

Vassel Johnson cautions: Don't rush process of Constitutional Review

■ There's a piratical party in the House, writes Consuelo Ebanks / 8



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Efforts fail to delay Constitutional Report

Truman Bodden warns: 'Silent Majority will be heard at the polls'

By Wil Pineau
THE NEW CAYMANIAN

Despite an eleventh hour attempt by five backbench Members of the Legislative Assembly and the Cayman Islands Chamber of Commerce to prolong the debate of a Select Committee's report on Constitutional Review, legislators, led by the government bench, this week voted to accept the report without any changes.

The 24-page report, which includes a majority and two dissenting statements, will now be forwarded by His Excellency the Governor Alan Scott to the United Kingdom.

It is expected the Secretary of State will evaluate the report and draft a list of any changes to the Constitution which are acceptable to the United Kingdom Government. This procedure could result in a new

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Constitutional Report

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Legislators voting to accept the Select Committee's report were the seven ExCo Members, including the three Official Members, and MEAs Gilbert McLean and Mabry Kirkconnell (Sister Islands) and Roy Bodden (Bodden Town). The Hon. Norman Bodden, ExCo Member for Tourism, Aviation and Trade and the chairman of the Select Committee, was the only Member to speak on the Select Committee's report.

Bodden said the committee has recommended that the draft Constitution be returned to Cayman for further consideration before an Order is made in Council to put it into effect. He added that an even wider public debate of proposed changes would likely come in the 1992 elections. He voiced strong objection to any claim that the Constitution Review had been rushed, stressing that every person had a chance to address or make representations to the commissioners and the committee.

He pointed out that no government or Legislative Assembly can produce a document that will please everybody. He said any attempt to stop or sabotage the project would not be in the best interests of the country.

The Speaker asked whether any Member wished to speak and when no one rose, she called for a vote. Backbench Members McKeeva Bush and John Jefferson Jr. (West Bay); Truman Bodden (George Town); Haig Bodden (Bodden Town) and John McLean (East End) voted against accepting the report.

Before the presentation of the Select Committee's report, West Bay MLA Bush raised a motion to suspend Standing Orders to enable the Assembly to consider a private member's motion seeking to postpone the debate on the report. The motion was moved by Bush and seconded by George Town MEA Truman Bodden. The motion was defeated nine to five with Bodden Town MLA Roy Bodden not present for the vote.

Bush wanted the debate postponed until "a date in 1992 to enable members of the public to have sufficient time to evaluate the recommendations of the report." He said there was a considerable number of people who opposed constitutional change.

Opposing the motion, the Hon. Benson Ebanks, ExCo Member for Education, Environment, Recreation and Culture, pointed out that the Assembly was specifically called to table the report and debate it. Any attempt to preclude the report and the debate would be "nothing short of ridiculous." He also pointed out that the committee had taken the extraordinary step to make the report public before it had been tabled in the Assembly.

George Town MLA Truman Bodden defended the motion saying it was not an attempt to preclude tabling of the report and the committee's minutes. He said he believed the public would have had at least two to three weeks to read the report. Since members could not complete the report on time, the public had one week only to digest its content.

PUBLIC FORUM: On Thursday, 24 October, the Chamber of Commerce held a public forum at the George Town Town Hall attended by approximately 40 individuals, including West Bay MLA McKeeva Bush and George Town MLA Truman Bodden to discuss its members' position on constitutional changes proposed in the Select Committee's report and the Commissioners' report. Former Manager Mario Ebanks chaired the meeting and George Town MLA Truman Bodden agreed to answer questions from the public and elaborate on the minority statements which he endorsed.

Reading a statement on the Chamber's position on constitutional review (see sidebar), William Adam noted that the Chamber was "disappointed with our meeting with the Commissioners in that they seemed to have already decided on what our new Constitution would be."

Furthermore, Adam continued, the Chamber is also "disappointed" that the Select Committee, with the exception of a few members, endorsed the views of the Commissioners. During the meeting the Chamber had with the Select Committee, said Adam, MLAs "advised us that the public must learn that government is elected to govern, and that MLAs are answerable to the public only once every four years."

"I must say that the Chamber finds this attitude deplorable. We firmly believe that government is elected to represent the wishes of the people, not merely to listen to such carefully researched input, and then ignore it."

Responding to a question about whether he felt as an elected legislator from George Town that his constituents had sufficient time to discuss constitutional change, MLA Truman Bodden said he felt the issue should be raised during the next General Election and only then "will we be able to gauge what the people want. The silent majority has a right to speak at the polls," Bodden said.