

Forward to Genuine Independence in the Caribbean!

Escrito por David Comissioning
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Whether they are called departments, non-incorporated territories or associated states, the reality is that they are all colonies, and the Caribbean region has the highest concentration of such colonies world-wide!

If we are going to analyze the condition of the Caribbean colonies, it seems to me that a useful way to group and distinguish them is on the basis of size.

One group consists of the micro-colonies:- Cayman Islands, Turks & Caicos Islands, British Virgin Islands, U.S Virgin Islands, Bermuda, Anguilla, St Martin, Bonaire, Curacao and Aruba. (The volcano-devastated small island of Montserrat constitutes a unique individual case and will not be included in this general analysis.)

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The other group consists of the relatively larger colonies:- Puerto Rico, Martinique, Guadeloupe and French Guiana.

A distinguishing feature of all of the colonies in both groups is that the people of these colonies enjoy relatively advanced and elevated standards of living when compared with the majority of the populations of the independent nations of the Caribbean and neighboring Latin America.

The group of micro-colonies, perhaps because of their small size and their small populations, have been able to move from a past of great material scarcity and poverty to their current situation, on the basis of finding economic niches within the predominantly Anglo-American international capitalist economy. And this has permitted them to produce their relatively elevated and enhanced life-styles!

The modern economies of all of these micro-colonies are based on tourism, the provision of domains and services for international or off-shore businesses, and even the provision of second homes for North Americans and Europeans. Thus, a model of dependent development, in the sense that they do not produce for themselves but depend on providing services for North America and Europe. However, with the notable exception of the Dutch islands, none of them depend on or receive financial transfers from their metropolitan governments! In other words, these micro-colonies basically finance themselves.

The group of larger colonies, on the other hand, perhaps because of their relatively large size and / or their relatively large populations, possess economies and societies that are based to a very significant extent on financial transfers from their metropolitan home governments - a support prop that is required in light of the collapse and / or the significant inadequacy of the productive sectors of these colonies.

The French departments of Martinique, Guadeloupe and French Guiana constitute a good example of this. Not only has the old sugar- cane plantation based economy collapsed, but the replacement banana industry survives only thanks to heavy national subsidization. As a result, the exports of these French departments cover barely 10 per cent of their imports.

And so, the relatively elevated life-style of these colonies is dependent on financial transfers from Paris. The inhabitants of these colonies are two per cent of the total "French" population and represent less than one per cent of France's Gross National Product, but absorb through transfer payments three per cent of the French national budget. Furthermore, the national and local government remain - by far - the largest employer of people in the departments.

A broadly similar picture holds true for Puerto Rico.

So, what we see in all of these colonies is a picture of relatively enhanced and elevated life-styles, but based on an economic sub-structure of **"dependent development"**. And inherent in those sub-structures of dependent development are a number of specific mortal dangers for the people of these colonies!

In the case of the group of smaller colonies, the danger consists of the creeping reality of these

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small island states - Cayman, Anguilla, B.V.I etc - being gradually taken over by Anglo-American and European individuals and companies. I am referring particularly to the alienation of scarce land resources, business enterprises, and even demographic shifts in terms of the racial make-up of the population.

A good example of this is the Cayman Islands. The population of the Caymans was approximately 10,000 in the 1960's prior to its embarking on its modern process of dependent development. By the 1990's the population had increased to 25,000, largely through an infusion of foreigners --an infusion that features a high proportion of North-Americans and Europeans.

In the case of the group of larger colonies the danger consists of the fact that, with the weakened condition of their productive sectors and their great dependence on financial transfers from the metropolis, these metropolitan financial transfers will be reduced or taken away - a process that is already underway in the French Antilles and Puerto Rico.

In addition to these economic and social maladies and weaknesses there is the danger (or should I say the creeping reality) that the cultural identities of all of these states are under attack and in danger of subversion.

This danger is keenly felt in Puerto Rico with the American threat to the use of the Spanish language and to the traditional Hispanic-based culture of Puerto Rico. The French Antilles also face a similar threat to their Creole language and culture, while the small English-speaking Caribbean colonies find their unique communal cultures and traditional value systems under threat from various varieties of foreign cultural penetration.

All of these colonies therefore face the very real danger of losing their cultural identity!

But there is yet another danger that I would like to identify in relation to these colonies. And that is the danger that the colonies themselves constitute in relation to their brothers and sisters who exist in the formally independent states of the Caribbean and Latin America!

As we are all aware, the independent Caribbean nations, with the notable exception of Cuba, all possess very fragile and incomplete structures of independence and sovereignty. In fact we may coin a term and refer to this variety of independence as **"Dependent Independence"**, otherwise known as

Neo-colonialism

. And it is therefore clear that our formally independent Caribbean nations still have some distance to go to achieve genuine independence, sovereignty, dignity, strength, self-sufficiency and psychological emancipation.

Thus, to have in our Caribbean space, colonies that constitutes beach-heads of North American and European imperialism represents - by their very existence - a threat to the future progress of the independent nations!

