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UNIVERSITY OF KENT  
AT CANTERBURY

“THE MERCHANT PRINCES OF NASSAU”: THE MAINTENANCE OF POLITICAL HEGEMONY  
IN THE BAHAMAS 1834-1948.

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO  
THE SCHOOL OF HISTORY  
IN THE FACULTY OF HUMANITIES  
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

BY  
ROSALYN THEMISTOCLEOUS



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## ABSTRACT

The former slave owning class in The Bahamas fought a rearguard action to defend its political, economic and social hegemony. It shaped the local Abolition Act of 1834 to meet its own requirements, particularly to ensure apprentices would remain in a position of subservience and obedience.

The initial period of concern for the welfare and rights of the freedmen on the part of the Imperial Government soon waned and the white oligarchy was left to govern the newly emancipated without much interference from London. Imperial Government policy also aided the elite in preventing the formation of a class of independent, peasant freeholders. On the Out Islands labour or sharecropping tenancies, squatting and the working of commonage were the norm. Coercive labour systems procured a stable and dependent workforce in a number of industries. The cash economy was limited outside of Nassau and the merchant/landowners were in possession of the little available capital.

Tough laws, designed to keep the lower classes in awe and fear of authorities, were passed by a Legislature dominated by the white elite. Much more was spent on law and order than education or social reforms. The Bahamas continued to be governed under the seventeenth century Old Representative system and the ruling class stubbornly protected its rights and privileges. But the constitutional system was not a responsible one and hardly representative. Open voting, inequitable constituencies, a franchise weighted in favour of the propertied classes, non-payment of representatives and plural voting ensured the return of the white Nassau merchants. The agro-commercial elite had a limited vision beyond its own interests, particularly in regard to financial policy. There were many struggles between the Legislature and the Governors over control of finance and expenditure, reaching its climax in the 1930s when the Governor insisted on Reserve Powers. The Colonial Office investigated the possibilities but realised that, barring a crisis, the initiative had to come from the Assembly, which would never have arisen in The Bahamas.

The ruling whites experienced little challenge from the coloured and black middle classes. They sought to assimilate themselves into white society and distanced themselves from the black lower classes. They were generally conservative in their views. The non-whites did not attempt to form a political party, despite the fact Bahamian society became more polarised in the 1920s and 1930s. No leaders emerged to take advantage of the discontent. After the 1942 Riot, the ruling whites made a few limited concessions that safeguarded their dominance.

## INTRODUCTION

The Bahamas has never fitted neatly into the patterns of historical development woven by other islands of the West Indies. Situated on the periphery of the Caribbean region, it was isolated from the other islands of the British Antilles, closer to the mainland of North America and the Spanish island of Cuba (see Map 1). Its links with the former British colonies of North America were from the beginning of its imperial history far stronger than with any of the islands of the Caribbean. Indeed isolation, both geographically and as a result of poor communications, was to prove a key determinant of The Bahamas' development.

Moreover, the geographical features of The Bahamas present a contrast to other islands of the British West Indies and have proved important factors in mapping out a path of development significantly different from that of the other islands. An archipelago of over seven hundred islands and cays, stretching over 600 miles north to south, with approximately 90,000 square miles of sea within its boundaries, The Bahamas' history was bound to be tied to maritime activities, more so than the colonies of the Caribbean basin. As a consequence of its physical layout, the Colony was also to suffer from problems in controlling the outer territories from its centre at Nassau and from a sense of isolation and estrangement in its Out Islands. The other British colonies in the Caribbean were either contained within a single island or within a small group of islands and would not suffer such difficulties.

The Bahamas, entirely of coral origins, is flat and low-lying with a pot-holed limestone landscape, which contrasts sharply with the volcanic peaks and valleys of its West

Indian neighbours. Having a more northerly location within the Atlantic Ocean, it is climatically more sub-tropical than tropical and thus experiences cooler winters. It is also very close to the large landmass of North America on its western side and, although the warming influence of the Gulf Stream mitigates the colder air that emanates from that area, its location naturally affects the weather patterns experienced by the country. These conditions of topography, soil and climate made The Bahamas unsuitable for significant sugar production and meant that any large-scale plantation farming would be problematic. Since the plantation was a defining feature of the colonies in the West Indies, this was a significant differentiation. As George Beckford stated, the plantation fashioned “the whole environment which the people of these countries have inherited”, the economic structure, the multi-racial population and the structure of society.<sup>1</sup> Parallel developments came to The Bahamas with the introduction of cotton plantations in the later eighteenth century, albeit of comparatively brief duration, and with the concomitant influx of American Loyalists, particularly from the southern British colonies of the North American mainland. Although commercial and maritime activities soon resumed their predominant position in the economy, The Bahamas more resembled the sugar producing islands in demographic and, to a certain degree, in social structure from the 1780s.

The Bahamas, as an island of British settlement, shared similar lines of constitutional development to the other islands of the British West Indies until the post-Emancipation period. Then its constitutional structure came to differ from all the other islands, except Bermuda; both retained the Old Representative system. By the end of the nineteenth century, most British islands had become Crown Colonies, except British Guiana, with its Dutch-inspired administrative system, and Barbados, which retained its elected Assembly but had an Executive Committee, which took over the monopoly of initiating money bills. By the turn of the century, only The Bahamas and Bermuda had a representative system where the elected Assembly possessed control over Revenue and Expenditure. This, of course, was a most important differentiating feature, as these two colonies became virtually self-governing.

The Bahamas, therefore, had certain significant differences from the other islands of the British West Indies that affected its historical development. Nevertheless, one must not

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<sup>1</sup>George L. Beckford, Persistent Poverty: Underdevelopment in Plantation Economies in the Third World (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 3.

only emphasise the contrasts between The Bahamas and the British Antilles. They also had certain elements in common: the settlement process; the establishment of a political structure; influences from Britain; slavery and a slave society; creolization; Emancipation and the restructuring of society.<sup>2</sup> Gordon Lewis describes how the same “architectic forces” have shaped each island of the West Indies and, in consequence, each has suffered similar problems.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, Lewis reminds us there was variance across the region basically because colonies developed at different times and at different rates. Each colony had a unique history. The Bahamas merely experienced more variance because of the differing geographical and economic factors and political developments. There was also a certain lack of harmony among all the colonies of the West Indies, despite their similarities and common interests. Lewis blames colonialism as it decreed that avenues of communication should be between each colony and the metropolis, not among the colonies themselves.<sup>4</sup> This was however, even more accentuated in The Bahamas because of its isolation from the other islands.

The inhabitants of The Bahamas have always endeavoured to sever their islands from a regional identity. A typical view was expressed by a witness at the Commission of Inquiry into the 1942 Riots, who stated “the psychology of the Bahamian is as different from that of the West Indian as cheese is from chalk – this colony is unique – geographically we belong to the USA”.<sup>5</sup> He correctly observed that the average Bahamian would prefer not to be classed in the West Indian group. At the same time, especially in the twentieth century, many West Indians have also preferred to exclude The Bahamas from the group. The perceived racism and unprogressive policies of the ruling white minority and the moderation, indeed conservatism in some cases, of the spokesmen of the black majority alienated many West Indians. The Bahamas did not appear to be ‘one of them’ when it

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<sup>2</sup>See Franklin Knight, The Caribbean: The Genesis of Fragmented Nationalism (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990). He argues that the sum of the general experiences and understandings of the various Caribbean islands outweighs territorial differences.

<sup>3</sup>Gordon Lewis, Main Currents in Caribbean Thought: The Historical Evaluation of Caribbean Society in its Ideological Aspect, 1492-1900 (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1983), chap. 1.

<sup>4</sup>See Gordon Lewis, The Growth of the Modern West Indies (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1968), 18.

<sup>5</sup>Inquiry into Disturbances in the Bahamas, June 1942, 277, microfilm, Department of Archives, Nassau.

came to fighting for democratic and civil rights and, more recently, for independence. The mutual antagonism served to further isolate The Bahamas. This has had some bearing on its place within the literature on the West Indies.

Whether The Bahamas is included in general studies of the West Indies or not seems to depend on the authors' preferences. Hume Wrong in his early study of West Indian Government included The Bahamas, but noted its variance from the other islands: "Numbered among, yet having little in common with, the West Indian colonies, cut off from the rest by the geographical barrier of the Greater Antilles, and by the nature of their products and the character of their population, they have only emerged from obscurity on four occasions in their history".<sup>6</sup> W.L. Burn wrote in his preface to The British West Indies: "The occasional mention of the Bahamas and, still more, of Bermuda in a book on the West Indies is obviously open to objection: they are dealt with in this volume of the series [British Empire History] because it would be difficult to find another into which they could be more fittingly put".<sup>7</sup> Thus, in this case, inclusion appears to be a case of mere convenience for the publishers. Even then, The Bahamas warranted only four brief mentions and just one from the post-Emancipation era. Morley Ayearst (The British West Indies: The Search for Self-Government) can serve as an example of an author who chose to ignore The Bahamas entirely. In a footnote he explains the exclusion: "Sometimes the Bahamas and even Bermuda are included as part of the British West Indies. In fact they are not thought of as such by most West Indians and are not members of the West Indian federation".<sup>8</sup> The grounds for excluding The Bahamas are not totally convincing. Just as valid arguments could be made for inclusion. After all, Columbus did make landfall in The Bahamas and from that time the notion of the 'West Indies' began. Moreover, the British Government regarded the Colony as part of the West Indies and its administrative affairs were dealt with through the West Indian Department. The Imperial Government sent The Bahamas a dispatch in 1945 urging it to consider participation in a West Indies federation, but the House of Assembly, controlled by the white elite, refused to even consider the idea, a manifestation of the 'apartness' felt by the local ruling class. The Colony's non-

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<sup>6</sup>Hume Wrong, Government of the West Indies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1923), 89.

<sup>7</sup>W. L. Burn, The British West Indies (London: Hutchinson's University Library, 1951), vii.

<sup>8</sup>Morley Ayearst, The British West Indies: The Search for Self-Government (London: Allen Unwin, 1960), 11.

participation in the Federation, although not the only non-member in the region, certainly helped to re-enforce the separation of The Bahamas from the West Indies. But for historians of the region to include or not to include The Bahamas is a matter of personal predilection. Lewis, who includes both The Bahamas and Bermuda in his study, states: "It is only in the geographical and historical sense that the island chains may be considered part of the West Indies.... In the social and economic sense they have been influenced, overwhelmingly, by the traditional colonial English way of life brought over by the Loyalist refugees fleeing the American Revolution, with its sense of property and the psychology of Southern slavery".<sup>9</sup> The former seem weighty reasons for considering them among the West Indian islands, their contrasting economic, political and, to some extent, social developments an interesting variant of the region's history.

It does seem to be the case that more recent studies of the region have included essays or chapters on aspects of Bahamian history.<sup>10</sup> The research and writings of Michael Craton from the 1960s go a long way to account for the change; the country had to await an academic of stature, who would not only survey the colony's history, but would include it in the West Indian discourse. Since then Howard Johnson and Gail Saunders have also contributed much to the academic studies of The Bahamas, useful for regional comparisons, particularly in the social and economic sphere. The research of these three scholars has contributed to the growing body of literature on the period of Bahamian history that begins with the Loyalists and ends with Independence. Their studies have enabled historians to place The Bahamas more precisely within the West Indian framework and have facilitated comparisons between marginal, non-plantation societies and sugar-producing colonies. It was Craton who published the first academic history of the Colony in 1962, a compact survey of the historical events of the islands from Amerindians to Independence.<sup>11</sup> Craton and Saunders have now produced, in two magisterial volumes, what will probably be the

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<sup>9</sup>Lewis, Growth of the Modern West Indies, 308.

<sup>10</sup>Such works include Howard Johnson and Karl Watson, eds., The White Minority in The Caribbean (Kingston: Ian Randle, 1998); O. Nigel Bolland, On the March: Labour Rebellions in the British Caribbean, 1934-39 (Kingston: Ian Randle, 1995); Howard Johnson, ed., After the Crossing: Immigrants and Minorities in Caribbean Creole Society (London: Frank Cass, 1988); Hilary Beckles and Verene Shepherd, eds., Society and Economy from Emancipation to the Present (Kingston: Ian Randle, 1993); Roderick A. McDonald, ed., West Indies Accounts: Essays on the History of the British Caribbean and the Atlantic Economy in Honour of Richard Sheridan (Kingston: Press of UWI, 1996).

<sup>11</sup>Michael Craton, A History of the Bahamas, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Waterloo: San Salvador Press, 1986).

definitive history of The Bahamas, surveying the social and economic development of The Bahamas up to the present day.<sup>12</sup>

It is the intention in this study to place The Bahamas within a framework that considers its place within the discourse on the British West Indies since Emancipation, seeking commonalities with and variations from the developments in other islands. The focus is political; it is concerned with power and domination. It investigates the hegemony of the merchant-elite of Nassau over the non-white groups, examining how the white minority managed to retain authority over the non-white majority and maintain its dominant position in the Colony. This involved a system of class rule where one ethnic group was subordinate to another. Thus, the application of state policies “reproduced the class continuities of hegemony and subordination of masters and slaves in the new regime”.<sup>13</sup> Eugene Genovese reminds us that “the idea of ‘hegemony’... implies class antagonisms; but it also implies... the ability of a particular class to contain those antagonisms on a terrain in which its legitimacy is not dangerously questioned”.<sup>14</sup> The strategies that the white elite used to achieve its hegemony in The Bahamas are scrutinised. Craton, Saunders and Johnson have principally investigated the economic and social strategies of the dominating class; this study uses their research as the springboard to investigation of the political developments in the Colony.

Thus the study concentrates on the white minority of The Bahamas. As Howard Johnson has pointed out recently, since the 1960s, the historiography of the English-speaking Caribbean has focused primarily on the experiences of the black majority.<sup>15</sup> This had the effect of sidelining the white elite in the historical discourse, which may have corrected the imperialist biases of earlier generations, but it too provided an incomplete picture of the past. As Johnson writes: “Neither the dominant nor the dominated exist

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<sup>12</sup>Michael Craton and Gail Saunders, Islanders in the Stream: A History of the Bahamian People, vol.1: From Aboriginal Times to the End of Slavery (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1992) and Craton and Saunders, Islanders in the Stream: A History of the Bahamian People, vol.2: From the Ending of Slavery to the Twenty-First Century (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1998).

<sup>13</sup>Frank McGlynn and Seymour Drescher, ed., The Meaning of Freedom: Economies, Politics, and Culture after Slavery (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1992), 10.

<sup>14</sup>Eugene D. Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made (New York: Vintage Books, 1976), 26-27.

<sup>15</sup>Johnson and Watson, White Minority in Caribbean, ix.

independently of each other for the process of subordination/domination is one in which both groups are involved".<sup>16</sup> Thus the relationship between the white elite and the non-white majority are examined.

However, the study will not posit the colonial oligarchy and the emancipated population in opposition, while ignoring the Colonial Office and the middle groups, as that would be an over-simplification of the historical picture.<sup>17</sup> Since the retention of power by the former slave owners and their descendants in the reconstructed society are the focus, the interaction between the Imperial Government and the Colonial Legislature is of paramount importance. The natural political opposition to the white commercial elite, the local holders of power in The Bahamas, were the aspiring members of the non-white middle classes; their failure to provide a convincing opposition contributed to the continuance of the status quo. The reasons for this failure in the period under study are considered.

This study delineates the political and constitutional affairs of The Bahamas from Abolition to the 1940s, although the social and economic context is discussed throughout. Colonial Office correspondence, accounts of the proceedings of the House of Assembly and the Councils and newspaper reports provide accessible evidence of political events and arguments. The ideologies and biases of the people who made or opposed the decisions are more difficult to chart. Private letters, diaries or autobiographies of a few Colonial Officials reveal a little about some of the expatriates who worked in The Bahamas. But the motivations and thoughts of Bahamians are harder to pinpoint as they have not left such evidence about themselves. Assumptions have to be made about the white elite and the non-white middle classes from their actions. The black lower classes are even more elusive, particularly as all written accounts, whether governmental, journalistic or private, are not written from their perspective.

White Bahamians did undertake some historical research and writing in the early part of this century. Their interests were predominantly in the tracing of their own roots among the original settlers from Bermuda or the Loyalist migrants and in constitutional

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., x.

<sup>17</sup>See William A. Green, "The Creolization of Caribbean History: The Emancipation Era and a Critique of Dialectical Analysis" in Beckles and Shepherd, *Caribbean Freedom*, 28-40. His principal objection to a dialectical approach is that "it narrows West Indian history and neglects its multiple subtleties, its richness and variation", 35.

developments.<sup>18</sup> The pre-Emancipation period was the focus. With the coming to power of the black majority in The Bahamas in 1967 attention shifted to the study of the black population. The constitutional changes that came to The Bahamas in the late 1960s and Independence in 1973 provoked interest in the political history of the country post 1953.<sup>19</sup> “Naturally, the political party that organized the black majority and led it proudly into independence feels it has earned the right to rewrite a history largely distorted in the past.”<sup>20</sup> Craton and Saunders warn “that the triumph of Black Power may lead to writing the former white master-class and their descendants quite out of Bahamian history”.<sup>21</sup> It is the intention of this study to put this class back on the centre of the stage to examine their “monopoly of state power”<sup>22</sup> in the post-Emancipation period of Bahamian history.

