

Anguilla's Double Revolution

There was a time, however brief, when Anguilla flew its own flag, a time when unity of purpose galvanized the island's resistance against the irrelevance to which it had been relegated by external forces, a time when Anguilla forewent all prudence and declared itself the world's smallest republic. It was in the heady days of the 1960s, and at the root of Anguilla's conflict lay Britain's neglectful administration of a territory that never had been, really, of any importance to the Crown. All in all Anguilla's republican experiment lasted 22 months, ending with the military invasion of March 1969, which signalled the island's return to the British colonial fold – the very thing for which Anguillians had clamoured for generations.

Formally, Anguilla's discontent began in 1825, when the island's vestry was essentially absorbed by the St. Kitts Council, but often with issues that have dragged on for centuries the key question isn't when they first emerged but when they last went unresolved. In the case of Anguilla, the very last missed opportunity came in 1966 after the collapse of the Federation of the West Indies when the British floated the idea of associated statehood, essentially a form of self-government that kept ties with Britain only for defence and diplomatic purposes.

The concept was embraced by Robert Bradshaw, Chief Minister of St Kitts-Nevis-Anguilla and a staunch supporter of the Federation. In May 1966 a constitutional conference took place in London, involving Bradshaw and several other politicians, including Anguilla's elected representative, Peter Adams. Adams sanctioned the proposals made in the conference and returned to Anguilla to discuss

them with his electorate. The outcome was a formal petition in June 1966 for Britain to send a senior official to Anguilla to discuss the possibility of direct rule from the United Kingdom.

This request went unheeded, as did a similar one from October, just four months later: the British could not spare a senior official. They did, however, agree to send a local government expert by the name of Peter Johnston. In the hope of ironing out any lingering misconceptions about the proposed form of government under statehood, Johnston visited all three islands in January 1967 – just one month ahead of the official creation of the Associated State of St Kitts-Nevis-Anguilla.

The Resistance

On 27 January 1967 Johnston was greeted by a crowd of agitated Anguillians waving placards with strong anti-statehood slogans. At the head of this crowd were Ronald Webster and Atlin Harrigan, the two men who during the course of 1967 would transform Anguilla's political scene. As Johnston made his way to the Courthouse, where he was supposed to conduct his consultation about local self-government, he must have realised his message stood no chance of coming across. Before long he called it a day, departing the island with an unfulfilled mission but with his head still firmly on his shoulders. The first echoes of social eruption were beginning to rumble.

Just how tone-deaf Chief Minister Bradshaw was to the sentiment prevalent in Anguilla is evidenced by the fact that, Johnston's expulsion notwithstanding, plans to hold a beauty pageant less than a week later to celebrate the impending arrival of statehood went ahead unchanged. The Statehood Queen Show of 4

February 1967 was nothing short of a deliberate provocation by the government towards the people of Anguilla, and that is precisely how it was perceived on the island. While entertainers were flown in from St Kitts and Nevis, ostensibly to appease the collective anxiety with an almighty party, various groups of antagonists from the eastern villages – from Island Harbour and East End and Sandy Hill – made plans to disrupt the show and make their discontent explicit.

That this was always likely to descend into chaos is clear from the fact that Anguilla's meagre police force – barely sixteen uniformed men, all of them originally from St Kitts – was specially equipped with tear gas for the occasion. Little instruction came with the canisters, though, so later that night when protesters took to pelting with stones the school that hosted the event and to vandalising the only generator powering the lights inside, the police did the logical thing: they used the tear gas to disperse the mob. Except the wind was blowing towards the school, where an audience already forced to gauge beauty in darkness was further aggravated by the suffocating sting of chemical weapons.

Anguilla's revolution is often described as bloodless, but there was nothing peaceful about the days, weeks and months that followed the Statehood Queen Show. In fact, things grew so tense over the following fortnight, with freedom fighters hiding in the wilderness, plans to smuggle guns into the island well underway, and the police raking the eastern quadrant of Anguilla, that on 15 February the British frigate HMS Salisbury made an unofficial visit. In collaboration with the local police, British marines searched for cached guns and fugitives yet found instead a brazen crowd that vehemently rejected statehood by singing, of all tunes, 'God Save the Queen'.

Less than a fortnight later, on 27 February 1967, the flag of St Kitts-Nevis-Anguilla was meant to replace the Union Jack at Government House and usher in an era of greater self-determination. Anguillians had no intention of welcoming independence under St Kitts, though, and a major demonstration convened before the public building to prevent the symbolic ceremony from taking place. Late into the night the protest continued, until eventually the crowd thinned out sufficiently for Warden Vincent Byron to deem it safe enough to switch flags. It was now the small hours of the morning, and the Warden himself was in his pyjamas. Bradshaw had succeeded in imposing statehood upon Anguilla, but he would have to be satisfied with having it sneaked in through the back door.