But don't take it from me. Listen to the voice of Sir John Swan, the black premier of Bermuda who famously declared in 1982 - "With the Americans to feed us and the British to defend us,

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who needs Independence?" The last thing that the psychologically fragile independent nations of the Caribbean need is champions of such a sentiment in their midst.

Listen also to French President Jacques Chirac who, in his 1996 official address to mark the 50th anniversary of the departmentalization of the French Antilles, referred to the French colonies as "bridgeheads" of Francophone culture that provide France with a presence in the four corners of the world and that, in Chirac's words, "must be ardent to defend and promote the cultural patrimony of France". Chirac also called the overseas departments "messengers" of French humanism in their respective regional organizations such as the Association of Caribbean States.

Today, all of these dangers are intensified by the fact that the international Capitalist economy is in the throes of a profound recession! And the probable consequences of this recession for the dependent colonies and the dependent independent (or neo-colonial) nations of the Caribbean are as follows:

- (1) The group of larger colonies is likely to experience a falling off in the level of financial transfers from the metropolitan capital thereby affecting social services, employment levels and general living standards in these colonies.
- (2) The group of micro-colonies will feel the impact of a decline in the Anglo-American / European tourist market, as well as the consequences produced by failing international businesses and the tighter regulations that are being put in place in relation to such off-shore businesses by their metropolitan home countries.
- (3) The independent neo-colonies likewise - enmeshed in the same type of non-productive dependent structures as the micro-colonies - face and are currently undergoing similar declines in their economic performance, employment levels and living standards.

So, how do we go forward from here? How do we convince the sizeable majority of people in the colonies who have thus far rejected decolonization and independence to opt for a future of independence? How do we convince them that their economic security and their cultural integrity will be more assured under a regime of independence?

And likewise how do we convince the people of the neo-colonial independent nations of the Caribbean to abandon the existing structures of dependent development / dependent independence and to reach for a future of genuine independence and sovereignty?

Seen in this perspective, it is not two struggles - one involving the colonies and one involving the formally independent nations - but one struggle involving all of us in the Caribbean!

The solution therefore can only be for all of us to aim for the creation of a collective culturally distinct Caribbean nation and civilization that is based predominantly on production!

To this end, I would like to propose the following work and advocacy plan that all of us

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could pursue simultaneously right across the Caribbean:

(1) We must all advocate for the construction of a planned regional productive economy based on regional industries, and guided by the principle of delivering an acceptable minimum standard of living to all of the people of the Caribbean region.

Only the organization of a real **Caribbean Economic and Industrial Community** can provide both the colonies and the neo-colonies with the investment capital, the organizational skill, and the political strength to offset the weakness inherent in the fragile tourist and international business industries; to defend themselves against the danger of having to sell themselves and their birthrights to the alien Euro-American interloper; and to consistently deliver material life-styles to the broad masses of Caribbean people that are on par with what currently obtains in the most socially advanced colonies and independent nations of the Caribbean.

Concomitant with this, we must all advocate for the construction of the core of a multi-territory federal nation-state of the Caribbean. Once this is accomplished, we would have established a strong independent political and economic structure in the Caribbean that the currently existing colonies can attach themselves to upon freeing themselves from their colonial oppressors.

The best prospect for achieving this plank of our Plan of Action is to focus on the existing 15 nation **Caribbean Community** (CARICOM), and to advocate for a re-thinking and re-conceptualizing of CARICOM in light of these new objectives; and ultimately a transformation and expansion of CARICOM.

(2) We must all engage in an advocacy campaign for the payment of **Reparations** by our colonial oppressors for the damage inflicted on us - colonies and neo-colonies - during the centuries of slavery and colonialism. Such Reparations should be conceptualized and presented to our people in both the colonies and neo-colonies as critical financial resources that will facilitate our move to genuine independence.

(3) We must all subscribe to and hold up before our people in both the colonies and neo-colonies the vision of a **Caribbean Civilization** based on the following three planks:

(1) Our common past and historical processes in the Caribbean;

(2) A sense of our collective cultural identity as sons and daughters of the Caribbean;

(3) A concept of civilizational development as being much more than mere material advancement or the accumulation of material goods - and extending to the concept of development as autonomous or self-driven movement; the autonomous confronting and over-coming of obstacles within our own civilizational space, by ourselves, for ourselves, and in our own unique manner!

(4) We must all engage in a class based political movement that identifies, targets and combats the economic and political elites (both in the colonies and neo-colonies and in the metropolis) that benefit from and therefore maintain the mechanisms of colonialism and neo-colonialism.

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And within this context, we must pay particular attention to identifying and combating the United States of America's geo-political interest in keeping the Caribbean region in a state of colonialism, neo-colonialism, weakness and dependency.

(5) We must utilize the strong hemisphere-wide mechanism of the '**Bolivarian Alternative for Latin America and the Caribbean (ALBA)**

as a supportive, nurturing and protective solidarity structure within which we can locate both this campaign of activism and the construction of mutually beneficial developmental initiatives.