most blinkered person would deny that the Anguillians had a just cause for concern that association and then independence as part of a state dominated by St. Kitts would result in further suffering for their people. It has been argued in defence of Bradshaw that St. Kitts had very little itself. St. Kitts undoubtedly had much more by way of development and infrastructure than did Anguilla.

Anguillians had protested vociferously over their poor living conditions including a petition in 1958 signed by more than 3,000 Anguillians calling on the Governor of the Leeward Islands to dissolve the political association of St. Kitts with Anguilla. The petition warned that *'a people cannot live without hope for long without erupting socially'* (Colville L. Petty and A. Nat Hodge, *Anguilla's Battle for Freedom*).

Hurricane Donna, a category four hurricane, devastated Anguilla in September 1960. The Anguillians were very upset at what they considered the inadequate response of the central government to this disaster.

Anguillians were ridiculed by Kittitians who referred to them as *'Bobo Johnnies'*. When I was growing up I learned derogatory jokes about Anguillians. Their accent was mocked. Those who attended school with me were constantly heckled. Anguilla was regarded as a backwater with nice beaches. Kittitians did not realise how proud, brave and independent Anguillians were. The British and St. Kitts governments mistakenly ignored that fierce pride and determination.

As statehood loomed, Peter Adams was the sole elected representative for Anguilla in

the legislature of the Colony. He seemed prepared to play ball with the British and Bradshaw but his inclination to compromise was not shared by his people. A movement arose in Anguilla headed by the fearless Ronald Webster who galvanized support in Anguilla for total separation from St. Kitts and for Anguilla to remain a colony of the UK. Many involved in the movement seemed prepared to die for the cause and to kill if necessary.

Arrangements for statehood were finalised at a constitutional conference in London in mid 1966. The Anguillians were represented by Peter Adams. The arrangements included provisions for local Councils for Nevis and Anguilla as '*the principal organ of local government*'. Those provisions were contained in section 109 of 113 sections of the statehood constitution in a chapter headed '*Miscellaneous*'. You do not have to be a genius to figure out that the section was an afterthought. Its very contents confirmed that. The membership of each Council was to be prescribed by the Legislature (controlled by St. Kitts) subject to two thirds of the membership being elected on the island it was to serve. Until January 1, 1968 each Council was to consist of such numbers as the Governor would determine and the members were to be appointed by the Governor acting in accordance with the advice of the Premier who was to consult with the Leader of the Opposition. The powers of the Council were not stated. A recipe indeed for the horror that followed.

After the constitutional conference the Bradshaw government proposed powers for the local Councils. The details of these proposals were not disclosed to the Anguillian people until the end of 1966 two months prior to the commencement of Associated Statehood. There was disquiet in Anguilla that the local council proposed would be weak and ineffective with minor functions only. They were concerned too at the lack of provision for budgetary support from the central government in St. Kitts. The British sent a representative to Anguilla a month before Statehood Day (set for February 27, 1967) ostensibly to explain the proposals. He was given no real chance to do so. He was met at the airport by a large crowd of

demonstrators. When later in the day he met with a group of Anguillian leaders the meeting place was stormed by an angry and hostile crowd and the meeting ended abruptly.

The Anguillians continued to take a forceful stand. A Statehood Queen Show held on February 4, 1967 was violently ended by protesters. The police used tear gas to disperse the protesters. In the days following, while investigating the disruption of the event, the police were shot at. Additional law enforcement was provided from St. Kitts and by the British. Efforts continued to resolve the situation but Statehood arrived on February 27, 1967 without any progress.

The likelihood of trouble in Anguilla was foreseen in London but the government there was bent on getting rid of its colonies. During parliamentary debates members of the House of Commons in London raised the issue and expressed serious concern but to no avail.

A week after Statehood the official residence of the Warden, the Government representative on Anguilla, was burned to the ground. More violence ensued and the pronouncements were clear that Anguillians were prepared to die for the cause. I did not hear of any Kittitians who were likewise committed to oppose them. The few police stationed in Anguilla certainly were not because they went meekly when thrown off the island on May 29, 1967.