Chapter One of this thesis considers the pre-Emancipation background and the nature of the political and economic structures set in place in The Bahamas. The immediate prelude to Abolition is discussed in relation to continuities into the post-Emancipation era, particularly with regard to the attitudes and policies of the white elite. The local Abolition Act and its application are examined in Chapter Two. The various strategies employed by the Bahamian ruling class to retain power are delineated. Chapter Three surveys the early political confrontations between the Government and ‘Opposition’. These particularly centred on sectarian disputes and culminated in the movement to disestablish and disendow the Anglican Church in the Colony. Denominational political parties were formed and the tendency of the Bahamian opposition towards Nonconformity was established. The white merchant oligarchy of the nineteenth century is examined more closely in Chapter Four: its attitudes and characteristics; its interrelationships; its leadership; the strengthening of its position and its clashes with the Governor and the Colonial Office. Chapter Five looks at the political stance of the middle classes, particularly of the coloured group; their

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<sup>18</sup>See A. Talbot Bethell, The Early Settlers of the Bahamas and Colonists of North America, (Nassau: by the author, 1914; reprint, 1937); Harcourt Malcolm, History of the Bahamas House of Assembly (Nassau: House of Assembly, 1921) and Mary Moseley, The Bahamas Handbook (Nassau: Nassau Guardian, 1926).

<sup>19</sup>Especially Colin A. Hughes, Race and Politics in the Bahamas (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1981).

<sup>20</sup> Craton and Saunders, Islanders in the Stream, vol. I, xviii.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>Phrase used by Howard Johnson in Howard Johnson, The Bahamas in Slavery and Freedom (Kingston, Ian Randle, 1991), vii.

contribution to the political stalemate is noted. Chapter Six considers twentieth century developments: changes in the ranks of the white ruling class, continuities in local government policies and more profound clashes between Imperial Government and local elite. The more turbulent years of the 1930s and 1940s are the focus of Chapter Seven, both the challenges from the non-white middle class and the stirrings of working class agitation. The success of the white Bahamian elite in tightening its grip on its “monopoly of state power” is analysed in the Conclusion.

## CHAPTER ONE THE ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL STRUCTURE OF THE BAHAMAS

It is necessary to briefly consider the pre-Emancipation period of Bahamian history: colonisation, settlement and establishment of the political and economic structure. Of particular note is the Bermudian connection, with its emphasis on maritime and commercial affairs; a strong sense of independence from the Metropolis; a preference for 'get-rich-quick' schemes and the establishment of a white merchant oligarchy in Nassau. The impact of the Loyalist immigrants from the North American mainland on Bahamian society was considerable and their heirs formed the backbone of the white elite of the post-Emancipation era. Many of the features of the slave society in The Bahamas would be replicated or modified in the reconstructed society after 1834.

### The Colonisation of The Bahamas

#### European Settlement

The island of Guanahani in the Bahamas archipelago was the site of the landfall of Christopher Columbus in 1492<sup>1</sup> but there was no inducement for the Spaniards to stay there for long. However, the Lucayans were not to be left in peace; King Ferdinand of Spain gave his permission to raid "useless" islands for labour supplies for the mines of Hispaniola. The Bahamas, well populated but with no gold, fell under this definition. From this time slave

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<sup>1</sup>The debate over the site of Columbus' landfall has lost some of its passion of late. Samana Cay now finds few supporters (see Joseph Judge, "Where Columbus found the New World", *National Geographic* 170, no. 5 (Nov. 1986): 563-599 for the best argument for that case), leaving the field clear for San Salvador and Cat Island. Recent archaeological, geological and navigational research gives more and more support to San Salvador as the most likely landfall. For discussion of this issue see Neil Sealey, "New Developments on the

raiding began officially and the Lucayans were forcibly removed from The Bahamas in the first two decades of the sixteenth century to meet their deaths in the Spanish colonies. The whole archipelago was soon deserted.

The Bahamas could just as easily have become a colony of Spain or France, as of England, its eventual coloniser. While the Spaniards claimed right of 'prior discovery' and the Papal Donation of 1493, without 'effective occupation' the French and English would challenge Spanish rights to The Bahamas in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. There were several abortive attempts by both the French and the English to lay claim to The Bahamas,<sup>2</sup> but it was not until the 1640s that the English eventually established permanent settlements in these uninhabited islands, in the persons of religious dissenters from Bermuda. In March 1646 Bermudian William Rener wrote to John Winthrop, the Puritan Governor of Massachusetts colony, that he and William Sayle, former Governor of Bermuda, were searching for an island in The Bahamas where "to enjoy Christe in the puritie of his ordinance, without this Bermudian imbitterment".<sup>3</sup> Sayle and a group of predominantly Bermudian Independents settled somewhere in North Eleuthera.<sup>4</sup> In 1649 Bermudian Loyalists expelled more of the Independents, all the free blacks and some "troublesome" slaves to Eleuthera.<sup>5</sup> The settlers lived mainly on the islands of Harbour Island, Spanish Wells and later Current Island and Cupid's Cay, leaving the mainland for woodcutting, growing provisions and raising hogs. However, the free blacks and coloureds concentrated at the Bluff and the Bogue on the mainland, an early racial division. By 1657 many of the first settlers had returned to Bermuda, including Sayle and his family.<sup>6</sup> After

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Columbus Landfall Issue", Journal of the Bahamas Historical Society 9 (1987): 5-13 and "The Columbus Landfall Debate in the Bahamas 1982-1992", Journal of the Bahamas Historical Society 14 (1992): 21-29.

<sup>2</sup>The French attempted to settle on Abaco in 1565; the English granted the Attorney General Robin Heath, territories in America including the islands of "Bahama" in 1629; Cardinal Richelieu granted Guillaume de Caen, General of the Fleet of New France, the title of Baron des Bahames and five islands. None of these claims were made good.

<sup>3</sup>Quoted in W. Hubert Miller, "The Colonization of the Bahamas, 1647-1670", William and Mary Quarterly, 3<sup>rd</sup> ser., 2, no.3 (Jan. 1945): 34.

<sup>4</sup>Paul Albury's painstaking research has pinpointed Governor's Bay as the possible location. See Paul Albury, "Search for the Second Capital", Journal of the Bahamas Historical Society 7 (1985): 20-22.

<sup>5</sup>Miller, "Colonization", 41.

<sup>6</sup>Sayle became Governor of Bermuda again between 1658 and 1662 and Governor of South Carolina in 1670. His interest in The Bahamas continued as part of a trading network between Bermuda, Eleuthera,

1660 The Bahamas was receiving the excess population from Bermuda and in about 1666 New Providence was settled by a group of Bermudians searching for ambergris and wrecks. It rapidly grew, as Charles Town had a fine harbour and a healthier environment. In 1670 John Darrell of Bermuda, one of the financiers of the New Providence settlement, reported three hundred inhabitants. He wrote to Lord Ashley that “it produceth as good Cotton as ever grew in America & gallant Tobacco. They have made but little as yet. Their greatest want at present is small Arms and ammunition, a godly minister & good smith”.<sup>7</sup> The population of The Bahamas as a whole now stood at 1,100, two-thirds being white.<sup>8</sup> There was, however, lack of government and rule of law which led to a request by prominent citizens to Lord Ashley that the eight Lord Proprietors of the Carolinas take over The Bahamas. Accordingly, on 1<sup>st</sup> November 1670, Ashley obtained a patent for The Bahamas, for himself and five other Carolina Proprietors.<sup>9</sup>

#### The Bahamas under Proprietary Government

The Lord Proprietors, making an initial investment of two hundred pounds each and paying a nominal quit rent, were given powers equivalent to a feudal lord in his fiefdom. They had exclusive rights to grant land, make laws (as long as they were not contrary to English law), establish public institutions, administer justice, coin money, make peace and war and collect taxes, apart from the collection of custom dues which was the right of the King of England. The land was to be held in ‘free socage’, that is those granted land by the Proprietors could then bequeath or sell it, provided the quit rent continued to be paid.<sup>10</sup> Plans were made for setting up a government, including a parliament and a council, but in fact conditions for ordered government never materialised. Although there were sittings of Assemblies and laws passed, there are no existing records of the proceedings.

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Barbados and England. His family also engaged in whaling activities in the Bahamian waters. Sayle died in 1671. *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>8</sup>Craton, *History of Bahamas*, 61.

<sup>9</sup>Lord Ashley; Duke of Albermarle; Earl of Craven; Sir George Carteret; Earl of Berkeley; Sir John Colleton.

<sup>10</sup>Michael Craton, “White law and black custom: The evolution of Bahamian land tenures” in Jean Besson and Janet Momsen eds., *Land and Development in the Caribbean* (London: Macmillan, 1987), 90. Although the Crown bought out the Proprietors in 1718, the latter retained the right to quit rents until 1787, *ibid.* 91.

The Proprietors failed to financially support the colony and to support the Governors once they were appointed, leading to misuse of their office. The first Governor was typical, if John Darrell's comments are correct. He wrote: "Capt. John Wentworth debauches himself and has corrupted the people to drink. They have chosen him Governor and neglect their crops".<sup>11</sup> The settlers were by no means easy to govern. John Oldmixon, in his early history of The Bahamas, recorded that they were "living a lewd, licentious Sort of Life, they were impatient under Government".<sup>12</sup>

Governors in The Bahamas often acted in complicity with privateers and buccaneers. English pirates from Tortuga had long used the islands of the Southern Bahamas and when war broke out in 1690 they began their permanent move to The Bahamas, where slack government, isolated cays and the hazards of rocks, reefs and shallows made conditions ideal. Governors continued to engage in dubious activities themselves. According to Oldmixon, Cadwallader Jones "pardoned capital Offenders, seized the publick Treasure, wasted and converted it to his own use. He neglected the Defence of the Islands, embezzled the Stores of Powder, converted the Lords Proprietors Royalties to his own Use, invited the Pirates to come to the Port."<sup>13</sup> The Proprietors did improve the fortifications of the capital, renamed Nassau in 1695, by financing, in part, the construction of Fort Nassau, but their failure to provide an adequate income for the Governors meant that temptations to make easy money were hard to resist by officials living in such an expensive place. By 1700 the pirates were in command. In 1703 Nassau was once more plundered and burnt and after a further raid in 1706 many settlers decided enough was enough and moved to British colonies in North America. The Proprietors never responded to the requests for assistance, having lost interest in the Colony long before. Organised government had completely broken down and by 1713 there were about 1,000 pirates active in the area. The Crown was besieged by letters of complaint from the honest citizens (most of whom had been forced to flee to Out Islands), captains of merchant ships and Governors of the surrounding colonies. Eventually it was forced to take action.

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<sup>11</sup>Quoted in Craton, History of Bahamas, 65.

<sup>12</sup>John Oldmixon, The History of The Isle of Providence (London: Jack Culmer, 1949; reprint, Nassau: Providence Press, 1966), 12. Originally part of John Oldmixon, The British Empire in America, 2 vols. (London: Brotherton and Clarke, 1741).

<sup>13</sup>Oldmixon, History, 14.

## Establishment of Royal Government

In 1715 the House of Lords observed:

And it appearing that through the neglect of the Proprietors these islands are in a defenceless condition and become a refuge for pirates, we are humbly of the opinion that for preserving the said islands to Great Britain and for encouraging the planters to resettle on them, the immediate government thereof be resumed into the Crown, and that your Majesty be pleased to appoint them a governor well experienced in civil and military affairs.<sup>14</sup>

His choice was former privateer, Woodes Rogers, who arrived in Nassau in 1718. He had a difficult agenda: to suppress piracy, oust Spanish and French intruders and establish government and law and order in the Colony. He proclaimed an amnesty to pirates who promised to give up their former lifestyle; he initially declared martial law, set up a permanent watch and mounted guns on the fort. To assist in governance, he created a Council of twelve men, six from his companions and six from the established settlers.<sup>15</sup> He appointed officers, including a Chief Justice, Provost Marshall, Colonial Secretary, Vice-Admiralty Judge and Chief Naval Officer. Roads were cleared and houses built, both for the soldiers and the new settlers, who were given town plots and twenty-five acres of land.

However, Rogers soon became frustrated by his task. Many of the newcomers died of tropical diseases. The established settlers often returned to their old ways, either to piracy or indolence, indifferent to the Governor's threats and punishments.<sup>16</sup> In 1720 a formidable Spanish fleet attacked Nassau and the Spaniards continued to roam Bahamian waters. Despite, Rogers' requests, the British Government sent no military aid. Suffering ill health and in debt, he returned to England in 1721, although he returned in 1729. His second administration continued the establishment of government institutions, with the creation of an assembly; there were to be twenty-four representatives, sixteen from New Providence and four each from Harbour Island and Eleuthera. They were to be elected by the free white adult males. This elected body was to prove the means to pay for the administration of the Colony.

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<sup>14</sup>Opinion of the British House of Lords, 14 December 1715, quoted in Philip Cash, Shirley Gordon and Gail Saunders, Sources of Bahamian History (London: Macmillan, 1991), 118-9.

<sup>15</sup>Woodes Rogers to Lords of Trade, 14 November 1718 in Cash, Gordon and Saunders, Sources, 119.

<sup>16</sup>See Woodes Rogers to Lords of Trade, 27 May 1718, *ibid.*, 118.

Whether the character of the local populace had changed much is to be wondered. Governor Richard Fitzwilliam (1733-38) wrote: "I am really at a loss how to behave towards them for in my lifetime I never knew so lawless, profligate and turbulent a People".<sup>17</sup> His successor, John Tinker, increased and better supplied the military and improved the defences.<sup>18</sup> However, The Bahamas suffered capture by American rebels in 1776 and by Spaniards in 1781. The Colony was returned to Britain in the Treaty of Versailles of 1783, although Loyalist Andrew Deveaux had already managed to oust the Spanish force. The ending of the American War heralded the arrival of Loyalists from New York, lured to The Bahamas by propaganda, and those from East Florida, who had not been offered anything better and came to the Colony reluctantly. The impact of the Loyalists on the economic, political and social development of The Bahamas was to be considerable.

#### The Loyalists

The changes to The Bahamas wrought by the Loyalist immigrants cannot be overestimated. Their attempt to introduce plantation agriculture was ultimately unsuccessful but the plantation economy introduced a new type of social relationship into the Colony, only fifty years before Emancipation. It was, though, the merchant class who were to primarily come to dominate nineteenth century society. At first the Loyalists challenged the political leaders of the Old Inhabitants, but there was eventual accommodation with the established white group. Class and racial barriers were firmly erected after the 1780s, a legacy from the southern mainland colonies.

The early refugees from New York made for North Abaco on account of the exaggerated accounts of its fertility. They were sorely disappointed by what they found there.<sup>19</sup> The frustrated exiles demanded assistance from Britain; they quarreled amongst themselves; and they antagonised those already living in the area.<sup>20</sup> Loyalists from East Florida settled either in New Providence or the islands of the Southern Bahamas.

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<sup>17</sup>Quoted in Craton and Saunders, Islanders in the Stream, vol.1, 137.

<sup>18</sup>See the account of the engineer in Peter Henry Bruce, Memoirs (London, 1782).

<sup>19</sup>One stated that "on their arrival, not finding the country so fertile as had been expected, certain commotions arose...". Quoted in Sandra Riley, Homeward Bound: A History of the Bahama Islands to 1850 with a Definitive Study of Abaco in the American Loyalist Plantation Period (Miami: Island Research, 1983), 143.

<sup>20</sup>Philip Dumaresq, formerly a successful Boston merchant, complained that the "early occupants of the island did not welcome them with cordiality". Quoted in *ibid.*, 158.

A group of Loyalists centred in Nassau and led by James Hepburn, formerly Attorney General of East Florida, proved very disruptive to the municipal and political life of the capital. Some of their complaints had substance as the British Government had neglected Nassau, which was not up to the standards of the towns in the former colonies of North America.<sup>21</sup> They also had cause to complain of their lack of representation in the Legislature. However, adjustment in the seat allocation to the Assembly was soon made, taking into account population changes and the habitation of new islands.<sup>22</sup> Nine of Hepburn's supporters were elected to the new seats, but they remained outnumbered in the Assembly and thus dissatisfied. Governor Maxwell suffered the brunt of Loyalists' displeasure and there was a Loyalist riot in 1784 against American trading ships in the harbour. But not all Loyalists objected to trade with 'the enemy' and not all harboured hostility towards the Governor. Maxwell described two classes of Loyalist to Lord Sidney: the first consisted of peaceful farmers who had settled for the most part on the Out Islands; the second were the officers, merchants and those who intended to return to America "when they have made their peace there" and "nothing can satisfy these people".<sup>23</sup> His successor, a moderate Loyalist, John Powell, attempted to lessen tensions between the Old and New Inhabitants, which had come near to violence in the elections. But arguments continued in the Assembly over disputed election results and the non-attendance of the disgruntled Loyalist group. When Lord Dunmore, former Governor of Virginia, arrived to take over the Government he too complained: "The malcontents of this colony have again set their engines to work...to obstruct every measure of government in these islands".<sup>24</sup> By June 1788 he had closed the courts and declared The Bahamas in a state of rebellion, proclaiming martial law. But Dunmore had managed to upset both the Old and New Inhabitants, who buried their differences in common cause – opposition to the Governor. He had used his

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<sup>21</sup>In 1785 a Nassau grand jury, dominated by Loyalists, drew up a list of criticisms: lack of fire-fighting equipment and garbage disposal; no adequate jail and poor house; lack of discipline among the black population; failure to maintain cemeteries; failure to control tipping houses; too high a duty on tea. See Wallace Brown, *The Loyalists in The West Indies* (Fredericton, Canada: University of New Brunswick, 1975), 23.

