

Caymanian Compass

26th Year

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House rejects move to delay

A motion to suspend Standing Orders and enable the House to consider a Private Member's Motion seeking postponement of debate on the Select Committee report on the Constitution was rejected in the House. A special meeting of the House began yesterday to accept the Select Committee report.

The Motion moved by West Bay MLA McKeeva Bush and seconded by MLA Truman Bodden was defeated when Messrs. Gilbert McLean and Capt. Mabry Kirkconnell (Sister Islands) voted with the Government Bench. The division was 9-5, with MLA Roy Bodden not present at the time the vote was taken.

ExCo Member for Tourism Norman Bodden then tabled the report and the minutes of the 24 meetings of the Select Committee of Elected Members to review the Cayman Islands (Constitution) Order of 1972. (The committee was set up on 15 November 1990 with the unanimous acceptance of a Private Member's Motion moved by Mr. Gilbert McLean.)

Moving the Motion, Mr. Bush said that there "is a large amount of people in these Islands opposed to constitutional changes at this time and wish it to be an issue at the next General Election."

He sought that the House stop all consideration being given to constitutional advancement for these Islands until the issue has been clear.

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ly debated in the manifestos of candidates in the forthcoming General Elections." He wanted the debate on the Select Committee Report to be postponed "until a date in 1992 to enable members of the public to have sufficient time to evaluate the recommendations of the Report."

Mr. Bush moved that a section of the Standing Orders be suspended to take up the Motion. Standing Orders have to be suspended if the House wishes to take up a Motion before five days have elapsed since the day of its circulation.

Opposing the Motion, Education Member Benson Ebanks pointed out that the House was specifically called to table the report and debate on its acceptance. The "attempt to preclude the report being tabled" and the ensuing debate "is nothing short of ridiculous", he said. He suggested that if the two MLAs felt strongly about postponing the debate, they could express their wish after the report had been tabled.

He said the committee had unanimously taken the unusual step to make public the committee's report before its tabling in the House.

Mr. Truman Bodden said the motion was not a move to preclude the report and the minutes being tabled. When he had agreed to the special meeting of the House, he had believed that members of the public would have had two to three weeks to read the report. But since Members could not finish the report in the time estimated, it resulted in the people having only one week to look at the report. He had received a "lot of representation" from his constituents asking for more time, he said.

Adding his voice in opposition, ExCo Member for Health Ezzard Miller said people had been "given ample opportunity" to take part (in the process) and to stop it now would be making a "mockery of the democratic process that has taken place so far."

It is time the House "faces the issue clearly" and for MLAs to make their

positions clear to the people who could then make their decisions at the time of the elections, he said.

Mr. Haig Bodden (Bodden Town) supporting the motion, also sought that ample time be provided for the people to "digest the revolutionary changes recommended in the report."

Public interest "did not really get going until quite recently," he said. The fact remained that "thousands have not read the report," he said. They needed more time to do so, he added.

He said it was unclear whether the Official Members of LA would vote on the motion to accept the report and if any constitutional amendment would be made before or after the General Elections. Government and the FCO had so far put out only "ambiguous statements", he said. "These are the issues this Motion deals with," he added.

Speaking in support, Mr. John Jefferson (West Bay) said it is unreasonable to conclude that people have had sufficient time when the Select Committee report has been out for only about 10 days.

He felt the MLAs as members of the Select Committee and as representatives of the people should set the time table (the November 30 deadline) for the process, not the FCO. The people, as representations to him had made clear, need more time, he said.

Summing up, Mr. McKeeva Bush said, "It was a rush from the beginning." Other important committee meetings such as the one on Immigration Review have been sidelined in order to deal with the Constitution "in a rush", he said.

Reiterating that he only sought postponement of the debate, he said he could clarify in his motion that it does not seek preclusion of the report and the minutes. The route being considered is that the new Constitution would be in place before the 1992 elections, he said. He was not playing politics but airing the view of the country's majority, he said.