The Revolt

Between March and May 1967 Anguilla witnessed an unprecedented spike in violence, which saw the Government House burned to the ground in an act of arson, the Police Station regularly sprayed with gunshots in the night, and several businesses vandalised due to their owners' presumed or explicit support of Bradshaw. That was the state of affairs when Peter Adams, Anguilla's elected representative, called for a public meeting in Burroughs Park on 29 May 1967. The response was overwhelming, as hundreds of people gathered to vent their anger. Spontaneously it was decided the crowd would march to the Police Station and demand the full task force leave the island. Acting Assistant Superintendent Charles Edgings was understandably apprehensive about the idea, but given the size and

determination of the mob outside he agreed to pass the information to Basseterre and await instructions.

In reality he was buying time for the central government to send reinforcements and quash the revolt, but when an unscheduled flight materialised in the Anguillian skyline the following morning the response on the ground was automatic: locals drove their cars onto the dust strip, making it impossible for the airplane to land and forcing it to turn back. Peter Adams, Ronald Webster, Atlin Harrigan and many others then set out to find any means of transport available to ship the sixteen policemen stationed in Anguilla back to St Kitts. It took all day, but by the end of 30 May 1967 Anguilla had embarked on its first revolution.

At that stage, two equally serious threats immediately compromised Anguilla's position: on the one hand, there was the very real danger of invasion from St Kitts; on the other, a structure had to be put in place in all haste to preserve the rule of law on an island where violence had progressively become tolerated as a valid form of resistance. To this end, a Peacekeeping Committee was established that very Tuesday, 30 May. The Committee consisted of fifteen of the community's most prominent members, and it was charged with preserving a semblance of normality as the island pursued the one and only ambition that amalgamated all segments of society: dissociation from St Kitts.

On Wednesday 31 May, one day into the revolution, Peter Adams sent a message to the United Nations asking Secretary-General U Thant for help. That same day a delegation of four was sent to St Kitts to present Governor Fred Phillips with an official plea to separate Anguilla from the newly formed Associated State. Under the new arrangement all Phillips could do was pass the message to Premier

Bradshaw, who adamantly refused to entertain the idea of a self-governing Anguilla. In response to Bradshaw's hostility towards the island's wishes, the Peacekeeping Committee deployed a network of coastline guardsmen to keep any potential invaders at bay.

In the event, Bradshaw was unable to garner support for a combined military operation from Britain or any regional player. Instead, he suspended the postal service and blocked all transactions made to Anguilla's only bank. To compound the situation, the Peacekeeping Committee's defence strategy consisted in making the island completely inaccessible by sea or plane, thus eliminating the threat of outside intervention. Isolation, however, was a double-edged sword, because for all the sense of safety it might have afforded Anguilla, this was a place that relied heavily on remittances, a place where anything other than salt and seafood was imported, so making the island off-limits essentially amounted to a self-imposed siege.

The Invasion

Anguilla's number one priority at this stage was fending off a potential attack from St Kitts. Ronald Webster, in charge of Anguilla's defence, took matters into his own hands and together with Atlin Harrigan prepared a secret counter offensive. Acting behind the back of the Peacekeeping Committee, Harrigan and Webster held surreptitious meetings with the leader of the opposition in St Kitts, William 'Billy' Herbert, who somehow convinced them of the feasibility of a coup d'état. In particular, Herbert persuaded the Anguillians that if they sparked an initiative to remove Bradshaw from power it would spread like wildfire. Herbert was bluffing –

though it's true that his People's Action Movement had hauled 35 percent of the vote in the 1966 general election – but Webster and Harrigan weren't just willing to gamble, they desperately wanted him to be right.¹

So, on the night of 9 June an expedition of eighteen freedom fighters, including three American mercenaries (or Anguilla sympathisers, whichever way you want to put it), set off from Island Harbour aboard the 35-foot motorboat Rambler. None of the men aboard Rambler had any sailing experience, though, so they got lost halfway between Anguilla and St Kitts. By the time they arrived at the meeting point, several hours late, there was no sign of the multitude of oppressed Kittitians expectantly awaiting the liberation party – just a handful of inebriated men sitting around a table, playing dominoes. Between them they only had two cars, so the expeditionary force was reduced to twelve men and split into two: one group would target the Defence Force camp while the other would hit the Police Station in a coordinated attack. Predictably, nerves played a dirty trick on the Anguillian contingent, so the squad in charge of taking the Police Station jumped the gun, even though they were supposed to act only once they'd heard the first shots fired from the Defence Force camp, while the men outside the military garrison in Basseterre were unable to blow a hole into the perimeter wall, let alone take over the complex. The rest of the night would see the runaways scramble for safety in a doomed race against sunrise.

Eventually, half of them – the three Americans included – would manage to escape to St Eustatius in a stolen fishing boat. Atlin Harrigan, Ronald Webster and

¹ 'General Election Results – 25 July 1966'. *Caribbean Elections*. http://www.caribbeanelections.com/kn/elections/kn_results_1966.asp.

four other Anguillians who never alighted Rambler also made it back safely before the crack of dawn. One of the men who attacked the Police Station got hold of a motor boat and successfully made it across the channel to St Barth, but the rest of that squadron would be kept in a prison cell in hostile territory for months, as the shambolic attack on St Kitts proved to be a rotund failure. Some battles, however, are best lost, and if none of the mission's immediate strategic goals were achieved, in the medium term the maverick initiative bought Anguilla time – which was precisely what Anguilla needed.²

First Declaration of Independence

Meanwhile, several Caribbean governments, spearheaded by Jamaica, sent a fact-finding mission to both St Kitts and Anguilla, which arrived in Basseterre on 28 June with the intention of brokering a peaceful solution to the conflict. By then, Anguilla's most illustrious migrant, Jeremiah Gumbs, had made it back from his home base in New Jersey, where he ran a successful fuel business. Together with him he had brought a man by the name of Roger Fisher, a law professor at Harvard whom Jere Gumbs had recruited to become the island's legal adviser. Almost by default, Gumbs became the ambassador and chief communicator of the nation's plight to the outside world. Gumbs headed a delegation of four who met the Fact Finding Mission, but predictably no recommendation of substance was put forward by the latter other than calling for yet another conference later that month in Barbados.