<sup>22</sup>The seats for New Providence, Harbour Island and Eleuthera were reduced to fourteen and eleven new seats were created for Abaco, Andros, Cat Island, Exuma and Long Island.

<sup>23</sup>Quoted in Riley, *Homeward Bound*, 161.

<sup>24</sup>Quoted in *ibid.*, 172.

position to enrich himself and his family and to indulge his passion for building new forts, the latter funded by fresh taxes and built by levies of slaves, both provided by the colonists. The irate members of the Assembly fought to get control of the Colony's budget. In 1794 Dunmore was forced to dissolve a House that had already sat for nine years<sup>25</sup> and he was no longer able to prevent control over the finances passing to the Legislature.

The Loyalists had won most of their demands. After a number of by-elections, they had come to dominate the Assembly, although these were men of a more moderate persuasion than Hepburn and his followers. The land problem was solved when the Crown purchased the land from the Proprietors in 1784-6 and bought out the Proprietors in 1787.<sup>26</sup> Each head of household, Loyalist or established settler, was entitled to forty acres, with an additional twenty acres for each dependent, subject to an annual quit rent of two shillings per hundred acres.<sup>27</sup> An Act to validate land claims was passed in 1789. Thus secure freehold tenure was established. After land was allocated, cotton production prospered and prosperity did much to lessen tensions.

As cotton cultivation declined, some Loyalists left The Bahamas for countries with better prospects. When planters left Abaco, it was repopulated with inhabitants from Harbour Island, who intermarried with the remaining Loyalists there. They reverted to the traditional maritime pursuits of these islands. Loyalist merchants and shopkeepers in Nassau, particularly those engaged in trade with Cuba and Hispaniola, were doing better. They too intermarried with the Old Inhabitants to form the white oligarchy that was to dominate The Bahamas until the 1960s.

### The Economic Structure of The Bahamas from European Settlement to Emancipation

Howard Johnson labels The Bahamas "a frontier society", characterized by the early settlers' struggle for survival.<sup>28</sup> In a natural attempt to reproduce their Bermudian way of

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<sup>25</sup>Dunmore did not dare to dissolve sooner since his personal unpopularity would result in an Assembly even more against him. After the "Long Parliament" the Septennial Act of 1795 was passed as a compromise measure.

<sup>26</sup>Craton, "White law and black custom", 92.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid. Loyalists were exempt from the quit rents for a period of ten years.

<sup>28</sup> Howard Johnson, The Bahamas from Slavery to Servitude, 1783-1933 (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996), 4.

life, there was an emphasis on seafaring activities, such as the collection of ambergris, whaling, fishing, shipbuilding and wrecking. The islands of Exuma and Crooked Island, being in a more arid zone, produced sea salt to export to markets in the Caribbean and North America. Woodcutting was also important: for the construction of boats and furniture, as dyewoods and for medicinal purposes. Agriculture was at subsistence level, topographical and climatological factors militating against its commercial development. Thus “the economic activities of the early settlers were extractive, involving an exploitation of existing resources”.<sup>29</sup> Some of these resources, such as ambergris and brazilletto wood, were already failing by the late seventeenth century.

The reliance on maritime and extractive industries and subsistence farming was accompanied by a predilection for ‘get rich quick’ schemes, such as wrecking and privateering. The salvaging of cargoes could be quite a lucrative occupation on account of The Bahamas being on a main shipping route to and from the Caribbean and of the many reefs around the islands. However, this was an unreliable source of income. John Oldmixon, writing at the beginning of the eighteenth century, commented on the colony’s lack of economic potential while it relied on wrecking:

...it had been well if it [New Providence] had never been discovered; for all the Advantage the Inhabitants can pretend it is to *England* or the other Colonies is, that it lies convenient for *Wrecks*; by which they mean to save such as are driven ashore there, and for Ships forced thither by Stress of Weather: And it being some Hundreds of Miles out of any Ship’s regular Course, to or from any of our Colonies and *England*, it is certain we had never lost any Thing by it had it never been heard of.<sup>30</sup>

Privateering prospered in The Bahamas during the frequent periods of European warfare that spilled over into the Caribbean. This activity did actually attract new settlers and temporary residents, although retaliatory attacks from Spanish and French forces led other settlers to relocate. In peacetime, privateering became piracy since the cays of The Bahamas were ideal hideaways. Bahamians worked on board pirate ships; Nassau merchants supplied crews and the houses of entertainment in Nassau catered to the pirates while they were in the port. Attempts to encourage plantation cultivation were attempted by Woodes Rogers and his successor as Governor, George Phenny, and by the newly created

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 5.

<sup>30</sup>Oldmixon, *History*, 11.

House of Assembly, but without success. Not surprisingly, between 1739 and 1763, there was a revival of privateering. At this time local ship owners became involved. On the positive side, the activity did stimulate shipbuilding and the service and supply business. In the 1740s, the engineer Peter Henry Bruce, made this comment on the state of the colony:

It is very much to be lamented that these fertile and valuable islands should lie uncultivated for want of people, which are capable of maintaining many thousand families with ease; but it will ever be the same, while the governors are suffered to tyrannize over the inhabitants, as nobody that can do better, will ever come to settle here, and of consequence, they must remain uninhabited

He continued:

It is their own fault if the inhabitants want any of the necessaries of life... but they neither sow nor plant more than is necessary for maintaining their own families; whereby one of the most fertile parts of our West Indies is neglected for want of cultivation. <sup>31</sup>

Bruce may have exaggerated the fertility of The Bahamas, but his general picture of lack of settlement and economic production is accurate.

Just prior to the Loyalist immigration to The Bahamas, Howard Johnson considers there was probably more successful experimentation with cotton production, particularly on Long Island.<sup>32</sup> This production of an export staple was further expanded under the Loyalists. More than half of the East Florida planters remained in New Providence, but the rest settled in the Southern Bahamas (Exuma, Long Island, Crooked Island and Acklins), cultivating cotton. Planters from other areas of the British West Indies were also attracted by the success of cotton cultivation, stimulated by the demand from the Lancashire cotton mills. In 1785, 2,476 acres of cotton were planted and 124 tons exported; in 1786, 3,050 acres were planted and 150 tons exported; in 1787, 4,500 acres were planted and 219 tons exported.<sup>33</sup> This burst of profitable economic activity coincided with Nassau's advent as an entrepot, as a consequence of the passing of the Free Port Act in 1787, allowing Nassau to trade in certain goods with the Spanish and French colonies. Others benefited from the success of cotton production, principally merchants who provisioned the estates, provided credit or transport facilities or were involved in the slave trade.

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<sup>31</sup>Bruce, Memoirs, 421 and 425.

<sup>32</sup>Johnson, From Slavery to Servitude, 9-10.

<sup>33</sup>Craton, History of Bahamas, 156.

One early difficulty in cotton production was overcome: the cleaning of the fibre was improved by the invention of planter Joseph Eve's new cotton gin, introduced in 1790. This improved quality and quantity and by 1795 about 200 gins were in use in The Bahamas.<sup>34</sup> But other problems were not overcome so easily: soils were too thin; manure was not used due to lack of animals on the plantations; the chenille caterpillar destroyed the cotton crop and provision crops in 1788-9; the red bug appeared in 1790, staining the fibre; hurricanes struck in 1794, 1795 and 1798; planters were inexperienced in cotton production and sub-tropical agriculture and did not take account of local climatic conditions. Efforts were made to try to stem the decline. A new seed variety, Bourbon cotton, was introduced as it was thought to be more suitable to Bahamian conditions. The Assembly passed Bug Acts in 1798 and 1799 to control the pests, but failed to finance the experiment. Many planters abandoned their estates and left either for New Providence or the United States. Joseph Eve moved away in 1800, from when problems with ginning recommenced as there was no one else with the knowledge to service or build machines.<sup>35</sup> In 1800 fifty planters petitioned for relief and in 1802 Crown Lands were allocated freely once more, luring some planters to try again on other islands.<sup>36</sup> However, commercially grown cotton only survived in The Bahamas on a small scale. In 1802 the Bahamas Agricultural Society was founded and prizes were offered for diversification in products.<sup>37</sup> On several estates there was a shift to raising stock and provisions for the domestic market and in 1811 a bounty was granted for locally produced corn that exceeded the provision needs of a plantation.<sup>38</sup> On some plantations salt and cotton production had been complementary and as cotton declined, salt raking took prominence. Inagua, suitable only for salt production, was occupied by the turn

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<sup>34</sup>Johnson, From Slavery to Servitude, 26.

<sup>35</sup>Brown, Loyalists, 13.

<sup>36</sup>Craton, History of Bahamas, 166.

<sup>37</sup>Brown, Loyalists, 13. On the large Rolle estate on Exuma (5,000 acres), diversification came around 1820 when the cost of providing the statutory allowances to each slave came close to the income each would generate. It was not very successful. See Michael Craton, "We Shall Not Be Moved: Pompey's Slave Revolt in Exuma Island, Bahamas, 1830", New West Indian Guide 57, 1-2, no. 18 (1983): 23.

<sup>38</sup>Johnson, From Slavery to Servitude, 29. On the Farquharson estate on Watlings Island crops grown included guinea corn, cotton, oranges, pigeon peas, India corn, guinea grass, red peas, black-eye peas, yams, sweet potatoes, snap beans, castor oil, cabbage, pumpkins and catnip and sage bush for medicinal purposes. Sheep, pigs, steers, heifers, mules, horses and fowls were reared. Other activities were salt raking, fishing and tree felling (*lignum vitae*). See A Relic of Slavery: Farquharson's Journal for 1831-32 (Nassau: Deans Peggs Research Fund, 1957).

of the century. The colonial government encouraged this activity and foreign ships were allowed access. The decay of the plantations also led to a return to wrecking, which had always remained vital to some islands' economies. Also, the 1812 War provided fresh opportunities for privateering; the Admiralty Court in Nassau condemned almost as many ships in two years as in the previous nine.<sup>39</sup>

The economic picture by 1820 looked dismal and, to add to their gloom, landlords and merchants had also to face the prospect of changes to the slave system. The collapse of the plantation economy, a decline in mercantile activity and the amelioration policy of the Imperial Government combined to cause "increasing tension and paranoia among the Bahamian ruling class".<sup>40</sup>

### The Political Structure in the Nineteenth Century

The Bahamas was ruled by the Old Representative system for the period under study.<sup>41</sup> Before Emancipation most British colonies in the West Indies had enjoyed the same constitutional system. Later differences between The Bahamas and Bermuda and other British islands were probably a reflection of their position as 'settler colonies' rather than 'exploitation colonies' and the relative importance to the Imperial Government that the connotation implied. The Old Representative system left the Crown in political control, but allowed the local elite a large degree of self-government. More central control was required in colonies where stability was in doubt and whose economic importance to the Mother Country was recognised. Moreover, the whole ethos of the exploitation and settler colony differed. "The plantation society produced a plantation culture, essentially ad hoc, dependent and eclectic, while the settler society produced its own settler culture with a pronounced regional influence that gradually developed into a sort of nationalism".<sup>42</sup> The Bahamian elite combined its English and American heritage, cherishing its political

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<sup>39</sup>Craton, History of Bahamas, 167.

<sup>40</sup>Craton and Saunders, Islanders in the Stream, vol. 1, 217.

<sup>41</sup>For discussion of the political structure of all the British West Indian islands see Frederick G. Spurdle, Early West Indian Government (New Zealand, privately printed, n.d.) and Wrong, Government of the West Indies.

<sup>42</sup>Knight, The Caribbean, 80.

traditions and privileges. It considered its political system mirrored that of England and representatives saw themselves rather in the mould of the Whigs and, indeed, the American rebels, defending their rights from interference from an authoritarian body, in their case, the Imperial Parliament. The politically dominant whites were strong enough to defend their 'representative' government, albeit because of lack of will from England to curtail their freedoms.

Once Royal control had been established in the Colony, the Crown appointed, under Letters Patent, each Governor and the chief office-holders. After 1876, in The Bahamas, the Office of Governor was created by Letters Patent; appointment to that office was made by Commission under the Royal Signature and the appointed Governor received the Royal Instructions.<sup>43</sup> The Governor represented the Crown and had the powers of the Royal Prerogative. However, in The Bahamas, the only powers granted to the Governor alone were appointment to offices; convocation, prorogation and dissolution of the Assembly and the vetoing of laws. Consent of the Council was necessary for the other government functions.

The Council had a dual function: an advisory body to the Governor, that is an Executive role, and as a Legislative Council or Upper House. In 1841 The Bahamas was the first of the West Indian colonies to separate the Councils.<sup>44</sup> The Governor chose members of the Councils, subject to approval from the Crown. The Governor headed the Executive Council and a President, the senior member of the body, headed the Legislative Council.

The Lower House or House of Assembly was the representative element of the constitution. The franchise was always restricted to males in this period. Until 1830 only white males generally enjoyed the vote; after that date colour and race were no longer restrictions, but ownership of property served to still limit the franchise.<sup>45</sup> Plural voting was

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<sup>43</sup> Harcourt Malcolm, History of The House of Assembly, 48.

<sup>44</sup> Wrong, Government 91.

<sup>45</sup> The 1807 Act (47 Geo.3 c.1) specified that the right to vote was restricted to white males, although a few mulattoes had been granted the privilege of voting prior to 1830. See David Wood, "The Free People of Colour in Bahamian Society", Journal of the Bahamas Historical Society 12 (1990): 20-23. He has found instances where mulattoes petitioned the House and were given the special privilege while others were denied it.

By the 1807 Act to qualify to vote the male had to have attained 21 year of age; resided in the district for at least 12 months; be a freeholder or housekeeper in the district for at least 6 months; have paid duties of at least 50 pounds to the Receiver during the preceding year (Laws of the Bahamas (Nassau, 1843)). The qualifications were amended by the Election Acts of 1886 and 1919 so that a male had to possess real estate

allowed, serving to give more advantage still to the propertied classes. There were twenty-nine members of the Assembly, to be elected at least every seven years (by the Septennial Act of 1795).<sup>46</sup>

The Assembly drew up its own rules; chose its own Speaker; disciplined its own members; judged their qualifications and decided disputed elections.<sup>47</sup> Members enjoyed freedom of speech and debates, immunity from personal arrest and some protection from distraint of goods. Laws had to pass each House three times and were then presented to the Governor for assent. Acts then took practical effect but were sent to England for scrutiny. If disallowed by the Crown, they went out of action. Colonial laws could be disallowed if found to conflict with English law. If a law passed by the English Parliament specifically included the colonies, it would apply to The Bahamas. The legislatures of colonies were not empowered to deal with foreign affairs.

The Assembly held one weapon in any tussle with the Governor: control of the public money. It had the sole right to introduce money bills and initiate taxation, according to Wrong, “an ancient and anarchical prerogative”.<sup>48</sup> In 1793 the House resolved: “All bills for granting supplies for support of the Government or whereby money may be directed to be levied on the subject must constitutionally originate in this House”.<sup>49</sup> According to The Bahamas’ constitutional expert, Harcourt Malcolm, the Governor in a speech admitted this

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worth five pounds or be a householder paying a yearly rent of two pounds eight shillings in New Providence or one pound four shillings in the Out Islands (Malcolm, History of House of Assembly, 54-5).

By the 1807 Act to qualify to stand as a candidate to the Assembly a man had to own property clear of all judgements and mortgages and valued at one thousand pounds or more or to have proprietorship of fifty acres of land under cultivation, free of all legal encumbrances. This was also amended by the Election Acts of 1886 and 1919 to lower the value of the land to two hundred pounds above all debts and mortgages.

<sup>46</sup>The constituencies in 1832 were the Town District of Nassau (4 members); the Eastern and Western Districts of New Providence (2 each); Abaco (3); Eleuthera (3); Andros (2); Watlings Island (1); Long Island (2); Exuma (3); Turks Island (1); Caicos (1); Harbour Island (3); Crooked Island (1); San Salvador (1). When Turks and Caicos Islands were separated from The Bahamas in 1848, Inagua was created a constituency.

<sup>47</sup>Examples of these functions are to be found throughout the volumes of Votes of the House of Assembly of the Bahama Islands. Disciplining their own members was not often necessary, but a good example is to be found on pages 27 to 29 of the 1835 volume when James Malcolm, Member for Harbour Island, was held in contempt for abusive and violent language towards Henry Adderley, the member for the Town district of Nassau.

<sup>48</sup> Wrong, Government, 92.

<sup>49</sup>Quoted in Malcolm, History of House of Assembly, 58.

right in 1828.<sup>50</sup> Thus the Assembly could always withhold essential supplies or the pay of the Crown officials. It could also tack money bills on to other measures it wanted to introduce, threatening to withhold the money if the whole legislation was not passed.<sup>51</sup>

The Assembly in The Bahamas acquired further powers over the Executive by means of the Boards of administration. The Governor appointed to the Boards but was required to choose a certain number of members of the Assembly. It could, therefore, influence all departments of the administration.

The fact that such a large amount of control over local affairs was given to the colonists by the British Government was bound to result in conflict when the ideologies and priorities that governed each differed. The local legislature also considered that it knew more about local problems and conditions and should have the decisive voice. The Governor, of course, would bear the brunt of any local criticism of Imperial policy. He also had to build support in the House and find effective leadership for the Government there.