Then came the act which brought the struggle to St. Kitts. On June 10, 1967 a group of Anguillians sailed to St. Kitts. Some landed and fired shots at the Defence Force HQ at Springfield, the Police HQ at Cayon Street and the Electricity Power Plant at Needsmost. No one was killed and the violence petered out. However, there began the political tribalism which still racks St. Kitts. Bradshaw was convinced that the Anguillians were supported by the recently formed Peoples Action Movement headed by Dr William Herbert. PAM thought that Bradshaw wanted to get rid of them because they were posing the first real challenge to the Labour Party in St. Kitts after adult suffrage. What happened next strengthened their

view.

In May a State of Emergency (including emergency powers of arrest and detention and a curfew) was declared throughout the State in response to the violence in Anguilla. 22 members and supporters or perceived supporters of PAM were detained at the Basseterre Prison under the emergency powers. Four Anguillians were arrested and charged with offences relating to what Bradshaw called an attempted coup. Dr. Herbert and Michael Powell were charged with treason. Several non-belongers including citizens of Caribbean countries who had lived here for years, were deported. Most of the detainees were in August released by Order of the Court. The trials of those charged proceeded in October and November. Lawyers came from all over the Caribbean to defend the accused and the detainees. There was high tension throughout the island. After the acquittal of two Anguillians in the first cases the Judge was threatened, jurors were threatened and there was an illegal demonstration in Basseterre against the Court. The House of Assembly debated and passed a Motion of No Confidence in the Court which was broadcast on ZIZ Radio. The Chief Justice of the newly established West Indies Associated States Supreme Court Sir Allen Lewis flew from St. Lucia to St. Kitts, convened the Court and reminded Bradshaw and his Government in no uncertain terms of the separation of powers and the independence of the judiciary. His speech is a landmark in our history.

The trial of Herbert and Powell began but was discontinued by the Government. Bradshaw took instead to the media repeating his accusations against PAM of organizing a coup and he threatened to convene a Commission of Inquiry. The political battle between PAM 'cats' and Labour 'dogs', as they call each other, has not stopped since.

Anguilla never returned to rule from St. Kitts. Anguillians established a de facto government but really wanted to return to British rule. The British co-operated with Bradshaw for a while in the hope of brokering a reunification. They continued to misjudge

the Anguillians. When a British Minister of Government was roughed up in Anguilla in 1969 they decided to invade Anguilla by paratroopers from the air, expecting resistance. Instead they totally embarrassed themselves internationally. They were perplexed to be greeted with open arms and the British soldiers enjoyed like tourists the Anguilla beaches and hospitality.

Anguilla has been ruled by the British since and in December 1980 was by British Order in Council legally separated from St. Kitts and Nevis. That paved the way for independence. By then Bradshaw had died and Labour lost the 1980 General Election to the PAM/NRP coalition.

I set out some extracts from The Labour Spokesman, the printed mouthpiece of the ruling Labour Party and The Democrat, the printed mouthpiece of PAM.

The Labour Spokesman said the following:

The Truth About "Freedom Day" And Why It Flopped

'Yesterday, Monday 12th June [1967], was supposed to have been "Freedom Day", a day of rejoicing for the forces of violence, evil and disorder. From information which has recently come to light, it is clear that yesterday had been set aside for celebrations after the overthrow of the Government by force on Saturday and Sunday.

Those who had agreed to take up arms against the constitutionally and democratically elected Government of the State had already prepared a new flag, a new Cabinet and a new Civil Service hierarchy for the State.

That is what 'Freedom Day' was supposed to have marked - the beginning of Government by guns and explosives, the beginning of government by terror.

But our Police Force is more loyal than these criminals want to believe, and so is our Defence Force. And the Labour Government is more firmly entrenched in the masses of the people than the forces of destruction want to believe.

So 'Freedom Day' passed by without incident. Nearly all business places opened as usual, though one or two extremely bitter employers sent back home their employees who turned out to work.'

The Democrat said:

MASS ARRESTS FOLLOW SHOOTING INCIDENTS

'What is really behind all these arrests which include the leaders of the PAM, the only opposition political party, and WAM and CURE, two workers Trade Unions not connected with Government?