² For a detailed account of Anguilla's attack of St. Kitts see Colville Petty and A Nat Hodge. *Anguilla's Battle for Freedom 1967–1969*. Anguilla: PETNAT, 2010 (pp 84–122).

In the intervening weeks Anguilla's Peacekeeping Committee made it a priority to dispel the notion, disseminated by Bradshaw, that this was a racially motivated coup orchestrated by a small group of fair-skinned locals from the eastern portion of the island. Set within the context of Black Power in general, and particularly in relation to Bradshaw's strong bond with St Kitts' most disenfranchised class, the cane cutters, his misrepresentation of the situation in Anguilla was clearly aimed at discrediting the movement by aligning it with racial politics manipulated by a minority seeking to protect their privileges. His claims ignored the fact that in Anguilla those who sided with Bradshaw, or at least with protecting the integrity of the state, were primarily civil servants, teachers and other professionals who either lived in St Kitts or were employed by the central administration – in other words, the bulk of the island's middle class.

In order to legitimise its actions in the eyes of the world, the Peacekeeping Committee called for a referendum to consult the people of Anguilla whether they were in favour of seceding from St Kitts and of setting up an interim government. The referendum took place on 11 July 1967, and was witnessed by reporters from Canada and the United States. The result was an absolutely overwhelming 1,813 votes in favour with only 5 votes against out of an electoral role of approximately 2,500, including many living abroad.

With an approval rate in excess of 99% and more than 70% of the eligible population casting their vote, Walter Hodge, Head of the Peacekeeping Committee, read out a legal document specially prepared for the occasion by Roger Fisher, the Harvard lawyer, which officially declared Anguilla independent. Before the end of the month Fisher also presented a minimalistic constitution, which contemplated the

creation of a seven-member Anguilla Council (five elected members, two designated) and stipulated free elections to be held no later than July 1968.³

The San Francisco Group

Roger Fisher wasn't the only outsider contributing to Anguilla's cause. Indeed, Anguillians soon learned that extricating themselves from the ordinary framework of international law was one way of boosting their popularity – among shady individuals, rather than respectable nations. Among the plethora of small- and big-time crooks who visited Anguilla in 1967 – from men allegedly representing Meyer Lansky to men allegedly representing Aristotle Onassis – one character stuck out for his relatively unselfish motivations. His name was Dr Leopold Kohr, an economics professor at the University of Puerto Rico whose only dog in Anguilla's fight was proving right his theories about the viability of microstates.

Kohr was naturally attracted to Anguilla in June 1967, when he heard the small island of six thousand people had opted to go it alone (despite the fact that Anguilla's main ambition, at least initially, was to be absorbed by some greater conglomerate, preferably the United Kingdom). Having personally scouted the situation in Anguilla, he called on a number of his followers to help him ensure the island achieved financial sustainability. In Anguilla this army of theorists is still referred to as the San Francisco Group, simply because several of them stemmed from the Bay area.

³ 'The Constitution of Anguilla, July 1967'. In Ronald Webster. *Scrapbook of Anguilla's Revolution*. Anguilla: Seabreakers Ltd, 1987 (p 32).

Spearheaded by Scott Newhall, the one-legged swashbuckling managing director of the San Francisco *Chronicle* and one of the journalists covering the unfolding situation in Anguilla, the group brought together a motley assembly of enthusiasts for Leopold Kohr's ideas, which included Howard Gossage, an advertising guru, Art Finley, a TV personality in the Bay area, and his wife, Geraldine Finger. It was Gossage who came up with the idea of selling freedom stamps and coins to keep Anguilla afloat, while Newhall was responsible for the infamous 'mermaid flag' on a purple background. Less than a week after Fischer's Declaration of Independence the San Francisco Group arranged a big fundraising gala at the St Francis hotel in San Francisco, where Jere Gumbs and Peter Adams were first presented with the Anguilla Liberty Dollar – a few counter-stamped Peruvian soles die cast at a cost of \$2 each, which the group planned to sell for \$10 each as a means of replenishing Anguilla's coffers.

Alas, the well-meaning Anguillians and the well-intentioned San Francisco Group soon found their respective goodwill travelled on different wavelengths. The short-lived affair was fraught from the start with crossed wires, but things truly came to a head on 14 August, when Scott Newhall decided to take out a two-page ad in the *New York Times* to publish the notorious 'Anguilla White Paper', a manifesto of sorts, written by Gossage with much imagination and little understanding of what Anguillians actually wanted, which painted a less-than-dignified picture while addressing the island's centuries-long plight against poverty and neglect.⁴

⁴ "(The Anguilla White Paper): Is it 'silly' that Anguilla does not want to become a nation of bus boys". *New York Times*. 14 August 1967. In Webster, pp 54–5.