As Lewis remarked the “great constitutional defect of the old representative system” was “the failure to locate power between executive and legislature”, remedied in the Crown Colony system adopted in most of the other colonies since “the executive could always stamp out legislative opposition”.<sup>52</sup> This difficulty was to assume increasing significance in The Bahamas’ situation where, by the twentieth century, frustrated Governors sought reserve powers to counteract the obstructiveness of reactionary Assemblies.

William Drysdale, a visiting journalist, ignored the potential friction. He wrote: “The government is almost an ideal one. Nominally under the control of the British crown, the people of the Bahamas are as free as we are, making their own laws, electing their own

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<sup>50</sup>Ibid.

<sup>51</sup>For example, the Appropriation Bill of 1817 did not include provision of salaries for the Attorney General and Justices of the General Court, as these persons had offended the House during the Wylly Affair (see Craton, *History of The Bahamas*, 184 -5). Sir James Carmichael Smyth governed effectively without the House between 1831 and 1832 by reviving the salt tax and tonnage duties to pay salaries. In 1868 the Assembly withheld Supply to pressurize Governor Rawson into conceding its demands concerning Disendowment. In 1928 the ‘tacking on’ of Out Island provisions in an Appropriation Bill intensified a long running dispute between the House and the Legislative Council over the practice. After Governor Orr had dissolved the House, the threat of the newly elected body not voting Supply was used.

<sup>52</sup>Lewis, *Growth of Modern West Indies*, 98. Of course the Crown Colony system was undemocratic and lacked any notion of responsible government.

representatives, and enjoying all those political rights that we have come to consider peculiarly our own".<sup>53</sup>

### Slave Society in The Bahamas

If one considers the usual pyramid configuration, slave society in all West Indian colonies consisted of the white slave owning class at the apex, a middle section, of variable size, of free coloureds and blacks and a broad base of black and mulatto slaves. In some respects Bahamian slave society developed in a different manner from those of other islands and it is necessary to consider certain aspects of these variations in order to understand better the Bahamian society of the early post-Emancipation period. However, the differences were not as great as they might have been had the Loyalists not imposed their slave system on the Colony.

In the Caribbean colonies not dominated by sugar plantations the character of slavery differed substantially from slavery in the sugar colonies. Barry Higman argues that the material conditions of slavery were the products of economic forces, rather than of the personal character of slave owners; thus, exploitation on the sugar plantations was associated with the extreme demands on labour.<sup>54</sup> There was not the same intensity of labour in the economic activities of the non-sugar colonies, such as The Bahamas, although work on the salt pans could be unpleasant and debilitating. Thus, the slave system experienced in the Colony was, in many ways, a differing one from that of much of the rest of the Caribbean.

As seen, slaves were present in The Bahamas from the time of the Adventurers' settlement, but the first detailed picture of Bahamian society came in the Census of 1731. Table One indicates that slaves made up almost one-third of the population by that date, but they were overwhelmingly centred in New Providence.

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<sup>53</sup>William Drysdale, "In Sunny Lands: Out-Door Life in Nassau and Cuba", Harper's Weekly, 18 Sept. 1885, 3-65.

<sup>54</sup>B. W. Higman, Slave Populations of the British Caribbean 1807-1834 (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1984).

Table 1. Population of The Bahamas in 1731

Island	Whites	“Negroes” <sup>a</sup>	Total
New Providence	633	409	1,042
Harbour Island } Eleuthera }	302	44	346
Total:	935	453	1,388

<sup>a</sup> = slaves

*Source:* Michael Craton and Gail Saunders, Islanders in the Stream: A History of the Bahamian People, vol. 1 (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1992), 120.

The influx of Loyalist immigrants and their slaves after the ending of the American War resulted in major changes in the demography of The Bahamas, both in terms of numbers and racial composition (see Table 2). The Loyalist predominance in New Providence, Abaco and the Southern Bahamas is clear, but the Old Habitants retained their position in Harbour Island, Spanish Wells and Eleuthera. In the latter islands the black/white ratio is about 2:1, whereas in New Providence it was about 8:1. Long Island was fairly well balanced between Old and New Inhabitants, confirming the contention that the island was already subject to plantation agriculture before the advent of the Loyalists.

Table 2. Population of The Bahamas in 1788: Households

Island	Old White Householders	Old Slave	New White Householders	New Slave
New Providence	131	1,024	165	1,264
Harbour Island & Spanish Wells	94	142	----	----
Eleuthera	119	310	----	----
Exuma	11	75	26	679
Cat Island	12	16	28	442
Abaco	----	----	49	198
Long Island	42	306	29	476
San Salvador & Rum Cay	----	----	----	----
Andros	4	56	22	132
Crooked & Acklins Islands	----	----	5	357
Caicos	1	5	6	214
Turks Island	18	40	----	----
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>430</b>	<b>1,974</b>	<b>330</b>	<b>3,762</b>

*Source:* Michael Craton and Gail Saunders, Islanders in the Stream, A History of the Bahamian People, vol.1 (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1992), 180 (adapted).

The Bahamas' slave population seems to have increased steadily up to about 1820, when it declined due to export of slaves to other areas of the British West Indies. In 1828, it returned to a position of growth once export was disallowed.<sup>55</sup> The number of persons registered as slaves on first of January 1831 was 10,098.<sup>56</sup> Table Three compares the populations in 1810 and 1830. By 1830 the ratio of slaves to the total population had decreased by about 13% from the 1810 figure, the proportion of both freedmen and whites increasing by approximately 6.5%.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., 76. Between 1808 and 1825 more than 3,000 slaves were shipped to the newer British colonies, chiefly Demerara, St. Vincent and Trinidad (see D.Gail Saunders, Slavery in the Bahamas, 1648-1838 (Nassau: Nassau Guardian, 1985), 62-3).

<sup>56</sup>Return of Number of Persons Registered as Slaves on 1 January 1831, CO23/103/42.

Table 3. Estimated Slave, Freedmen and White Populations in 1810 and 1830

% Slave		% Freedman		% White		Total	
1810	1830	1810	1830	1810	1830	1810	1830
68.9	55.8	8.3	14.8	22.8	29.4	14,500	17,030

Source: B.W. Higman, Slave Populations of the British Caribbean 1807-1834 (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1984), Table 4:2, 77.

The Bahamas differed from most Caribbean colonies in that it experienced high rates of positive natural increase, exceeding 20 per 1,000 after 1828. In the marginal colonies high fertility was associated with small slaveholding size.<sup>57</sup> However, Michael Craton calculated the augmentation of the *large* slave unit of Lord Rolle on Exuma from 254 to 376 in twelve years, achieved by natural increase alone.<sup>58</sup> Between 1822 and 1834 the crude annual birth rate there averaged 42.5 per 1,000 and reached 53.7 per 1,000 in the final three years. The crude death rate averaged only 8 per 1,000, with the death rate of Creoles 5.5 per 1,000.<sup>59</sup> Craton gives the reasons for these relatively good rates as balance between the sexes by 1822; a “pyramidal” age profile; high fertility among the women; predominately nuclear family groupings and some form of family grouping among the rest; absence of miscegenation and healthy spacing between births.<sup>60</sup> As already mentioned, working

<sup>57</sup>Higman, Slave Populations, Table 9:1, 310. Bahamian rates: (1822-5): +12.7; (1825-8): +16.1; (1828-1831): +23.3; (1831-4): +24.8. See also Saunders, Slavery, Table 16, 60. Of the slaves living in The Bahamas 74.4% lived in units of 50 or less. There were only 9 cases of units of over 100 slaves each and 20% of these lived on the Rolle estates in Exuma (ibid., 94 and Table 30, 95).

<sup>58</sup>Michael Craton, “Hobbesian or Panglossian? The Two Extremes of Slave Conditions in the British Caribbean, 1783 to 1834”, William and Mary Quarterly XXXV (April 1978): 328.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., 329-345. These factors can be extrapolated to the general slave population of The Bahamas. The general pattern in The Bahamas’ slave population was a steadily improving birth rate, from 27.3 per 1,000 in 1822-1824 to 44.6 per 1,000 in 1831-1834. The crude death rate averaged around 13.4 per 1,000 for the whole of this period (Craton and Saunders, Islanders in the Stream, vol.1, 274). The ratio of males to females in 1822 was 104.7:100 and in 1831 99.7:100 (Higman, Slave Populations, 116). From a sample of 26 holdings over several islands, Craton found that, in 1822, 85% lived in some type of family unit, with 54.1% living in a simple nuclear family and 63.1% living as couples (Michael Craton, “Changing Patterns of Slave Families in the British West Indies”, Journal of Interdisciplinary History X,1 (Summer 1979): Table 1, 9 and 7). Female-headed families were most common in New Providence and the Out Islands seem to have been more conducive to stable family units (ibid., 11). Craton found little evidence of polygyny. In Craton’s samples, the spacing of

conditions for slaves were better than in the industrial units of the sugar plantations. However, rations distributed to slaves appear to have been very limited<sup>61</sup>, although Bahamian slaves generally had access to provision grounds and fish, so their diets may have been relatively healthy. These working and living conditions and the absence of endemic diseases such as malaria and yaws meant that the general health of the slave population in the Colony was reasonably good, compared to other colonies in the West Indies.

At the time of Abolition in the British West Indies, praedial slaves made up 85% of the total slave labour force, but the smallest proportion of praedials was in the marginal colonies of The Bahamas and Anguilla.<sup>62</sup> In The Bahamas, 54.5% were field labourers; 31.8% domestics; 2.7% tradesmen; 0.9% head people; 10.1% dockworkers.<sup>63</sup> Only in The Bahamas and British Honduras did the number of fieldworkers fall below 60%. Domestics amounted to over 25% only in The Bahamas, Anguilla and British Honduras. Marginal islands had the smallest number of tradesmen as slave artisans were associated with sugar production. Head people were most numerous where slaveholdings were large; in The Bahamas no headman was assigned unless the master owned at least ten slaves.<sup>64</sup>

The Bahamas experienced a somewhat milder slave regime than in the sugar colonies. This led Bahamian slaveholders and visitors to exaggerate its benevolence. A Miss Hart, writing from the Colony in 1823-4, stated: "I have never seen an instance of cruelty to the slaves since my residence here; on the contrary, they are well fed and clothed, and appear always cheerful and happy. They have but little employment... but they are civil in their manners, and very kind and obliging".<sup>65</sup> Such subjective evidence was used by early Bahamian writers to engage in self-congratulations on the humane treatment of slaves in their Colony. Robert Curry, for example, wrote in 1930: "Bahamians quite rightly were

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children was also regular and healthy, with an average of three years between births (ibid., 8 and Table 2,10). Of the women aged 15 to 49, 65.8% were indicated as mothers, having on average three children (ibid.).

<sup>61</sup>Higman, *Slave Populations*, 213. See also Howard D. Johnson, "A Slow and Extended Abolition: The Case of the Bahamas 1800-1838" in Mary Turner ed., *From Chattel Slaves to Wage Slaves: The Dynamics of Labour Bargaining in the Americas* (Kingston: Ian Randle, 1995), 168.

<sup>62</sup>Higman, *Slave Populations*, 46 and 47.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., Table 3.3, 48.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., 49.

<sup>65</sup>Letter IX in *Letters from the Bahama Islands, written in 1823-4*, ed. Richard Kent (1<sup>st</sup> printed 1827; reprint, London: John Culmer, 1948), 43.

proud of the high reputation for the treatment of their slaves, and resistance to their freedom was based largely on arguments of the contentment of the negroes and in the belief that the ending of slavery would cause the prosperity of the islands to cease”.<sup>66</sup> But Bahamian legislators had passed slave laws that conformed to those of the other West Indian colonies in regards to their severity. Central to all slave legislation was the assumption that the slave was property and the denial of a slave’s humanity. Slave laws protected the masters’ property, restrained the black population and maintained subordination and public order. “The workable core of slave law everywhere confirmed and defined the authority of the master over the slave, rather than the rights of the slave against the master.”<sup>67</sup> The first Bahamian slave code appeared in 1723 and comprised the usual restrictions on slaves in order for the ruling elite to maintain control and discipline.<sup>68</sup> The 1726 Decree of the Council was more concerned for the slaves’ morals, although many slaveowners did not heed the legislation, reluctant to Christianize their slaves.<sup>69</sup> Slave laws were enacted fairly frequently, progressively tightening up restrictions and imposing more brutal punishments, culminating in the 1767 Slave Act.<sup>70</sup> There were no clauses covering minimum requirements of food and clothing or conditions of work. The passing of this severe Act and a corresponding one the next year coincided with worsening economic and political conditions and an increase in the black population, particularly in New Providence. The whites feared social disorder, having no police force and only a small military force in the garrison.<sup>71</sup> The Haitian Revolution instilled further fears leading to the Consolidated Slave

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<sup>66</sup>Robert A. Curry, *Bahamian Lore*, 2d ed. (Paris, 1930), 60-1.

<sup>67</sup>C. Duncan Rice, *The Rise and Fall of Black Slavery* (London: Macmillan, 1975), 67.

<sup>68</sup>See Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream*, vol.1, 128-9 for details.

<sup>69</sup>*Ibid.*, 130.

<sup>70</sup>*Ibid.*, 136 (1729 Slave Act); 139 (1734 Slave Act); 151 (1748 Slave Act); 152-4 (1767 Slave Act). Summary punishments were admitted into the law; a magistrate could order up to 100 lashes; two Justices of the Peace and three freeholders could try serious offences; punishments such as slitting the nose, cutting off ears, branding and execution could be enacted for violence to a white. Slaves absent for over two weeks were considered “outlaws”; owners were required to advertise for runaways; known outlaws had a price on their heads, dead or alive.

<sup>71</sup>*Ibid.*, 162. By 1773 the black population comprised 53% of the total population; in New Providence the blacks had almost doubled their number since the 1740s, comprising almost 64% of the island’s population.

Law of 1797; improvements to the police force and militia; building of a new gaol and workhouse and a Deficiency Law to maintain a proportion of one white male per 30 slaves.<sup>72</sup>

Such punishments as flogging were inflicted frequently and forcefully. The Abolitionist Governor, James Carmichael Smyth, mentioned in a dispatch of 1832 “a female slave a very short time ago was dreadfully flogged by her Master & exhibited on the back, shoulders, neck and even face severe marks of the cat-o-nine-tails – one of her eyes was very seriously injured”. He added that “there was ample proof that the Master himself had inflicted these injuries”.<sup>73</sup> Overseers could be cruel and demanding. A tragic example of mistreatment of a slave occurred on Watlings Island where Prince Storr, himself a slave, acted as overseer. He punished the young Sancho Storr so severely that it resulted in his death.<sup>74</sup> One of the worst cases documented by the British Anti-Slavery Society was the Moss incident, which took place in 1826.<sup>75</sup> Henry and Helen Moss punished their domestic, Kate, for theft and disobedience. She was confined in stocks that did not allow her to sit or lie down “at pleasure” for seventeen days. She was beaten repeatedly during this period and had red pepper rubbed in her eyes to prevent her sleeping. When removed from the stocks, she was beaten again and relegated to field labour; whereupon she caught a fever and died. The Mosses were found guilty of a misdemeanour, not murder, and were sent to gaol for five months, with a three hundred pounds’ fine. Twenty-eight citizens, including seven House members, requested the Secretary of State to mitigate their sentences. On their release prominent Nassau citizens entertained the Mosses and Henry Moss resumed his seat in the House and as a Justice of the Peace.

Besides its inherent inhumanity, slavery was a racist system in the West Indies and the Abolition movement never attempted to challenge this deep-rooted racism. As Goveia argues: “The whole tendency of the slave system was to reduce the Negro to a position of

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<sup>72</sup>Ibid., 208.

<sup>73</sup> J. Carmichael Smyth to Viscount Goderich, no.163, 2 August 1832, CO23/86/302-7.

<sup>74</sup>James Stephen to John Lefevre, 2 January 1834, CO23/861/304-6. Prince Storr was put on trial for murder but the presiding judge, William Munnings, charged the jury in a manner favourable to an acquittal, the consequent decision. The owner, John Storr, wanted to send Prince back to his former post, but Governor Balfour refused the licence, arguing he was unfit for the office of overseer. He refused again on a further request; on this occasion because it might result in a slave rebellion. The owner, therefore, manumitted Prince and he returned to the Watlings Island estate as a free man.

<sup>75</sup>Saunders, *Slavery*, 161-2.

marked social inferiority, which was interpreted by the whites as the inevitable consequence of his racial difference from and racial inferiority to them”.<sup>76</sup> As Douglas Hall states “slave” and “negro” were synonymous terms.<sup>77</sup> This had two important consequences for post-Emancipation society. Firstly, in the minds of the former slaveholders “labourer” and “negro” became synonymous. Secondly, the attributes most desired by the elite in the social hierarchy were a white skin, material wealth and education.<sup>78</sup> In The Bahamas, the latter two were sometimes difficult to attain, but the first was a property that the holders of power did possess and intended to preserve as a prerequisite to entrance to the higher echelons of society.

The Bahamas had the highest rate of manumissions in the British West Indies. There were 3.1 manumissions per 1,000 slaves in 1808; 4.5 per 1,000 in 1820 and 11.4 per 1,000 in 1834.<sup>79</sup> The freed slaves had tended to be female, Creole, young and coloured and particularly domestics, but in the last years of slavery, males were manumitted at a higher rate.<sup>80</sup> Howard Johnson refers to “a slow and extended abolition” because of “the disintegration of slavery” following the decline of cotton production.<sup>81</sup> Some owners consequently manumitted their slaves, employing them on a wage basis as required. Others used the task system, allowing the slaves to spend more time on their own provision grounds and neglecting their obligations to maintain the slaves.<sup>82</sup> Charles Farquharson, a proprietor on Watlings Island, exchanged labour with his neighbours at crop time, “work to be returned

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<sup>76</sup>Elsa Goveia, Slave Society in the British Leeward Islands at the End of the Eighteenth Century (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965), 135.