The only information which is available to the public is that which is repeatedly broadcast night and day by the Premier, who alleges his government to be democratic yet refuses the PAM, and those who hold contrary opinion, the right of reply through the same medium. We draw your attention in support of this to two letters from employers on page 2, the contents which speak for themselves.

The public will have to wait patiently for the whole truth. In the meantime a feeling of tension and fear permeates the whole community and even the Premier himself finds it necessary to go about armed in public.

There are also reports that Government has found it necessary to arm questionable persons. As a result of this at least one incident has been reported of a gun being fired accidentally.

It is regrettable that irresponsible shooting has occurred in a peaceful community such as ours fortunately without serious injury or loss of life, but these incidents show that all is far from well in our new State.

It is high time that our Premier and other senior members of Government stay at home and work out a satisfactory solution to our problems in accordance with both the letter and spirit of our Constitution.'

The Democrat also published the following:

‘Governor’s Dep. Calls for Day of Prayer’

The following is the text of a letter from His Excellency the Governor’s Deputy - Mr. B. F. Dias, O.B.E., to certain Heads of Denominations and the Christian Council of Churches in the State:-

‘You will of course be aware of the recent acts of violence taking place in the State and of the continued state of tension which appears to be mounting rather than abating. I am of the opinion that only the hand of Providence moved by the prayers of our citizens, can avert a great catastrophe and cause us all to search our hearts and enter upon the road of justice and love for our fellow citizens, irrespective of colour, class, creed or political persuasion. I am therefore asking all Christian Churches in the State to declare Sunday 18 June, 1967 as a National Day of Prayer when all men will kneel and ask the Almighty to grant a just peace to this troubled State.’

Ronald Webster, who led the Anguilla revolt against association with St. Kitts, wrote a book entitled ‘Revolutionary Leader’ which was published in 2011. Webster is acclaimed in Anguilla as ‘Father of the Nation’ in much the same way as Robert Bradshaw is acclaimed in St. Kitts. Webster says very little in his book of the events of June 10, 1967. He mentions those events in passing in chapter 19 as follows:

‘There was another round of discussions between the St. Kitts Government and a second delegation from Anguilla at the end of June prompted by an armed attack on St. Kitts by a group of Anguillians on June 10th, and a request by Premier Bradshaw to the Commonwealth Caribbean Governments for military assistance to end the Anguilla revolution.’

Much more is written of the events of the June 10, 1967 by Colville L. Petty (an Anguillian historian) and A. Nat Hodge (an Anguillian journalist and editor) in their book entitled ‘Anguilla’s Battle for Freedom 1967-1969’ published in 2010. In note 1 to chapter 4 headed

‘Armed attack on St. Kitts’ they say as follows: *‘The information in this Chapter is the result of extensive interviews with most of the men who took part in the attack on St. Kitts.’*

In note 2 they say *‘The names of the Kittitians who were involved in the attempted coup have been withheld out of concern for their safety and that of their relatives.’*

Petty and Hodge wrote *‘The notion of attacking St. Kitts was the brainchild of Ronald Webster and a prominent Kittitian lawyer. The attack was carried out on Saturday 10th June 1967. The party of armed men from Anguilla who landed in St. Kitts had two principal objectives which were interrelated. One was the defence of the Anguilla Revolution. The other was the overthrow of the government of Premier Robert Bradshaw and the installation of a government sympathetic to the Anguillian cause.’*

Ronald Webster was fearful of an invasion from St. Kitts and reasoned that the best way of preventing it was to attack St. Kitts and overthrow its government. Connell Harrigan observed: *‘St. Kitts was trying to get into Anguilla by fair means or by foul. We were out in the night and so forth, and we were seeing boats coming in and we figured that Bradshaw might attack us at any time, so we attacked him first.’*

Petty and Hodge also say that the Anguillians who attacked St. Kitts were misled into believing that there would be a general uprising in St. Kitts in support of them. They were surprised when they received little support on the ground in St. Kitts.

I am unable to verify any of the statements which I have quoted from Petty and Hodge nor have any of them been proven in a court of law.

The sad facts are that the British set up the Associated State to fail and so it duly did leaving St. Kitts and Nevis to face their issues which I describe in detail on this site.