As a publicity stunt the ad was a success, but Anguillians didn't take kindly to it, among other things because the message it contained was misleading and frankly belittling. In the end only a few hundred Anguilla Liberty Dollars ever made it to the island, and most of them were earmarked for the generous donors from the fundraiser at the St Francis hotel (which single-handedly contributed \$14,000 to Anguilla's cause). Still, in the early days of the revolution, through the months of July and August 1967, the San Francisco Group played a key role in raising both awareness and funds for the smallest republic in the world.

The Barbados Conference

Following the recommendation made by the Fact Finding Mission sent to St Kitts early in July 1967, the British Minister for Commonwealth Relations, Lord Shepherd, announced a new conference would take place in Barbados on 25 July. In the intervening eight weeks between the expulsion of the Kittitian task force from Anguilla on May 30 and the Barbados Conference on 25 July Anguilla managed to hold a referendum, declare independence, produce a constitution, form an island council, create a flag, and successfully hold an international fundraising event. Armed with this considerable accomplishment Peter Adams and the rest of Anguilla's five-member delegation met the representatives of Jamaica, Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago, Barbados and the United Kingdom, as well as Robert Bradshaw and his Attorney General, Eugene Walwyn from Nevis.

The purpose of the conference was to find political compromise and to broker a fair and reasonable deal beneficial for all parties, thereby bringing a peaceful

resolution to this quickly escalating regional crisis. To this end the British delegate, Lord Shepherd, pressured Bradshaw into granting Anguilla what Anguilla had already taken by force, namely, some degree of self-governance in the shape of an island council. Bradshaw agreed to that, as well as to stipulations for a general amnesty, ending the state of emergency, and the deployment of a regional peacekeeping force for an advisory period. For good measure, Lord Shepherd threw in a belated gesture of generosity the likes of which Anguilla had never witnessed in its long history of neglect: the British government would spend £50,000 in infrastructure in Anguilla over the course of the following six months. It was a good deal, as good a deal as could be hoped. Except it demanded in return the one thing the Anguillian delegation simply could not grant: the return to a single unitary state with St Kitts.

Faced with the impossible, Adams asked for an adjournment and requested reinforcements from Anguilla. Ronald Webster, Jeremiah Gumbs, and three other Anguillians expeditiously joined Peter Adams and the rest of the island's contingent. Since Ronald Webster and another of the newcomers, Bob Rogers, were part of the Anguilla Council they were accepted as full delegates. Anguilla's delegation now consisted of seven members plus four advisers. More heads huddled together, however, did not bring the desired harmony. Lord Shepherd, increasingly exasperated, used ever more intimidating language, insistently pointing to the imminent threat of a coordinated invasion should the conference fail to result in a workable solution for both parties.

After a full week of heavy-handed negotiations, adjournments and counter-negotiations, four of Anguilla's delegates were finally convinced – whether by force

or reason would later become a major source of debate – that these were the best terms they'd be able to get. When the time came to endorse the ensuing agreement, however, Ronald Webster and two of the original five-member delegation refused to sign it.

In the face of it, a majority of Anguilla's sizable delegation had chosen what was best for the island, and the Barbados Conference was immediately celebrated as the crowning achievement of Caribbean diplomacy. Yet the reality on the field of battle, as it were, on Anguilla's home soil, was very different. Ronald Webster and the rest of the dissenting faction of Anguilla's delegation returned home from Barbados the following day, breaking the news to a large crowd gathered at the airport that four members of the team had buckled under pressure and signed an agreement that essentially preserved the integrity of the state of St Kitts-Nevis-Anguilla. Robert Bradshaw's triumphant speech on ZIZ radio that same day did nothing to appease the flaring tempers on the island. When the rest of the delegation arrived from Barbados, via Antigua, one day later, they were greeted by an angry mob who had seemingly allowed the plane to land only so they could lynch the passengers on the ground.

The chain of command in Anguilla was immediately changed as a result of the Barbados Conference, with Ronald Webster taking over from Peter Adams as Council President, while Walter Hodge was put in charge of the Treasury, a role he would fulfil enviably throughout the lifetime of the Republic of Anguilla. Webster then proceeded to inform leaders across the region that the people of Anguilla would not abide by the terms of the treaty. The British had already assigned a navy frigate to bring the joint Caribbean Peacekeeping Force to the island, but Jamaica, which had

recently faced a comparable situation with the separation of the Turks and Caicos and the Cayman Islands after Jamaica declared independence in 1962, remained adamant in its resolve not to participate in any form of intervention that went against the will of the Anguillian people. Webster turned to Barbados next, sending Emile Gumbs, one of the seven members of the Anguilla Council, to speak to Prime Minister John Tudor. Emile Gumbs made it clear to John Tudor that Anguilla had gone past the point of no return, that Anguillians would not entertain going back to St Kitts, and asked for Barbados not to contribute to a Caribbean policing force which, in effect, would be an invading army.