<sup>77</sup>Douglas Hall, “Slaves and Slavery in the British West Indies”, Social and Economic Studies 11, 4 (1962): 315.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., 315-6.

<sup>79</sup>Higman, Slave Populations, Table 10.1-A, 381. Manumission was facilitated by the substitution of the fee of ninety pounds by a nominal registration fee in 1827 (Craton, History of Bahamas, 187).

<sup>80</sup>Higman, Slave Populations, 383.

<sup>81</sup>Johnson, “Slow and Extended Abolition”, 165.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., 167. On the Rolle estate in Exuma, slaves were allowed more time for their own cultivation and other pursuits. More freedom and mobility was permitted (Craton, “Pompey’s Slave Revolt”, 24).

when wanted”.<sup>83</sup> Some owners in the Out Islands transferred their slaves to Nassau, to sell, hire out or work on the self-hire system. Obviously, the slave market was not vibrant, so hiring was a more popular alternative.<sup>84</sup> There were two types of slave-hiring: the owners and employers arranging the hire or the slaves negotiating their own hire. In the former case slaves were usually paid a portion of the money and in the latter case the slaves gave the masters a portion of their wages. Either way, as Nigel Bolland commented, it acknowledged a degree of individual self-interest and it recognised that the master’s right to a slave’s labour was not absolute. Negotiation of work and wages also meant slaves were engaged in market transactions.<sup>85</sup> Governor James Carmichael Smyth described the practice in The Bahamas to the Secretary of State: “It has long been a custom in this colony to permit the more intelligent of the slaves, and more particularly Artificers, to find employment for themselves & to pay to their Owners either the whole or such a proportion of what they may gain as may be agreed upon between the Parties”.<sup>86</sup> Skilled slaves were thus more involved, but casual labourers were also needed and there were jobs available as stevedores, porters, sailors, fishermen, wreckers, domestics, vendors, nurses and washers at the military hospital.<sup>87</sup> Slave mariners were often given shares rather than wages and domestics would often be fed and clothed.<sup>88</sup> Sometimes slaveowners, no longer needing intensive labour themselves, hired out gangs of slaves for long periods.<sup>89</sup> There was competition for jobs in the urban labour market, so wages were probably only just adequate. Some, though, earned

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<sup>83</sup>A Relic of Slavery 1, 3 and 50. Farquharson exchanged labour with Prince Storr, the overseer at Sandy Point and two unnamed neighbours.

<sup>84</sup>Johnson, “Slow and Extended Abolition”, 171.

<sup>85</sup> O. Nigel Bolland, “Proto-Proletarians? Slave Wages in the Americas: Between Slave Labour and Free Labour” in Mary Turner ed., From Chattel Slaves to Wage Slaves, 135. Howard Johnson notes that many slaves were so successfully negotiating their wages that the Grand Jury presented a grievance in 1799 (Johnson, From Slavery to Servitude, 36).

<sup>86</sup>J. Carmichael Smyth to Viscount Goderich, no. 163, 2 August 1832, CO23/86/302-7.

<sup>87</sup>Johnson, From Slavery to Servitude, 38-40. The Consolidated Slave Act (1796) forbade employment of slaves to retail dry goods because of the competition to Loyalist merchants. It seems to have been a dead letter.

<sup>88</sup>Johnson, “Slow and Extended Abolition”, 172.

<sup>89</sup>A typical advertisement in *Royal Gazette*, 14 April 1827 read: “For Hire: A small gang of Plantation Negroes by the year”.

enough to purchase their freedom.<sup>90</sup> However, there could be pitfalls for those eager to join the job market; Carmichael Smyth informed the Secretary of State that “many of them have a sort of account current with their owners, and in hopes of better times get deeper in debt every month”.<sup>91</sup>

The slaves that were hired out could almost melt into the free non-white group, so the House of Assembly passed a law to regulate the practice, stipulating owners allowing self-hire should register the names of slaves with the police and slaves should wear a badge. This was also partly to stop evasion of paying wages to owners, a widespread problem by the 1830s.<sup>92</sup>

Slaves in The Bahamas resisted their enslavement in the same ways as those of other West Indian islands. Malingering was a common habit.<sup>93</sup> If slaves were so inclined, running away was fairly easy on islands with much undeveloped land, covered in bush. Even in Nassau there were areas of refuge for the run-away, such as Negro Town and, after 1825, its extension, Grant’s Town. Slaves on self-hire were particularly vulnerable to the temptation to extend their freedom.

Insolence probably became more common as rumours of impending Emancipation circulated. Even Charles Farquharson, who worked with his slaves on his estate, found relations sometimes fraught. In May 1831 he reported in his diary that he had attempted to correct one of his female slaves “for a good deal of empidence [*sic*], but was prevented by three males “in a very threatening manner with deffience [*sic*]”.<sup>94</sup> A more serious incident occurred the following February when his mulatto son, James, was involved in an altercation with the driver, Alick, after he had beaten Alick’s brother. The next day all the Farquharson slaves, bar two old women and Alick, turned out with clubs and sticks, threatening their owners. With the help of the neighbours, Farquharson managed to restore calm but sent the

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<sup>90</sup>Johnson, “Slow and Extended Abolition”, 175.

<sup>91</sup>J. Carmichael Smyth to Viscount Goderich, no.163, 2 August 1832, CO23/86/302-7.

<sup>92</sup>Johnson, “Slow and Extended Abolition”, 176.

<sup>93</sup>One amusing case on the Farquharson estate concerned the driver, Alick, a frequent malingerer, who was employed making castor oil, a task he obviously disliked. He complained “the wind Blows too hard, and the Tide does not suit for making Oil”. Farquharson thus put him to build walls, much harder work, in an attempt to break his attitude. Later he wrote that Alick was in the house “sick or pretending to be sick”. A Relic of Slavery, 42-3 and 52.

<sup>94</sup>*Ibid.*, 15.

mutineers to Nassau for trial. Alick, his wife and child were subsequently sold and another woman and her child left in the workhouse for a period of punishment.<sup>95</sup>

In 1830 the absentee Baron Rolle's slaves on Exuma revolted when attempts were made to transfer them to Trinidad. Rolle had not managed to do this before the 1824 ban on such transfers and he tried to effect the move voluntarily by promises to the slaves.<sup>96</sup> Turned down by the Government, he tried again in 1828. Again the scheme was not approved but his attorney, A. J. Lees, reported that the slaves were willing to go to another Bahamian island. Thus, plans were made to ship some of the slaves to Grand Bahama. But when the time came they refused to embark. Rolle had underestimated the slaves' attachment to their homes and plots of land. Twenty slaves were forcibly transferred by soldiers from Nassau and early in 1830 Lees planned to move seventy-seven to Cat Island. They were only informed three days before shipment, just after planting their Indian corn. Led by Pompey, most fled into the bush and remained there for five weeks. Then forty-four of them took a boat and sailed to Nassau to make their case before Governor Carmichael Smyth. They were seized immediately upon landing and thrown into the workhouse, most of the adults being flogged. Smyth was furious, particularly at the flogging of a female, and suspended the Police Magistrate, Duncombe, and the Agent, Lees, from the Council. When he learnt that Rolle in fact had no land in Cat Island, as claimed, and intended to rent the slaves to another planter, Smyth ordered them returned to Exuma. There the slaves refused to work and the overseer reported open rebellion was imminent and the slaves armed. Smyth sent soldiers, who found all was quiet but there was a refusal to work. They were admonished, but they still refused. Thus Pompey was given a public punishment of thirty-nine lashes. It was established that the slaves' behaviour stemmed from information received from two free blacks that they were to be freed and the land divided amongst them. This rumour never died and there was regular unrest in Exuma from 1832 to 1834. In 1832 Lord Rolle reported to the Secretary of State that his slaves were refusing to work again. He believed "evilly disposed persons" were inducing them to follow the example of slaves on other islands.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>95</sup>Ibid., 50-51.

<sup>96</sup>Craton, "Pompey's Slave Revolt": 24-5. The following account of the revolt is drawn from pages 26 to 28 of the article. Lord Rolle promised that they would not be involved in sugar production; no families would be split up; females born there would be free and in due course, if they worked hard, the slaves could purchase the land on an installment plan

<sup>97</sup>Lord Rolle to Viscount Goderich, 13 April 1832, CO23/87/371 and 23 April 1832, CO23/87/372-3.

More to the point was that his slaves already enjoyed a large amount of discretion in how to spend their time and wished to extend this to full freedom. Plus, they were not receiving adequate food and clothing provisions from their master, insufficient compensation for labour services, so to speak. Slaveowners generally found the activities of Abolitionists in England a ready excuse for their slaves' disobedience and agitation, but there were generally more tangible reasons. There was an uprising of slaves on the Hunter estate on Cat Island in late 1831, provoked by harsh treatment and the circulating rumour that the local government was withholding their freedom. Further revolts took place on Eleuthera, Crooked Island and Ragged Island in 1833 and 1834. Slaves on the Ferguson estate in Exuma were infected by the disturbances at the Rolle plantations and sailed away to Nassau to object to their removal to a salt cay.<sup>98</sup> Despite isolation on the various islands, slaves seemed to have a keen knowledge of what was happening on other plantations and in Nassau.

The Bahamian slaveholders considered that they treated their slaves well and resisted demands from Britain for registration of slaves and amelioration of slave conditions. West Indian slaveholders, wrote Elsa Goveia, "preferred to have harsh laws which might be leniently administered rather than ameliorated laws conferring positive protection on the slaves".<sup>99</sup> This was certainly the attitude of Bahamian owners. The basis of their resistance was, in the words of Woodville Marshall, "self-interest, political traditions and constitutional status, deeply ingrained racial prejudice, and fears about the continuance of their pre-eminence in a free multiracial society".<sup>100</sup> Opposition began with the 1815 Act enforcing slave registration, which was not approved by the local Legislature until 1822. The House of Assembly similarly resented the 1824 Consolidated Slave Act to better the slaves' conditions, or rather, it resented the intervention of the British Parliament into their affairs.<sup>101</sup> It also rejected the 1824 Order-in-Council, providing for an official to protect the slaves, arguing the office was not needed in The Bahamas and objecting to both the cost and

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<sup>98</sup>Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream*, vol.1, 387 and 389. One slave (a driver) was executed for the uprising at the Hunter estate.

<sup>99</sup>Goveia, *Slave Society*, 321.

<sup>100</sup>Woodville Marshall, "Amelioration and Emancipation (with a special reference to Barbados)" in *Emancipation I: A Series of Lectures to Commemorate the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Emancipation* ed. Alvin O. Thompson (Cave Hill, Barbados: University of West Indies, 1986), 80.

<sup>101</sup>Saunders, *Slavery*, 174.

the interference.<sup>102</sup> Eventually an amended 1824 Act was passed, but the House refused to abolish the whipping of female slaves, leading to a prolonged dispute with Governor Carmichael Smyth. Conditions for slaves were improved between 1826 and 1830 by the amended Slave Code<sup>103</sup> but the owners complied with British requests reluctantly and regulated their slaves with perhaps more severity just prior to Emancipation.

Another aspect of the rearguard fight of the Bahamian ruling class to preserve their position was to belatedly incorporate the free coloureds and blacks into the ranks of the privileged few possessing civil and political rights. The position of this group had actually deteriorated at the end of the previous century, when the conflagration in Haiti, begun by the free coloureds, caused panic among the whites. The House of Assembly had passed an Act to force free blacks and coloureds to register with the Secretary and work on the public road to earn a certificate to prove their free state.<sup>104</sup> Further fears had led to the passing in 1793 of an Act to prevent the admission of “all French negroes and other French persons of colour”.<sup>105</sup> The Amelioration Acts of 1824, 1826 and 1830 extended the rights of the freemen, but it was the 1830 Act (Geo.IV, c.10) that conceded the vote to the free coloured and black class, provided they were born free and not of African birth.<sup>106</sup> This phase of the Bahamian elite’s attempt to retain its power was to continue from 1833 in a concerted effort to co-opt the coloured middle classes and separate them from the black lower classes.

To a great extent the West Indian governments precipitated the ‘immediate Emancipation’ policy of 1831 to 1838 by their frustration of the Amelioration programme. However, co-operation with the colonial governments continued to be sought by the Imperial Government and the price of Emancipation was thus slave compensation, apprenticeship and the granting of considerable authority to local governments “in fashioning the structure in which emancipation will operate”.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>102</sup>See *ibid.*, 176 for details of arguments used.

<sup>103</sup>For details see *ibid.*, 178-80 and Craton, *History of Bahamas*, 185-190.

<sup>104</sup>Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream*, vol.1, 206-7.

<sup>105</sup>Lord Dunmore to Dundas, 10 October 1793, CO23/32/163.

<sup>106</sup>Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream*, vol.1, 231.

<sup>107</sup>Marshall, “Amelioration and Emancipation”, 75.

A number of the characteristics and features of the slavery period in The Bahamas would be developed or reconstructed after Emancipation. Overriding all would be the racist implications of the policies of the ruling whites. As Donald Wood contends, a number of assumptions and myths combined to form the white view of the character of blacks. "Behind it lay the whole intricate experience of the Afro-European encounter since the Renaissance, the stereotypes formed by slavery, the legacy of the master and servant relationship, and, equally important, the growing dogma of the superiority of European culture and technology."<sup>108</sup> The ethos of the post-Emancipation period retained the conception that blacks were inferior, fit only for labour, and this would particularly be applied to the education of the labouring class. Blacks had to be kept in place. The white elite had already shown a marked fear of social disorder and would endeavour to use the law to maintain the subordination of blacks. The law and its application would continue to be a powerful hegemonic weapon. However, blacks in The Bahamas had developed certain 'freedoms' within slavery, such as self-hire, task work and the right to provision grounds. These practices, in fact, made it easier for employers to accustom themselves to the requirements of apprenticeship. Also, since some slaves on self-hire were already not paid in cash, but in shares, and had developed credit relationships with their masters, these systems, which benefitted the employers, could be transferred into the new era. But former slaves wanted to continue some of their 'rights' too, such as the right to farm the land that was theirs by custom. There would have to be some negotiation of land tenures and contracts after the ending of slavery. Since the former slaveowners would no longer be in such a commanding position, both in terms of their power over other human beings and in view of their weak economic position, the freedmen would be able to extract some concessions. The Imperial Government would be a third party, the Colonial Office supervising the local enactments and the Stipendiary Magistrates labour contracts. The interference of the British Government had already caused considerable resentment and obstruction from the Legislature; this too would mark their relationship in the post-Emancipation era.

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<sup>108</sup>Donald Wood, Trinidad in Transition: The Years after Slavery (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), 248.

CHAPTER TWO  
ADJUSTING TO FREE LABOUR: THE PERIOD OF APPRENTICESHIP IN THE  
BAHAMAS

Although plantation agriculture was no longer a significant part of the Bahamian economy, the slaveowners had fought against Emancipation, especially since it was imposed from outside. In this respect The Bahamas followed the pattern of the other islands of the British West Indies, although, in most of their cases, they could argue the need to retain a pool of cheap and reliable labour in order to preserve the plantation system. The Bahamian Legislature resented the encroachment on property rights and its traditional constitutional rights. In line with the whole of the British Caribbean, the land-owning elite, and their merchant supporters, feared the consequences of Emancipation. Would it lead to a social upheaval and the consequent loss of their own privileged positions of wealth and power? They had only recently witnessed the Haitian Revolution and were, consequently, determined to safeguard themselves against such a cataclysmic turn-of-events.

Following the decline of cotton production in The Bahamas, adjustments in the utilization of slave labour had been made and, as Howard Johnson has pointed out, there was already prior to Emancipation a class of “dependent cultivators” on the land, whose tenure “was rooted in contractual relations”.<sup>1</sup> These agreements predated and facilitated the voluntary agreements of the Apprenticeship era. Cash payments in lieu of labour services were also firmly rooted in the urban and maritime economy.<sup>2</sup> Thus, “in the Bahamas, full emancipation was (with the exception of the salt industry) primarily a political event which

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<sup>1</sup> Howard D. Johnson, “A Slow and Extended Abolition: The Case of the Bahamas 1800-1838” in Mary Turner ed., From Chattel Slaves to Wage Slaves: The Dynamics of Labour Bargaining in the Americas (Kingston: Ian Randle, 1995), 169.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 172. See page 33.

did not significantly alter the existing social relations of production”.<sup>3</sup> The former slave owning class now fought a rearguard action to defend their political, economic and social hegemony.