Less than a week later a Second Barbados Conference was convened by the governments of Jamaica and Barbados, as well as Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago to decide whether assembling and shipping out this Caribbean Peacekeeping Force would be feasible at all. The answer came loud and clear during yet another conference, this one held on 17–20 August in Jamaica, where the British were informed that if they wanted to invade Anguilla, they'd have to do it on their own. Lord Shepherd invoked the stability of the region, warned against the dangers of foreign elements gaining control of Anguilla and even made first mention of Mafia-like gangsters taking advantage of the situation, the very same excuse the British government would use to justify its decision to invade Anguilla two years later. But in Jamaica in August 1967 no one was willing to listen to any of this. Anguilla, through the temerity and conviction of Ronald Webster, had landed an unlikely diplomatic victory.

Audience with the United Nations

After the disastrous end to the Barbados Conference, Jeremiah Gumbs flew to New York, showed up at the UN HQ, identified himself as the Ambassador-at-large of Anguilla and asked to speak to Secretary-General U Thant. Predictably, he was told His Excellency was fully booked and was politely asked to come back the following day, probably in the hope he would never show up again. But he did, so persistently that he was finally pencilled in to meet the Under-Secretary of the Department of Trusteeships and Non-Self-Governing Territories, Issoufou Saidou-Djermakoye, on 7 August. The following day Gumbs spoke to the Sub-Committee III of the Special Committee, who listened with keen interest to Anguilla's predicament and asked him to come back the following day to continue their discussions.

In an effort to strengthen the legal foundations of his plea, Gumbs brought Roger Fisher to the meeting on 9 August, but the latter was refused entry on the basis that he wasn't Anguillian. Eventually Jeremiah Gumbs convinced the Sub-Committee III that Roger Fisher's insight in the case of Anguilla was valuable, so the Harvard man was finally allowed to speak to the Sub-Committee on 14 August. That was the day Scott Newhall had contrived to respond to the *New York Times* coverage of the situation on the island by taking out a full-page advert and publishing the 'Anguilla White Paper'.

Fisher survived the effects of the publicity stunt and eventually persuaded the Sub-Committee to bring the matter to the attention of the Special Committee on Colonialism. But Lord Caradon, the representative of the UK, an integral member of the Committee of 24, blocked any further discussions, claiming this was an internal

affair of a self-governing Associated State and therefore not a matter of colonialism at all. It wasn't until the British government made a U-turn in its support for the integrity of the state of St Kitts-Nevis-Anguilla, towards the end of 1967, that Jere Gumbs and Roger Fisher were finally allowed to speak to the Committee of 24 and pose Anguilla's all-important question: 'Does a place have to be big to be free?'⁵

Going It Alone

After three hectic months of emergency talks and the highest levels of vigilance on the island, it dawned on Anguillians that, having outsmarted St Kitts in the diplomatic battle, the challenge wasn't anymore repelling a potential invasion which seemed ever less likely, but rather successfully going through the motions of an ordinary government in an ordinary state – and staying afloat in the process. Some of it was practically symbolic, like Peter Adams resigning at the end of August to his seat in the Legislature of St Kitts-Nevis-Anguilla, as was his appointment as Magistrate on an island firmly banked on legal limbo.

Another critical element in the paraphernalia of any democratic system was added to the small but growing roster of Anguillian institutions in September 1967, when Atlin Harrigan, among the youngest of the revolutionaries at 28 years of age, set up the first newspaper in the history of Anguilla, *The Beacon*. Produced by the Anglican Canon Guy Carleton, Rector of Anguilla, and pressed in the basement of Atlin Harrigan's wife's family home in Sandy Hill, the paper started as a single sheet printed on both sides with the news of the day and circulated every Saturday,

⁵ 'The Two Fishers'. *The Beacon*. No 12. 16 December 1967. Ed. by Atlin Harrigan (p 2).

without fault, from the last week of September 1967 to March 1969 (and later again from April '69 to the end of 1971).

Meanwhile, an upshot of the Barbados Conference debacle was the need to call early elections. The first elections of the Anguilla Council were supposed to be held on 25 October 1967, but by the end of nomination day only five independent candidates had been proposed to the five positions up for grabs so they were declared duly elected without so much as a ballot being cast. There was no big celebration rally on Election Day, just a number of speeches at Burrowes Park, led by Ronald Webster, who was reappointed Chairman of the Council. By then, though, the flag flying from the mast at the airport was no longer the Union Jack, or Scott Newhall's ridiculous mermaid pastiche. It was, instead, a rather tasteful symbol for a nation. Designed by Jeremiah Gumbs' wife, Lydia, and realised by Marvin Oberman, a graphic designer from New York, it featured three orange dolphins jumping in a circle on a white background and a turquoise bottom hoop – to this day the foundation of the island's visual identity.

The flag on its own was just an unimportant afterthought, but the fact that Anguilla had discarded the first suggestion and replaced it with a much more suitable one showed how seriously they were taking themselves. Anguilla was learning the protocols of diplomacy and self-governance on the fly, inevitably making mistakes nearly at every turn, but also identifying them and putting them right as best she could.