### The Bahamian Emancipation Act of 1834

The British Parliament passed the Emancipation Act in 1833 and it was to come into force in the colonies on 1 August 1834.<sup>4</sup> Each colony was required to pass its own Act, consistent with the spirit of the Imperial Act, each legislature deciding whether to adopt the Apprenticeship system or whether to opt for immediate freedom for its slaves. In The Bahamas, the Abolition Act and the Auxiliary Act passed surprisingly easily in February 1834. Lieutenant Governor Blayney Balfour commented to Edward Stanley, Secretary of State for the Colonies: “The temper of the House of Assembly during this session has been so different from that which characterized the last House that I have not, for one single moment, repented the disposition of that Body”.<sup>5</sup> The Bahamian landowners and politicians no longer wished to resist the inevitable and settled down to make the best of a bad job by shaping the local Act to meet their own requirements. Besides, the discontent and disturbances evident among the slave populations since 1830 probably convinced slaveowners that further delay would be counter-productive. A relieved Balfour praised the House at its closing on 20 March: “I should not be doing justice to my own feelings if I abstained from noticing the good sense and temper which marked your deliberations during the discussion of the Slavery Abolition Bill”. The Governor could certainly afford to feel satisfied that everything had gone comparatively smoothly, for he was well aware of the prejudices and past history of the elite in The Bahamas. In the speech, he expressed hope that the Bill presented would be seen as “a well regulated plan for the future peace and

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 177. In the salt industry use of low-level technology meant this was a labour-intensive pursuit and thus still worked by slave labour prior to 1838. See *ibid.*, 171.

<sup>4</sup> 3 and 4 Wm. IV c.73: “An Act for the Abolition of Slavery throughout the British Colonies: for promoting the Industry of the Manumitted Slaves; and for compensating the persons hitherto entitled to the services of such slaves.”

<sup>5</sup> Blayney Balfour to Edward Stanley, 19 February 1834, CO23/91/56-57.

harmony of all classes of Society within these Islands”.<sup>6</sup>

Basically, the emancipation legislation was designed to transform slaveowners into employers and slaves into free labourers. As seen, this process was well underway in The Bahamas since the decline of cotton plantation production. It was also meant to transform social relationships between masters and slaves, although there were limits to how far this would be possible, given the deep-rooted prejudices and attitudes of the white elite. The ruling class also considered another function of the legislation was to ensure the maintenance of social order and discipline, once the old order of the ‘whip and the lash’ were removed.

The Bahamas decided to adopt the apprenticeship system as an interim measure between slavery and full freedom. The rationale behind apprenticeship was to continue to provide a supply of labour to planters for a number of years, hardly necessary in The Bahamas, but also to give the slave owning class time to adjust their economies, values and ideologies to the new era of free labour. Labour was only in demand at the salt ponds and in the few struggling plantations scattered around the Out Islands. In the former case, the intensive and unpleasant nature of the work made it unattractive to free labourers and, in the latter instances, the vast amount of Crown Land available made squatting a viable alternative to wage labour. Fortunately, for the Bahamian proprietors, there was a ready pool of cheap labour available in the Liberated Africans, which could be utilised under indentureship.<sup>7</sup>

Apprenticeship was intended to provide a period of adjustment for the former slave, so he could attune himself to contracting his labour and be educated and trained for life in a free society. At the same time, he would, for a time, have his basic necessities provided by his master to guard against an early descent into destitution. Thomas Holt aptly writes that the “drafters of the apprenticeship system” regarded “the slaves as children needing to be re-educated as wage labourers and resocialised as citizens”.<sup>8</sup> What they considered was needed

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<sup>6</sup>Blayne Balfour, Speech at Closing of House, 20 March 1834, CO23/91/207-208.

<sup>7</sup>Between 1811 and 1860 approximately 6,000 Africans were landed in The Bahamas, 4,000 between 1831 and 1838 (Howard Johnson, *The Bahamas from Slavery to Servitude 1783-1933*, (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996), 63 and 70). They were indentured for between 7 and 14 years.

<sup>8</sup>T. C. Holt, *The Problem of Freedom: Race, Labour and Politics in Jamaica and Britain, 1832-1938* (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1992), 56.

was “a thorough cultural reconstruction of the working class”.<sup>9</sup> The *Royal Gazette* implied such a consideration when it envisaged apprenticeship as a “school of instruction” in which apprentices could “learn to conduct themselves as industrious and useful, worthy members of society”.<sup>10</sup> In The Bahamas many labourers were already adjusting to contract labour or forming a proto-peasantry. But they did not receive training nor were the facilities for public education ever adequate. This aspect of apprenticeship never seemed to preoccupy the Assembly. However, where instruction was available, whether religious or secular, teachers taught the virtues of obedience, discipline and deference.

The key factor persuading the ruling class to opt for apprenticeship was probably the fear felt by whites over the freeing of so many black persons. The increased slave resistance in the 1830s, although not in any way threatening physically to the whites, made the slaveowners mindful of their own safety. Besides they wanted to hold on to their positions of privilege for as long as possible. Another significant consideration for the swift adoption of the Abolition Act and apprenticeship was the desire to share in the twenty million pounds’ worth of compensation that Britain had granted to its slave colonies. The individual colonial legislatures had to ratify the Emancipation Act in order to get their share. Moreover, slaveowners seemed to regard apprenticeship as part of their compensation. A system of apprenticeship had seemed to work adequately in securing the labour services of the Liberated Africans and Bahamian slaveholders would probably have approached the change with somewhat less trepidation than their West Indian counterparts who had no such experience.

The apprenticeship system set up by the local Act was in its essentials the one recommended by the Imperial Act, but some of the details were not according to the spirit of the British legislation and contrary to the wishes of the British Government. The new Secretary of State for the Colonies, Thomas Spring Rice, while not giving His Majesty’s unqualified approbation, wrote that he was “fully satisfied that the Legislators of the Bahamas have endeavoured to perform the task assigned to them with fidelity, and with a sincere intention to carry into complete effect the measures contemplated by Parliament and

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 35.

<sup>10</sup>*Royal Gazette*, 6 August 1834.

His Majesty's Government".<sup>11</sup>

#### The Terms of the Act

According to the Bahamian Abolition Act of 15 February 1834<sup>12</sup>, all children under the age of six years were freed immediately; the other slaves became apprentices, working for their former owners for no more than nine hours each day, excluding Saturday and Sunday. This was unwaged labour, although the masters had to provide basic necessities. Allowances of food, clothing and lodging were stipulated, but if both parties agreed, the equivalent in land, time or money could be provided instead. The British Government was more than satisfied with these provisions. "Having regard to the limited resources of the proprietors in the Bahamas, they deserve no small measure of praise for the humane and liberal spirit in which they have legislated both now and heretofore on this important subject".<sup>13</sup> It remained to be seen if the masters, particularly on Out Island plantations, abided by this part of the law.

The number of apprenticed labourers in The Bahamas on 1 August 1834 was filed as 7,447 (3,831 praedials and 3,616 non-praedials).<sup>14</sup> These figures, however, proved to be inaccurate and were the subject of a reprimand from the Earl of Aberdeen in 1835. He complained: "It may be a very serious evil that it should remain uncertain for eighteen months, from the first of August last, to which of the two classes of apprentices particular individuals belong". He also berated the legislature for not establishing a judicial authority to hear objections on behalf of slaves concerning the class to which they were assigned.<sup>15</sup> It was important for two reasons to know the class for each apprentice. The apprenticeship system was to last for six years for praedials (until 1 August 1840) and four years for non-

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<sup>11</sup>Thomas Spring Rice to Blayney Balfour, 19 July 1834, CO23/91/81-108.

<sup>12</sup>4 Wm. IV c.21.

<sup>13</sup>Thomas Spring Rice to Blayney Balfour, 19 July 1834, CO23/91/81-108. Cf. Provisions in the Jamaican Act which were "left vague" (Holt, *Problem of Freedom*, 95) and the Barbadian Act offered meagre food rations (H. McD. Beckles, *A History of Barbados. From Amerindian Settlement to Nation-State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 95).

<sup>14</sup>Return, CO23/103/42. In 1831 the number of registered slaves was over 10,000. The difference in numbers is accounted for by the under six year olds, who were freed in 1834; those manumitted just prior to Emancipation and deaths in the intervening period. There were also probably inaccuracies in the return of 1834 (see above).

<sup>15</sup>Dispatch from the Earl of Aberdeen, no.14, 10 February 1835 printed in *Royal Gazette*, 8 April 1835.

praedials (until 1 August 1838). Masters were not allowed to use slaves in any other capacity once they were assigned. This irked some owners, particularly since it was the custom for domestics to work in the salt ponds during the season. Queries were made on the owners' behalf in the House in November 1834 as to whether non-praedral labourers could be lawfully employed in the field, but the Acting Public Secretary answered in the negative, unless it was by mutual consent, which was highly unlikely.<sup>16</sup>

By mutual consent, apprentices could hire themselves out to whomsoever they pleased once they had completed the stipulated hours of service and at weekends. (They had leisure time too on Good Friday, Christmas Day and the next two working days after Christmas.) Contracts now provided the basis of the conditions of employment for all workers and these had to be renewed yearly and witnessed by two persons. Breach of agreement by either party was to be punished. Employers were well practised in negotiating such agreements, used for Liberated Africans and slaves on hire. This can be compared to Jamaica where "neither employers nor employees were familiar with the methods of wage-bargaining" and where "the revolutionary aspect of the change can hardly be over-emphasised".<sup>17</sup> Agreements were not innovatory in The Bahamas, but they now encompassed all workers, a lasting effect of apprenticeship. Moreover, task-work could, by agreement, be substituted for labour by the day. Again the task had already been widely used on slave worked plantations in The Bahamas, probably a practice brought over from the rice plantations of Georgia. It had suited both masters and slaves; the latter could spend time on their provision grounds, and the former needed to provide less food and supervision of labour and benefited from the increased motivation of the worker.

If the employer so wished, an apprentice could, in the presence of a Justice, be discharged from an unexpired term of his apprenticeship. An apprentice could also purchase his freedom if the employer agreed.<sup>18</sup> Again there were advantages to both slaves and

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<sup>16</sup>*Royal Gazette*, 14 March 1835. Further queries concerned whether, if domestics were found to be unfit, from continued petty theft or other crimes, they could then be transferred to praedral labour, with the consent of a Special Justice. A negative answer was again given and it was emphasised that Special Justices did not have the authority to change employment.

<sup>17</sup>D.G. Hall, *The Apprenticeship Period in Jamaica, 1834-1838* (reprint, Mona: Institute of Education of University of West Indies, n.d.), 7.

<sup>18</sup>It was the duty of the Justice to withhold consent if the slave was above fifty years of age and/or infirm and unable to earn a living.

masters, but the British Government considered the method of appraising the cost of manumission unfair to the apprentice.<sup>19</sup> One master considered the benefits ran in the other direction. In a letter to the *Royal Gazette*, Philagathus complained of the customary mode of appraisal. He wrote: “The appraiser on the part of the apprentice generally names a sum, about two-thirds the amount of that fixed on by the other party- an umpire is called in by the stipendiary, who perhaps, adds a few dollars to the lowest sum, and this fixes the amount to be given to the master for the future services of his apprentice”.<sup>20</sup> The Bahamian Legislature also attempted to write in clauses allowing transfer of services to another master, as long as there was no separation of families and with the consent of two Justices of the Peace. These transfers of apprentices deviated from the terms of the Imperial Act and were illegal. Apprentices were fixed to the land.

Bahamian masters intended to regulate vigorously their apprentices. Misdemeanours and their punishments are listed in detail in the statute. Apprentices could be charged for breach of the peace or disturbance of order; indolence, neglect or improper performance of work; violation of contract; acts of insubordination, insolent language or manner towards employers; injuries to the person, property or “just rights or character” of their employer or other persons and attempts to injure their employer. The British Government did not approve the clause relating to offences against “other persons” since there should have been no distinction between apprentices and free persons in general matters of criminal law.<sup>21</sup> The punishment for negligence, indolence, fighting or drunkenness was an extra fifteen hours’ labour for the first offence, hard labour for one week for the second offence and hard labour for two weeks and twenty lashes for the third offence. (Extra labour could be levied in lieu of or in addition to the latter two punishments). Unlawful assembly merited hard labour for three months and thirty-nine lashes and riotous assembly earned three months’ hard labour. Other punishments were at the Justices’ discretion and could include flogging, solitary confinement and the stocks.<sup>22</sup> The severity of these punishments reflected the masters’ fears. These punishments were regularly reported in the *Royal Gazette*: “April 27,

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<sup>19</sup>Thomas Spring Rice to Blayney Balfour, 19 July 1834, CO23/91/81-108.

<sup>20</sup>*Royal Gazette*, 8 April 1835.

<sup>21</sup>Spring Rice to Balfour, 19 July 1834, CO23/91/81-108.

<sup>22</sup>Cf. Jamaican Act where offences and penalties were not defined (Holt, The Problem of Freedom, 95). In The Bahamas, females could not be whipped and only held in the stocks for a limited time.

Charlotte Sands, an apprentice House Servant, was sentenced by this Court to two days' imprisonment in the workhouse, for refusing to obey the commands of her Master and Mistress."<sup>23</sup> Kate Thompson, an apprentice, was sentenced to three days' solitary confinement by the same court for insolent conduct to her employer. On the first of July, 1835 the newspaper apologised to readers for not including the Stipendiary Magistrate's reports from Nassau, but claimed there was nothing new - "the disobedience, insolence, and refractory conduct of Apprentices and the punishments awarded for such conduct, as confinement in the Workhouse, the Stocks, etc.; and now and then, the fine inflicted on a gentleman who may have lost his usual good temper, from the loss of a good dinner, by the negligence, and insolence afterwards, of his apprentice".<sup>24</sup> This confirmed that court punishments were not inflicted just on the apprentices, but, according to the Act, violation of the person, property or just rights of an apprentice warranted no more than a fine (or equivalent term of imprisonment). The *Royal Gazette* reported the case of John Walker, accused of assaulting Evan, his African apprentice. The case was dismissed, with an explanation to the defendant that he might only correct and punish his African apprentice in a reasonable way, as an apprentice in England might be punished.<sup>25</sup> William Fulford appeared before the court for "making use of scurrilous and abusive language" to his apprentice John. He only received a reprimand and was admonished to refrain from such practices in future.<sup>26</sup> The courts did punish some masters. The *Royal Gazette* reported: "Thomas Rigby, Esquire-convicted of striking his apprentice Cato, with his fists-sentenced to pay 10s.; a fine to the king."<sup>27</sup> However, the law and the courts were not even-handed. The lawmakers had also attempted to gain the right to chastise boys less than fourteen years of age and girls under twelve *in loco parentis*, including the right to whip. This clause was disallowed by the Secretary of State in 1835.

Legislators were keen to ensure that apprentices would not be inclined to desert employers, particularly to squat on Crown Land. Apprentices absenting themselves from

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<sup>23</sup>*Royal Gazette*, 9 May 1835.

<sup>24</sup>*Royal Gazette*, 1 July 1835.

<sup>25</sup>*Royal Gazette*, 27 June 1835.

<sup>26</sup>*Royal Gazette*, 12 August 1835.

<sup>27</sup>*Royal Gazette*, 25 July 1835.

their employers' service could be sentenced to work for their employers two hours for every hour of absence (not exceeding fifteen extra hours in one week). An apprentice away for over seven and an half hours in any one week would be judged a deserter and liable to one week's hard labour. An apprentice absent for more than two days in one week would be adjudged a vagabond and liable to two weeks' hard labour and fifteen lashes. Any apprentice absent for one week would be deemed a runaway and liable to hard labour of up to one month and thirty lashes. Apprentices guilty of these offences would also have to serve additional time, equal in length to their period of absence. There were also penalties for those harbouring runaways. An incidence of such a crime was when on 28 April 1835 Moll, an apprentice labourer to Mr. Thomas Necks, was found guilty of harbouring two runaway apprentices, Sam and Charles, on her master's premises and sentenced by the Court to be confined in the solitary cell for three days. Mr. Necks was also admonished by the Court not to allow runaway apprentices to remain on his premises in the future.<sup>28</sup> More severe were the punishments of the runaways. Sam Hughes and Charles Thompson were sentenced to seven days' hard labour and twelve lashes. In the same newspaper Peter Malcolm, a praedial apprentice labourer, was sentenced to four days' hard labour for absenting himself from his master's plantation without leave. The appeal of genuine freedom was powerful for some apprentices and masters would endeavour, as in slavery times, to protect their human assets. A newspaper advertisement read "ABSCONDED: On the 18th of April last, from the Schooner Traveller, the subscriber's Apprentice named Dick, formerly belonging to Mr. Nesbitt. Any person harbouring or employing the said Apprentice will be liable to a fine of L50. It is suspected he is on board some wrecking vessel. H.M. Williams."<sup>29</sup> Absconding in order to farm for oneself on uncultivated land similarly had to be discouraged by the law. Unlawful possession of Crown lands could lead to eviction, selling or destruction of crops and hard labour for three months, unless the apprentice had enjoyed two years' undisturbed possession of the land, whereupon he would not be punished.

Apprentices might marry without any restriction from their employers, but there were clauses stipulating how the solemnization of marriage might be performed. The British

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<sup>28</sup>*Royal Gazette*, 9 May 1835. One of his apprentices, named George, was sworn in by the Court as Special Constable, to assist him in the execution of his duty.

<sup>29</sup>*Royal Gazette*, 27 June 1835.

Government objected to these as they served to differentiate apprentice labourers and free persons. “Whatever tends to perpetuate the distinction of caste in the Slave Colonies, however trifling in itself, arises from that circumstance into serious importance”.<sup>30</sup> The opposing ideologies behind the two Acts are clear; the Bahamian elite had every intention of preserving caste differences.

In a similar vein, apprentices might be witnesses in civil and criminal cases, but there were provisos that made their use unlikely and their testimony was not to have retrospective effect from the first of August 1834. The Secretary of State commented that the provisos preventing use of apprentices’ evidence “would go very far to reinstate one of the most indefensible parts of the Slave Code, viz.: the rejection of Slave Evidence”.<sup>31</sup> The idea that blacks could bear witness against whites was unpalatable to most of the elite during the rest of the century. In addition, apprentices were not to be called for jury service or service in the militia nor were they to hold any office, except Constable (see page forty-nine). Employers did not want to lose labour service nor could they envisage their ex-slaves in positions of trust or authority. Spring Rice considered the bar on holding office unnecessarily rigid:

To obliterate the memory and the feeling of Caste, and to teach the apprentice to think of themselves as integral parts of the Society to which they belong, partaking in its’ [*sic*] advantages and interested in its’ [*sic*] welfare, is the obvious Policy by which all legislation on this subject should be directed.<sup>32</sup>

Again, the differing philosophies of the British Government and the Bahamian Assembly were obvious.

Apprentices were not to leave the plantation without permission. The Secretary of State pointed out that not being able to leave the plantation without permission might well preclude the labourer from hiring out his own time to anyone but his employer. The liberty of the labourer was infringed upon in various arbitrary regulations and Spring Rice considered such provisions would prevent acquisition of the habits of voluntary industry. The Bahamian legislators were forgetting their duties of turning slaves into free market

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<sup>30</sup>Thomas Spring Rice to Blayney Balfour, 19 July 1834, CO23/91/81-108. The Act did allow solemnization of marriage by other than a clergyman of the Church of England, which was beneficial to the apprentices since there were few clergymen on islands other than New Providence, Eleuthera and Turks Island.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

labourers. They did not pass an Act until 1837 to counter this clause (1 Vic. C.19) and then it was probably not always enforced. Other such restrictions included the apprentices not being allowed to cultivate any article of colonial produce, except for subsistence purposes, specifically Indian and Guinea corn and salt. Nor could they raise cattle or other livestock, apart from two hogs. They could not deal in liquor or the products in which their employers dealt. The planter and merchant class could not tolerate competition from their former slaves.

There would be a curfew after nine in the evening and the apprentices could not possess gunpowder, guns, swords, pistols or firearms unless they had the consent of their master. Many of these provisions resembled the restrictions of the Slave Code and indicate that the ex-slave owners had not yet adjusted to the fact that their former slaves were now freemen. They also emphasise the fear of violence felt by the proprietors.

#### The Special Magistrates

Special Magistrates were sent out from Britain to see that the provisions of the apprenticeship were enforced. Initially, three were sent to The Bahamas, stationed in New Providence, Eleuthera and the Turks Islands.<sup>33</sup> Apprentices could be appointed Constables to assist the Special Magistrates. Constables were to be responsible to the Special Magistrates, and not to the proprietors of the plantations, and they were to be armed with the authority of the law, although with very limited powers.<sup>34</sup> The Constables were to advise apprentices with complaints to await the arrival of a Special Magistrate, rather than take matters into their own hands. They could also confine a disorderly apprentice until the arrival of a Justice. The instructions issued to Magistrates in their selection of Constables suggested that they were to be “heads of families who are thought well of by their employers, and who are possessed of some influence with the apprentices”.<sup>35</sup> In fact this was probably an astute move by the Legislature, as law and order would be applied in the first instance from one of the labourers’ peers, in the manner of the slave drivers formerly.

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<sup>33</sup>By July 1835 the British Government had granted six magistrates and plans to send them to The Bahamas were in place by November. British Government to William Colebrooke, 8 July 1835, CO23/93/436-437 and Lord Glenelg to William Colebrooke, 5 November 1835, CO23/94/77-78.

<sup>34</sup>Thomas Spring Rice to Blayney Balfour, 19 July 1834, CO23/91/81-108.

<sup>35</sup>*Royal Gazette*, 15 April 1835. There was to be one constable to about every ten families.

Drivers had always been strict upholders of discipline and the Constables likewise proved to be very effective.

The new Act was to be proclaimed throughout The Bahamas, but it was to be the job of the Special Magistrates to explain the changes and the provisions of the Act. They would also inspect the record books of the employers to check the contracts and ensure that both parties adhered to the agreements. The Special Magistrates would listen to complaints and punish guilty parties. Gordon Lewis comments, “The new instrumentality of the stipendiary magistrate gave to the freed slave a bargaining power and an independent legal representation quite unknown in the slavery economy”.<sup>36</sup>

The Governor and the House of Assembly considered three Magistrates, as originally proposed by the British Government for The Bahamas, were not enough, bearing in mind the distances between islands and the isolated nature of most settlements. Thus Balfour proposed to appoint eighteen Special Justices from the local population, usually proprietors or overseers. He did this with reluctance and out of necessity, stating to Stanley:

I cannot bring myself to believe that men who have, during their whole lives, been accustomed to look down upon a certain class as unworthy of credit and as being below others, will now, when that class is elevated in spite of them, be therefore disposed to do justice towards it.<sup>37</sup>

He believed that the black peasant would not find justice at the hands of any colonial magistrate, due to a prejudice “unchecked by Religious feeling or by high moral sense, or by the restraining principle of public opinion”. Balfour’s foreboding was soon proved correct and William Colebrooke, soon after taking up the office of Lieutenant Governor, complained to London about the arrangements, which he considered expensive, inefficient and “in some cases open to more serious objections”.<sup>38</sup> He elaborated on the failure of the local justices to preserve order and to gain the confidence of the apprentices, whereas in areas of disturbance, the English Magistrates had been able to restore order and induce the apprentices to work willingly for their employers.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, local justices had not been

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<sup>36</sup>Gordon Lewis, The Growth of the Modern West Indies (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1968), 72.

<sup>37</sup>Blayney Balfour to Edward Stanley, 20 June 1834, CO23/91/272-273.

<sup>38</sup>William Colebrooke to Earl of Aberdeen, 12 March 1835, CO23/93/121-123.

<sup>39</sup>William Colebrooke to Earl of Aberdeen, 9 April 1835, CO23/93/178-180.

appointed to some islands, leaving a gap in the administration of the apprenticeship. Colebrooke applied for more magistrates to be sent from Britain and proposed to reconstruct the system by establishing circuits and eliminating the local justices. Lord Glenelg fully agreed with Colebrooke's sentiments. He had sent a circular to all West Indian colonies saying:

It is not consistent with those intentions [of Parliament in passing the Abolition Act], that the powers of a Special Magistrate should continue to be exercised by any person who had an interest in apprentice labour; and it is only with great circumspection, and in peculiar cases, that the Special Commissions should be given to parties who, though not interested in apprentice labour, have been habitually resident in the colonies, and are in consequence unavoidably much connected with the Colonial Society.<sup>40</sup>

The House and Council gave their approval to the scheme.<sup>41</sup> Six English magistrates filled the six circuits thus established by 1837.<sup>42</sup>

The Special Magistrates played an important role in the impartial and successful implementation of the Abolition Act in The Bahamas. Their duties became fairly extensive, including reporting on the conditions in districts, assessing the potential for the establishment of free villages and assisting in the building of schools and gaols. They assumed the mantle of disciplinarians from the former slave owners and thus suffered a certain amount of resentment from the Bahamian whites. Not that they refrained from inflicting corporal punishments, such as flogging, but they earned respect from the apprentices. The Magistrates had a slightly less onerous task in The Bahamas than those working in the sugar islands, who had to enforce the disciplined organisation and frenetic pace of the sugar industry during crop time. Consequently, the Bahamian apprentices did not have so much reason to resent their authority.

#### Implementation of the Act

As the first day of August 1834 approached Lieutenant Governor Balfour expressed fears of some public disorder. He had heard that the slaves on some of the islands were resolved not to work after the first day of August "on the plea that the king has made them

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<sup>40</sup>Circular from Lord Glenelg, 15 June 1835, printed in Votes of the House of Assembly of the Bahama Islands (1836), 29.

<sup>41</sup>William Colebrooke to Earl of Aberdeen, 21 April 1835, CO23/93/207-208.

<sup>42</sup>The circuits were (1) Turks Island, Caicos Island, Iguana, Mayaguana (2) Crooked Island, Acklins Island, Long Island (3) South Eleuthera, Rum Cay, San Salvador, Watlings Island (4) Exuma, Ragged Island & Cays (5) Berry Islands, Andros (6) New Providence, Harbour Island, North Eleuthera. CO23/93/276.

free” and they believed that he, with their masters, was endeavouring to cheat them of this boon.<sup>43</sup> He mentioned specifically Eleuthera, Exuma, and Turks Island where the largest gangs were. Magistrates at Turks Island had warned Balfour that the prevailing opinion among the slave population there was that on the first of August they would be free and under no obligation to work for their former master. They feared the consequences if this opinion was not counteracted.<sup>44</sup> One problem Balfour faced was that the three Stipendiary Magistrates, who were supposed to explain the new conditions to the apprentices, had not yet arrived. Thus, at the beginning of July, he had sent his private secretary to some of the islands to read an address to the main gangs. The Governor posted sixteen copies of his communication in different parts of Nassau, but fourteen were removed within twenty-four hours. Some of the whites took offence at the address as it reminded them that masters had obligations to provide for the apprentices, that they had no right to strike or imprison an apprentice and that, if an apprentice deserved punishment, they had to await the visit of a Special Justice. The address also outlined the rights of apprentices. Balfour feared the actions of some whites in the Out Islands as they “are nearly as low as the Slave both in capacity, and in habits of respect for the Laws”.<sup>45</sup> He had also enlisted the help of the dissenting clergy, many of whom enjoyed influence among the slaves. Rev. Thomas Lofthouse wrote to his superiors that he had communicated the required information in his chapel in Abaco and delivered an address pointing out “the advantages of submission, sobriety, industry etc. and recommended to them a spirit of gratitude for the great benefit conferred upon them by a wise and humane legislature”.<sup>46</sup>

Emancipation Day seems to have passed off without incident in The Bahamas. The Governor reported “the colony is in a very tranquil and satisfactory state: there have been very few acts of insubordination during the last month and everything goes better than I

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<sup>43</sup>Blayney Balfour to Earl of Stanley, 14 July 1834, CO23/91/289-291.

<sup>44</sup>Special Magistrates to Blayney Balfour, 28 June 1834, CO23/91/295.

<sup>45</sup>Blayney Balfour to Earl of Stanley, 14 July 1834, CO23/91/289-291.

<sup>46</sup>Rev. T. Lofthouse, Abaco, to Revs. Bunting and Beecham, WMS, 8 August 1834, Box 135, no. 53; Fiche Box no. 11, *West Indian Correspondence General 1834*, sheet 503. The correspondence of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society is located in the Special Collections Dept. of the Library at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London.

anticipated”.<sup>47</sup> Rev. Thomas Lofthouse confirmed that apprentices in Abaco “conducted themselves with the utmost propriety and decorum”.<sup>48</sup> His audience of apprentices seemed to have listened intently to his preaching. Rev. Charles Penny reported that the day had passed in Harbour Island “without the least excitement”.<sup>49</sup> In truth there was not much for the apprentices to get excited about as yet; for some not much had changed. Rev. T. Pugh likewise said the first of August in Nassau passed “in great peace and tranquility”, with no cases of disorderly conduct or drunkenness.<sup>50</sup> A show of authority was used in a few islands, where there was a history of slave disturbances, to inspire orderliness and respect. In areas of potential trouble Lieutenant Governor Balfour had taken precautions: two armed schooners and a detachment of troops were sent to Crooked Island and Exuma. He intended to leave the detachment in Exuma, where there had been simmering discontent for so long, “owing to the insubordination of Lord Rolle’s gang” and their refusal to work on the estate. The presence of troops was “sufficient to restore discipline”.<sup>51</sup>

There was further encouraging news to report to the Colonial Office by November. Punishments had been few in number under the new system; in fact, in two districts, for the previous month, the returns of the Magistrates showed no punishments were administered. In the other districts, very few lashes were inflicted; there were just a few cases of confinements in the stocks or extra labour on Saturday morning. Moreover, there were no complaints from masters or labourers against the conduct of the Magistrates.<sup>52</sup> In the first

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<sup>47</sup>Blayney Balfour to Thomas Spring Rice, 13 September 1834. CO23/91/380-381.

<sup>48</sup>T. Lofthouse to Revs. Bunting and Beecham, 8 August 1834.

<sup>49</sup>Rev. C. Penny, Harbour Island, to WMS, 28 August 1834; Box 135, no.25; Fiche Box no. 11, West Indian Correspondence General 1834, sheet 506.

<sup>50</sup>Rev. T. Pugh, Nassau, to Revs. Bunting, Beecham & Alden, WMS, 16 August 1834; Box 135, no.3; Fiche Box no. 11, West Indian Correspondence General 1834, sheet 504.

<sup>51</sup>Blayney Balfour to Thomas Spring Rice, 13 September 1834, CO23/91/380-381.

<sup>52</sup>Blayney Balfour to Thomas Spring Rice, 20 November 1834, CO23/91/421-423. The return of the Special Magistrates for the period 1 August 1834 to October 1835 gives the numbers of punishments inflicted on the apprentices in the first fourteen months after the Act came into operation (Return of Magistrates, enclosed in William Colebrooke to Lord Glenelg, 8 October 1835, CO23/94/154-170). The proportion of punishments to apprentices was twelve percent in New Providence; the highest proportion was eighteen percent in Turks Island and the lowest was one and three-quarters percent in Grand Bahama. One hundred and sixty-nine males were whipped; the average number of stripes administered in one whipping was seven and the maximum number of stripes given in one session was thirty-nine. The most severe punishment was one month’s hard labour and thirty lashes, with the term of apprenticeship extended for ten months. Lord Glenelg questioned the legality of this. It transpired that the apprentice, Sam, had absconded from his master at The

few months of the new year, Government reports portrayed continued tranquillity and the peaceable demeanour of apprentices, even on the most distant islands where there was little surveillance.<sup>53</sup>

This did not last and in 1835 Colebrooke was forced to send two of the Magistrates, Thomas Winder and Hector Munro, and a detachment of troops to Exuma to restore order.<sup>54</sup> They considered the primary cause of disturbance was the neglect of the local Justices, one of whom had been fined by the Special Magistrates for striking his own apprentice.<sup>55</sup> The Magistrates' report gives an impression of few specific or serious complaints. One detailed case was the complaint of Joe against his master, Morley, whose goat was destroying Joe's crops.<sup>56</sup> What, at first, seems a case of an altercation between neighbours, highlights the unequal relationship between master and apprentice when the 'victim' received punishment, presumably for insolence and threatening behaviour. The Magistrates reported that the local Justices had not made periodical visits, but had waited to be called upon by the masters. Therefore, the apprentices did not have a chance to have their grievances heard. If they had absented themselves from the plantation without leave for this purpose, they would have been considered deserters. Both Governors Balfour and Colebrooke had been right to doubt the efficacy of using local proprietors as assistants in the task of making the Abolition Act

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Bluff, Eleuthera and the ten months' extension was the time he had illegally abstracted from his term of service (Special Justice E. E. Hile to William Colebrooke, CO23/96/115). This came under the meaning of Section 20 of the Imperial Act and Section 40 of the local Act. Special Magistrate Winder added an explanation for the varying percentages of punishments inflicted from island to island. In New Providence there was an influx of mariners, fishermen and so on, and apprentices were occasionally brought from other islands where there were no places of confinement. Turks Island was the place next in importance to Nassau and itself a port of considerable trade. Punishments in New Providence had also diminished in September as Magistrates were trying to settle by arbitration and mutual agreement. The scale of punishments in the first year of the apprenticeship in The Bahamas illustrates that this system was still a coercive one, the difference more in the fact that all punishments were now recorded and administered by Magistrates, not owners.

<sup>53</sup>Joseph Hunter to Earl of Aberdeen, 21 February 1835, CO23/93/43 and William Colebrooke to Aberdeen, 5 March 1835, CO23/93/68-69.

<sup>54</sup>William Colebrooke to Earl of Aberdeen, 9 April 1835, CO23/93/178-180.

<sup>55</sup>William Colebrooke to Earl of Aberdeen, 23 April 1835, CO23/93/225-226.

<sup>56</sup>Reports of Special Magistrates Lately Sent to Exuma, enclosed in William Colebrooke to Earl of Aberdeen, 5 May 1835, CO23/93/253-263. Morley had promised to tie up the goat but his wife objected because "the place was her own", presumably meaning she could do as she liked. Joe threatened to shoot the goat if it was not tied up, whereupon Mrs. Morley called him 'a Sheep Stealing black Son of a Bitch' and told him to 'go to Hell'. Her husband repeated the description and Joe returned the compliment by calling Morley 'a Son of a Bitch'. Morley complained to the local Justice and Joe was given twenty-five lashes.

work. Their replacement by an increased number of imported magistrates alleviated the situation.

The Magistrates concluded that the incidents at the plantation of Mrs. Francis Ferguson<sup>57</sup> arose, firstly, from the neglect of the late overseer, who allowed apprentices to idle their time, so that “they now felt the difference”, being called upon to work steadily and regularly, and, secondly, by the exactions of Mrs. Ferguson. Eventually, they brought both parties to a mutual agreement to work by daily task, at a specific rate, for one year. Mrs. Ferguson lodged complaints against several apprentices and eight were brought to trial. Two were sentenced to hard labour in the Nassau workhouse; three women were sentenced to six days’ solitary confinement in the Lockup at Salt Pond and the rest were admonished.<sup>58</sup> The deterrents did not work as disturbances at this plantation figured in several reports, but in March 1836, Special Magistrate Hill reported that “even the apprentices of Mrs. Ferguson are behaving better”.<sup>59</sup> Presumably the negotiation of agreements satisfactory to both parties and fairly administered was the key to order.