Developments in St Kitts

Anguilla's case for secession found its most persuasive exponent in the erratic, opportunistic and frankly dictatorial behaviour of Robert Bradshaw, the island's biggest foe. Following the attack on the Police Headquarters and the Defence Camp in Basseterre on 10 June 1967 Bradshaw declared a state of emergency and subsequently detained twenty-two people, including five of the Anguillian troublemakers. They would have to wait more than four months, until the middle of October, for the first of a series of trials against them and another eight of the original twenty-two detainees to be brought to court. The first trial ended on 25 October with Collins Hodge, one of the Anguillians who on 10 June had attacked the Police Headquarters, being acquitted from the charge of shooting with intent.

Hodge flew home that day to a hero's reception in Anguilla but his mirth resulted in more misery for the remaining Anguillian prisoners in St Kitts, as Bradshaw realised the independent Eastern Caribbean High Court would not dance to his tune. A change in strategy saw the prosecutor use one of the Anguillians, Lemuel Phillip, as witness against the other three, Mitchell Harrigan, Churchill Smith and Todville Harrigan on the next case. The tempestuous trial began on 30 October and became a matter of national pride, with two members of the jury receiving threatening letters and the judge, Ian St Bernard from Grenada, having to request special protection for them from the police.

One of the most important, yet widely overlooked, developments in Anguilla's quest for legitimacy came on 14 November, immediately after Judge St Bernard acquitted all five accused, the three Anguillians plus two local residents with ties to Anguilla, from the charge of shooting with intent. The government of St Kitts had clearly seen this coming and was prepared to react in all haste, not only by

arresting the Harrigan brothers and Churchill Smith again, this time for stealing arms from the police back on Anguilla on 30 May but, most importantly, by calling an emergency assembly in which a motion was introduced and immediately adopted, supporting the creation of an official inquiry into the events of 10 June, and expressly stating the assembly's lack of confidence in the administration of justice by the Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court in this particular matter.

Over the following fortnight the foundations of the judiciary system in St Kitts eroded substantially, putting into question its autonomy and indeed compromising the separation of powers within the state. On 20 November yet another trial started, this time against six individuals accused of conspiracy to overthrow the government, Billy Herbert and Todville Harrigan among them. However, after just one week the government abruptly stopped the trials, as the increasingly political nature of the case made Bradshaw's government uneasy. With no further evidence being brought forward by the prosecution, Judge Eric Bishop was forced to pronounce the men not guilty. Nearly at the same time the Kittitian government set up its own Commission of Inquiry to establish what had really happened on 10 June 1967. If any doubt still persisted, Bradshaw had proven he regarded St Kitts St Kitts as his private playground – and Anguilla (as well as Nevis, incidentally) as a tacit appendage.

Parliamentary Delegation and Interim Administration

Bradshaw's act of defiance against the Eastern Caribbean High Court effectively forced the British to realise that if left to their own the natural forces fuelling this

conflict would lead to more and more polarisation. Hence, towards the end of 1967 not just one but two members of the British Parliament made it to Anguilla to discuss the constitutional crisis and explore possible solutions.

Tory MP Nigel Fisher, Labour MP Donald Chapman, and an administrative team led by Tony Lee (who would soon become the face of Britain's topsy-turvy policy towards the island), got to work on Monday 4 December, visiting schools, churches and hospitals in Anguilla for four days before heading to St Kitts for the rest of the week. It would take Fisher and Chapman a fortnight of toing and froing between Anguilla and St Kitts before they could broker an Interim Agreement whereby Tony Lee would be appointed Administrator for the period of one calendar year, essentially closing the book on the (First) Republic of Anguilla and leaving the island in some sort of protectorate-like agreement with Britain.

By the end of 1967 Anguilla had been governing itself for exactly seven months, and while the books could only be balanced thanks to a personal loan of EC \$35,000 (approximately US \$7,000) from Ronald Webster as well as EC \$42,000 (close to US \$9,000) in donations from the USA (mainly through Jere Gumbs' Anguilla Improvement Association), the fact remains that the wheels had decidedly not come off during this period, an accomplishment that stood out even more when contrasted to the situation in St Kitts.

If 1967 had been a year of struggle and strife, 1968 was greeted as the year of solutions, beginning with the official start of the one-year period of direct administration by the British on 9 January. Before the end of the month some sort of closure was brought to the ill-planned invasion of St Kitts, as the four freedom fighters still stranded on the other side of the channel made their great escape thanks

to a sympathiser, a 16ft motorboat, a few guns and 40 gallons of fuel to make the journey back to Anguilla.⁶ Six months after setting out on a suicidal mission, all 18 men aboard *Rambler* on June 10 were back home and dry.

Despite the happy return of Anguillians previously held hostage, though, everything was not harmonious in Anguilla. The decision by the Anguilla Council's not to make the minutes of each session available to the public was met with apprehension, while suspicions of cronyism surfaced after it emerged several civil servants were also acting in government roles. As early as 27 January *The Beacon* published a lengthy editorial calling for new elections and for the number of councilmen to be expanded from seven to nine. Added to this, Anguillians grew frustrated as they came to the realisation that the interim agreement was little more than an institutional framework to do nothing. Moreover, the permanent liquidity issues affecting the island made it imperative for government to get its hands on the Anguillian portion of the development grant the British had made available to the government of St Kitts-Nevis-Anguilla. As the months went by it became evident that the sole purpose of Interim Administrator Lee's presence was to allow time to paper over the differences between Anguilla and St Kitts. Except, these were precisely the sort of wounds time can't heal.

New general elections were scheduled for 30 July 1968, and while five of the seven members of the Council stood unopposed, two districts, Road North and Valley South, saw two-horse races won by Emile Gumbs and Wallace Rey respectively. Real elections were starting to become a thing in Anguilla.

⁶ Petty and Hodge, p 120.

London Talks and Second Declaration of Independence

The newly elected Anguilla Council managed to achieve precious little during the summer of '68, before Ronald Webster and Robert Bradshaw were invited by the British Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, William Whitlock, to hold talks in London in between the 14 and 23 October that same year.

Despite the duration of the talks, it became evident from the onset that the two positions had grown apart rather substantially during the very period that was supposed to bring them closer together. Perhaps the most significant change in Anguilla's predicament through 1968 was the fact that Webster had become increasingly fond of the idea of total independence as he surrounded himself with a new retinue that included Freeman O Goodge – an American pastor of the Baptist church – and a Florida businessman called Jack Holcomb, both of whom were of the mind that Anguilla would be better off alone than in bad company. Meanwhile, Bradshaw saw in Anguilla's quest for secession a dangerous and potentially contagious disease that might well spread fragmentation across the Caribbean basin. Predictably, by the time all was said and done the London Talks produced absolutely no results.

Almost as if they had pre-empted this, the British proposed to extend Tony Lee's stay in Anguilla by another year but by this time the word 'Interim' had become toxic in Anguilla's lingo.⁷ Webster was effectively presented with the choice of another year of lethargy or a crack at the dizzying ideas brought by Holcomb, who initially introduced himself as a developer interested only in bringing prosperity to the island in exchange of a monopoly on all the concrete and building materials used

⁷ 'Editorial'. *The Beacon*. No 57. 26 October 1968. Ed. by Atlin Harrigan (p 1).

on Anguilla. The island's moderate faction pointed to the more than BWI \$250,000 Her Majesty's Government had poured into Anguilla throughout 1968 as a compelling reason to wait until the end of the Conference of Commonwealth Prime Ministers, held in London between 7 and 15 January, before making any decision. To this end, the Interim Administration was unofficially extended by eight days. However, Tony Lee's departure from the island on 16 January was very much interpreted by the radical faction as a tacit understanding that Anguilla's status had reverted to what it was prior to Lee's arrival. Thus, in Anguilla in January 1969 it was the summer of '67 all over again.

Webster instructed his new wingman, Jack Holcomb (of all people), to draft a more elaborate constitution and called for a referendum to decide whether Anguilla should declare independence or go back to the Associated State of St Kitts-Nevis-Anguilla. The referendum took place on 6 February, just four days later, the result was almost identical to the first referendum of 11 July 1967: 1739 votes in favour, 4 against. The Republic had completed its uncanny comeback in Anguilla.

The Crisis

It seems ironic, but not altogether surprising, that after pleading their case for 20 months, it was only once Anguilla cut ties with everyone that Britain was finally moved into actively solving a problem more than a century in the making. While Robert Bradshaw in St Kitts demanded support for a military expedition to crush the insurgency, the British government announced William Whitlock, Under-Secretary

of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, would travel to the Caribbean to find a suitable solution to the crisis.

In an almost shocking twist of fate, Whitlock actually managed to convince Bradshaw to accept the very conditions he had considered unthinkable just a few months earlier. The latest proposal by Britain stipulated the return of Tony Lee as Commissioner for an indeterminate period – some years at a minimum – to deal directly with Anguilla's affairs on behalf of Her Majesty's Government. In other words, direct rule from Britain, the very thing Anguilla had set out to achieve in the first place. Bradshaw also agreed to send a Magistrate from the Associated State to properly deal with legal matters on the island, while the Land Registry would be in the hands of the British Commissioner. The full extent of Whitlock's proposals effectively dissolved the integrity of the Associated State of St Kitts-Nevis-Anguilla in all but name.

However, while Whitlock was busy speaking to governments across the Caribbean, Ronald Webster was equally busy setting in motion the wheels of independence. In accordance with the Holcomb constitution the Anguilla Council called for a series of elections to determine eleven representatives to the Legislature, five in island-wide elections and six in district elections, as well as the President of the Republic. Come nomination day only six candidates were registered for the six district seats, while Ronald Webster stood unopposed in the presidential election and was accordingly declared President. A further five island-wide representatives were supposed to be elected on 25 March, but Anguilla's world, already troubled as it was, would be completely turned on its head by the events of Saturday 11 March, 1969. That was the day when William Whitlock, having completed his round of

negotiations with half the governments in the Caribbean and consulted with his superiors in London, would finally make it to The Valley to inform Anguillians of his success negotiating their future status.

Alas, William Whitlock was totally oblivious to the wishes and expectations of the people he had come to serve. Not only did he snub Webster upon arrival, he also bypassed all basic codes of courtesy, antagonising the crowd that had come to meet him at the airport by tossing reams of leaflets at them without so much as explaining the terms they contained. To add insult to injury, Whitlock declined to attend a luncheon Jeremiah Gumbs had arranged in his honour at Rendezvous Bay Hotel, paying a visit instead to Henry Howard, the former Administrator of St Kitts-Nevis-Anguilla, at his home in Sandy Hill.

Understandably, Ronald Webster and his sympathisers were not impressed. Aboard the vehicles they had prepared to shuttle Whitlock and his delegation to Rendezvous Bay they headed to Sandy Hill, where they interrupted Whitlock's pleasant merriment. With shotgun bullets. Before the first shots rang, Webster gave Whitlock notice to leave the island within the hour, after which time his safety could not be guaranteed. In a reaction that sounds strikingly similar to Acting Assistant Superintendent Charles Edgings' actions back on 29 May 1967, Whitlock sent word of the situation to the British government and sought to buy some time, in the hope that reinforcements might arrive soon enough. Like Edgings or, for that matter, Peter Johnston, the local government expert, before him, Whitlock quickly found out Anguillians were dead serious about their revolution. Before the end of the day he and his delegation were escorted, at gunpoint, into the Piper Aztec that would fly them back to wherever they had come from.

Whitlock's account of his ordeal, upon his return to London, confirmed the suspicions first aired by Lord Shepherd all the way back in 1967 that Anguilla was being overrun by Mafia-like elements. The writing was on the wall for the Republic of Anguilla and, with the possible exception of John Holcomb and Ronald Webster, everyone involved knew it. Jeremiah Gumbs, for one, sensed military intervention was imminent. In a last ditch effort to garner diplomatic support he flew back to New Jersey to deliver a letter from Ronald Webster to Secretary-General U Thant. Gumbs informed the Special Committee on Sunday 16 March that two British frigates were on their way to Anguilla, and on Monday 17 he famously compared Britain's invasion to 'a bunch of gorillas running into an orphanage'.

Even as Jeremiah Gumbs was addressing the Special Committee of 24 in New York City on Monday 17 March, 135 Red Devil paratroopers from the 2nd Battalion, Parachute Regiment together with 40 members of the Scotland Yard police force were airlifted from Lyneham and Brize Norton airfields in Oxfordshire, en route to Antigua. However, strong headwinds throughout the flight forced one of the planes, a Vickers V10, to stop for refuelling on Bermuda, where a rough landing claimed two tyres. Which was a problem, because the VC10 carried only one spare, so the troops had to overnight on the landing strip and wait for reinforcements to arrive the following day.

With half of the contingent stranded in Bermuda and the other half waiting in Antigua, details of the mission were leaked to the press and divulged by the London *Daily Express* and *Evening News* on 18 March. Approximately 12 hours later, and eight days after the expulsion of William Whitlock from the island, two British frigates, the HMS Minerva and the HMS Rothesay, reached Anguilla, beaching

troops at Crocus Bay and Road Bay simultaneously. The paratroopers had the perimeter of the island secured by 8 am, less than three hours after landing, as they found the sleepy locals confronting them with some surprise and a good degree of indignation, but with no resistance at all. Before the end of the day the oil drums blocking Walblake Airport had been removed, and Tony Lee had been installed Commissioner of Anguilla.

The British had come prepared to find large stashes of weapons, intimidated portions of the population and 'Mafia-like gangster elements' ruling the island. They had compiled detailed lists of places to be searched and people to be arrested and questioned, including local militants and American citizens. The only suspect characters they could find to use as scapegoats, though, were Freeman Goodge, Jack Holcomb and doctor Spector, the single medic on the island, whose license had been rescinded in the US. They were expelled from Anguilla, more or less at the same time as Harold Wilson was ridiculed in parliament for embarking on his own Bay of Piglets.⁸

Operation Sheepskin, as Anguilla's invasion was officially called, was widely repudiated by the international community and scorned by the world press. It cost William Whitlock his job and ended his ministerial career;⁹ it contributed to Harold Wilson's defeat in the 1970 general elections in the UK; and it certainly cost the no-longer-existent British Empire some of the little face it had left. In Anguilla, there was unrest and frustration through the rest of the month of March, but as soon as Lord

⁸ A clipping, ostensibly from the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, dated 20 March 1969 already states that people in London 'were calling it the Bay of Piglets'. In Webster, p 106.

⁹ 'Anguilla Will Cost Minister His Job'. Reprinted from *The Miami Herald*, 8 October 1969. In *The Beacon*. No. 104. 11 October 1969. Ed. by Atlin Harrigan (p. 1).

Caradon, the chief British delegate to the United Nations, visited the island on 28 March the peace that had always reigned in Anguilla began to be restored. It would take years for the legal entanglement between Anguilla and St Kitts to be resolved, and for Anguilla's status as a British Overseas Territory to be settled. But the highly controversial invasion by British troops on 19 March 1969 put a definitive end to Anguilla's second bite at revolution, signalling the demise of an unlikely rogue state that over the course of 22 months contrived to force the hand of the international community.

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