Not all proprietors experienced such problems with their apprentices, even in Exuma. Ann Hume reported that her labourers were working better than before. The Magistrates attributed this turn of events “to the kind and judicious manner in which she treats them”.<sup>60</sup> Also, it does seem to have been the larger gangs that were not quiescent in the early days of apprenticeship. Those like the Rolle apprentices had been very much left to their own devices in the latter days of slavery and those like the Ferguson apprentices had been laxly supervised. Later reports from the Magistrates on circuit made it clear there were some fair-minded proprietors, who were determined to make the new relationship work. There were inevitably those of the other persuasion, who had yielded reluctantly to the abolition of slavery. The Special Magistrates visiting Exuma later in 1835 regretted the attitude of the owners there, who seemed little disposed “to promote the industry and well-being of the manumitted slaves, or to acknowledge the new state and relations of society in which the

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<sup>57</sup>She was the widow of Henderson Ferguson, reported to have 137 apprentices on Exuma, *Royal Gazette*, 18 April 1835.

<sup>58</sup>Reports of Special Magistrates Lately Sent to Exuma, enclosed in William Colebrooke to Earl of Aberdeen, 5 May 1835. CO23/93/253-263.

<sup>59</sup>Special Magistrate to William Colebrooke, 1 March 1836, CO23/96/230.

<sup>60</sup>Reports of Special Magistrates Lately Sent to Exuma, enclosed in William Colebrooke to Earl of Aberdeen, 5 May 1835, CO23/93/253-263. She only had 22 apprentices, *Royal Gazette*, 15 April 1835.

law has placed them, but rather attempt to exact from the requirements of slavery”.<sup>61</sup> They did add that these remarks were not generally applicable in The Bahamas and there were many “highly honourable exceptions”. Differences arose “principally from ignorance of their respective duties” and could be sorted out by agreements in writing, attested by the Stipendiary Magistrates.<sup>62</sup> The new system clearly depended on good will on both sides. Special Magistrate Winder remarked on the enterprise of the people of Ragged Island. “The apprentices are a fine race of people, very well treated, and in excellent condition,[sic] the Employers are very kind.”<sup>63</sup> Similarly, from Long Island the Special Magistrates stated: “We are happy in saying that the most mutual good understanding appears to exist between owners and apprentices, the latter working by agreements which are very equitable”.<sup>64</sup> In general voluntary agreements implementing task work worked well.<sup>65</sup> One continuous complaint about the landowners in The Bahamas during the nineteenth century was their disregard of modern scientific farming methods. The Special Magistrate who visited Eleuthera, Harbour Island, Abaco, Grand Bahama and the Berry Islands formed the opinion that proprietors of estates “do not seem inclined to march with the time” and “neglected their lands”.<sup>66</sup> This could have been due to penury or habit in that the use of available slave labour had discouraged scientific improvement.

At a few places in Exuma the Magistrates had found the supplies of food and clothing insufficient. Legislative enactments did not necessarily materialise. They found that many employers, heavily mortgaged, had not been able to give their apprentices the proper supplies from genuine poverty. The Magistrates took a lenient view of the infringement of the Act and merely warned them that on the next visit the Law must be put

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<sup>61</sup>Report of Special Magistrate to Exuma, 12 August 1835, CO23/94/83-86.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid.

<sup>63</sup>Special Magistrate Thomas Winder to William Colebrooke, 11 December 1835, CO23/94/463.

<sup>64</sup>Enclosed Report, 26 December 1835, CO23/96/31-32.

<sup>65</sup>The report from Crooked Island seems fairly typical of the situation where agreements were “very liberal, and such as to cause a good feeling to exist between them” (Report from Special Magistrates visiting Fortune Island and Crooked Island, 4 October 1835, CO23/94/151).

<sup>66</sup>Report of Special Magistrate Lately Sent to Eleuthera, enclosed in William Colebrooke to Earl of Aberdeen, 19 June 1835, CO23/93/358-381.

into force.<sup>67</sup> In 1836 Magistrate Penny in Inagua complained about the irregularity of supplies of clothing from the owners in Nassau to the apprentices employed in wrecking.<sup>68</sup> In the same year Lieutenant Governor Colebrooke informed Lord Glenelg that the proprietors of Eleuthera, Abaco and Harbour Island “are for the most part, indigent and illiterate persons, who are often without the means of maintaining themselves or their Apprentices”.<sup>69</sup> This reinforces the view of the Out Islands as isolated outposts, with poverty-stricken inhabitants of both races and classes. The whites had to use ‘colour’ to maintain the barriers between them. Some proprietors were brought to justice for not providing the regulated provisions. Proceedings were taken against Thomas Atwell, who was convicted of neglecting to furnish Boatswain, an apprentice in his employ, with proper nourishment and medicines while sick. Atwell was sentenced to forfeit treble the value of two weeks’ allowance of corn and to pay a fine of five pounds to the king. If he defaulted, he was to be imprisoned for thirty days.<sup>70</sup> Wiltshire Morley of Exuma was convicted of having neglected to furnish his praedial apprentice, Dorsey, with proper medicines and nourishment when sick and his legal allowance of clothing.<sup>71</sup> Presumably he was one owner who had not heeded the earlier warning from Magistrates.

The Magistrates appointed Constables and manumitted apprentices at various places as they visited the estates<sup>72</sup>. Between August 1834 and September 1835, eighty-one apprentices paid 1,215 pounds nine shillings for their freedom.<sup>73</sup> Moreover, 688 apprentices

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<sup>67</sup>Reports of Special Magistrates Lately Sent to Exuma. enclosed in William Colebrooke to Earl of Aberdeen, 5 May 1835, CO23/93/253-263.

<sup>68</sup>Special Magistrate Penny to William Colebrooke, 9 May 1836, CO23/97/86.

<sup>69</sup>William Colebrooke to Lord Glenelg, 11 March 1836, CO23/96/225-226.

<sup>70</sup>*Royal Gazette*, 15 July 1835.

<sup>71</sup>*Royal Gazette*, 25 July 1835. Was this the Morley with the case against Joe?

<sup>72</sup>The Magistrates at Exuma reported manumitting six apprentices in 1835 (CO23/93/253-263). The Magistrate at Green Turtle Cay manumitted twenty-four apprentices and in Grand Bahama three, while he manumitted all the apprentices of Mrs. Thompson (18), William Wemyss (23), the two Mackeys (45) and J. R. Gibson (25) of Eleuthera (CO23/93/358-381). In 1836 fifty-six were manumitted at Millar’s estate in Eleuthera for an agreed sum to be paid within twelve months and fourteen were released gratis on condition they supported their aged parents (CO23/97/85).

<sup>73</sup>Return: Apprentices who had purchased unexpired terms of Apprenticeship, August 1834-September 1835, CO23/94/215-216. One female on Turks Island paid the exorbitant sum of L60 13s 4d for manumission; one male and one female jointly paid that much also. Generally the cost of manumission was much lower; those paying over thirty pounds were few.

(293 males and 395 females) were released without pecuniary consideration. It is difficult to assess how many remained on the estates as free labourers, but one Magistrate stated that on Millar's Estate on Eleuthera voluntary agreements were made with heads of families to remain on the estate and work on terms "very liberal and beneficial to people".<sup>74</sup> Later reports of Magistrates seem to suggest that manumitted apprentices found it difficult to earn an adequate living in the Out Islands. Some continued to work for former masters, but were unable to improve on their terms, and several went to sea, but many remained unemployed.

The Magistrates looked at the provisions for schooling, saw to the building and improvement of gaols, investigated the resources and means of improving Crown Lands and sought the means of forming closed settlements for free people, much desired by the British officials. The Magistrates did often find difficulty in settling lots for the proposed townships and complained that they got no assistance from local Justices and Commissioners.<sup>75</sup> One Magistrate reported many poor inhabitants were eager to possess lands and to relieve their poverty.<sup>76</sup> Winder mentioned the demand in Harbour Island for house lots and fields. Many were paying ground rents "which would be sufficient in a short time to purchase their freeholds".<sup>77</sup> He even proposed to buy freehold land himself to reserve for the apprentices, "who from the grinding system pursued by some of the Employers are kept too poor to become purchasers themselves" or who were being employed almost constantly at sea. He intended to buy the land at public auction and sell lots at the same price by private arrangements with the apprentices.

William Colebrooke gave instructions to the Special Magistrates soon after his arrival to gradually discontinue inflicting the lash and reported to the Secretary of State that the application of the lash as a stimulus to labour would be abandoned in The Bahamas. He explained:

Considering that the relations at present upheld by the apprenticeship law have been intended to prepare for the maintenance of those voluntary engagements which subsist in

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<sup>74</sup>Report of Special Magistrate in Eleuthera, May 1836/CO23/97/85. Robert Millar was a mulatto.

<sup>75</sup>In fact, the nuclear families on slave plantations in the Out Islands extended into 'yards', which easily converted into free villages. Settlement names in the Family Islands today reveal their origin, such as Adderley's Plantation, Seymours, Weymss and Simms in Long Island.

<sup>76</sup>Report of Special Magistrate in Eleuthera, enclosed in William Colebrooke to Aberdeen, 19 June 1835, CO23/96/358-381.

<sup>77</sup>Special Magistrate Thomas Winder to William Colebrooke, 5 March 1836, CO23/96/231-232.

free countries, I have endeavoured to strengthen those habits and dispositions which are likely to be effectual when the abolition law shall cease to be in force, and which, from the progressive release of the apprentices who redeem their time, will soon cease to be applicable to the majority of the labourers in this colony<sup>78</sup>

Thomas Winder supported the Governor, giving the opinion that the discontinuance of the lash tended “to raise the apprenticed labourer in the scale of civilisation”.<sup>79</sup> Charles Penny likewise felt “the disuse of flogging had not produced any bad results”.<sup>80</sup> This reform was an executive decision and the departure of Colebrooke in November 1836 led to some backtracking as far as the infliction of punishments went. In 1837 Winder began to complain about the lack of application and insubordination of apprentices: “...the state of apprenticed labourers, as regards their industry and faithful discharge of the duties, required of their Employers, is not generally satisfactory”.<sup>81</sup> He considered the “sole causes of the evils” were inadequate punishments (solitary confinement also not being used for this type of offence). The Chief Justice agreed with him: “The consequent obstacles to the due attainment of order and subordination have all along been painfully evident”.<sup>82</sup> He continued: “Corporal punishment, although its infliction ought to be as seldom as possible, I conceive to be indispensable ‘in terrorem’ and its withdrawal from the Criminal Code, would in my opinion, be but a negative sanction of idleness, and insubordination”. Winder had restored corporal punishment after eighteen months for “gross and aggravated offences repeatedly committed by apprentices” who had shown “a wanton and reckless disregard of the property of their Employers” or who had persisted “in defying the authority of the employer and the magistrate”.<sup>83</sup> It seemed mariners and wreckers were the main offenders and corporal punishments had “a most salutary effect” on them, so much so that there were no instances of such punishment in the previous six weeks. The proprietors were content

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<sup>78</sup>William Colebrooke to Lord Glenelg, 8 October 1835, CO23/94/154-170.

<sup>79</sup>Report of Special Magistrate Winder in reply to Circular Letter from Secretary of State, 4 November 1836, CO23/97/507-519.

<sup>80</sup>Report of Special Magistrate Penny, 24 November 1836, CO23/97/586-591.

<sup>81</sup>Thomas Winder to Francis Cockburn, 15 May 1837, CO23/102/178-179. Offences continually committed were refusal to work, indolence, carelessness, fighting and drunkenness (Thomas Winder to Francis Cockburn, 28 May 1837, CO23/102/174-176).

<sup>82</sup>A. Mackenzie to Lord Glenelg, 14 April 1838, CO23/102/189-191.

<sup>83</sup>Thomas Winder to Lord Glenelg, 9 April 1838, CO23/102/187-188.

with the restoration of the status quo ante, always believing in the efficacy of the whip and the workhouse. Surprisingly, there was also support from a section of apprentices and the recently emancipated. Their petitions claimed the lenient enforcement of the law had led to an increase in offences, especially theft and plunder of plantations and provision grounds. “The plundering practices of the bad negro, whether still an apprentice or manumitted, reflect odium on those individuals of their colour who behave honestly and creditably”.<sup>84</sup> They recommended infliction of a “moderate” corporal punishment against “these persons of any class or colour” convicted of theft. It was in this sort of men that the liberal administrators of Emancipation had their faith. It was also a goal of the apprenticeship system to educate them into such good habits.

#### Education Provisions

It was the Imperial Government’s intention that there should be religious instruction among the apprentices. William Colebrooke eagerly pursued this, particularly since his inquiries “amply prove the urgent necessity of correcting the evils that arise from the lamentable state of ignorance in which considerable numbers of these people still remain, especially in the Out Islands”.<sup>85</sup> There was often no instruction for children, even though desired by parents, and there were no persons able to read the Scriptures to the labourers. There were some native preachers but it was claimed these were “in some instances so ignorant, illiterate, and immoral” that parents were reluctant to send their children to them. The Baptist minister, Rev. Joseph Burton, stated that when he visited a station he requested the most suitable person to instruct the rest. However, he stated that “of all the native Teachers connected with the Baptists throughout the Bahamas, I know of only one who can read a Chapter in the Word of God correctly” and that, of the twenty-five to thirty teachers, about one quarter were totally illiterate”.<sup>86</sup> The minister emphasised the great anxiety to learn on the part of the former slaves. He and the Magistrates noted the general enthusiasm among the apprenticed labourers and the recently emancipated for instruction of children. “No class have come forward with greater zeal and liberality to avail themselves of the

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<sup>84</sup>Undersigned apprentices from Green Turtle Cay to Joseph Hunter, 4 April 1837, CO23/102/191-192.

<sup>85</sup>William Colebrooke to Earl of Aberdeen, 10 March 1835, CO23/93/81-83.

<sup>86</sup>Enclosure in William Colebrooke to Earl of Aberdeen, 10 March 1835, CO23/93/81-91 and Rev. Joseph Burton to Blayney Balfour, 23 February 1835, CO23/93/91-94.

assistance offered than the Apprentices.”<sup>87</sup> This enthusiasm, though, could not always translate into contribution towards costs.<sup>88</sup>

The British Parliament had allotted thirty thousand pounds to aid in the erection of schools in the West Indies, some of which would come to The Bahamas.<sup>89</sup> The Bahamian whites might not have any great desire to educate the black population, but William Colebrooke was an enthusiast, influenced by humanitarian and utilitarian thought.<sup>90</sup> He set up a committee, composed of “Gentlemen of different religious persuasions”, to look into the standards of existing schools and promote the construction of new ones.<sup>91</sup> The Committee was most adamant that parents should contribute towards the costs of all schools and the grant should only be used to help out areas in need.<sup>92</sup>

Colebrooke’s plan for public education was to establish Infant Schools and Schools of Industry for Boys and Girls. A Normal School was to be established in Nassau to train teachers. Each school was to be under the immediate superintendence of local trustees, who would collect parents’ contributions, and would be periodically visited by inspectors who would report to the Committee in Nassau. Colebrooke considered they should concentrate

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<sup>87</sup>William Colebrooke to Lord Glenelg, CO23/96/121-128.

<sup>88</sup>Parents attending a public meeting in Rock Sound, Eleuthera, pleaded poverty when asked to contribute to the stipend of a teacher (Thomas Winder to William Colebrooke, 5 February 1836, CO23/96/227-29). At Stephen’s Town the parents withdrew their children when asked to contribute (Special Magistrates to William Colebrooke, 26 December 1835, CO23/96/31-32). The daily attendance at the Central School was 240, but parents made no contributions. On the other hand, at Tarpum Bay, Governor’s Harbour, Cherokee Sound, Elbow Cay and Spanish Wells parents were willing to make contributions (predominantly poor white areas).

<sup>89</sup>Shirley C. Gordon, *A Century of West Indian Education: A Source Book* (London: Longmans, 1963), 19. Thirty thousand pounds per annum was allowed for five years and then it was decreased each year until the provision ended in 1845. The allocation to The Bahamas was L550 to be administered through the SPG (*Ibid.*, 26).

<sup>90</sup>Frederick Madden, ed., with David Fieldhouse, *Imperial Reconstruction: The Evolution of Alternative Systems of Colonial Government: Select Documents on the Constitutional History of the British Empire and Commonwealth, vol.III* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1987), 694.

<sup>91</sup>William Colebrooke to Lord Glenelg, CO23/96/121-128. The main “existing school” was the Central School in Nassau, set up in 1834. It was under the superintendence of the Bishop and the Rectors and Churchwardens of the parishes of Christ Church and St. Matthew and of four others appointed by the Governor. The Anglican Church ran six daily schools (two in Nassau and one each in Turks Island, Harbour Island, Eleuthera and Green Turtle Cay).

<sup>92</sup>Proceedings of the Commission appointed to take into consideration the state of education throughout the Bahamas, and the means by which it may be most effectually promoted, 11 March 1836, CO23/96/135-174.

on building schools in areas where townships were to be established, namely in areas where there was a strong disposition by the liberated people to settle, to acquire property and to obtain education for their children. Colebrooke explained what he saw as the advantages of this system: uniformity, central training, constant inspection and control and no regard for “complexional distinctions”. He stated that the principle adhered to in the primary schools already formed was “of blending the children without distinction of colour or condition” and this principle would be followed in all future establishments. Colebrooke also proposed to establish the King’s College School in Nassau for secondary education for the middle classes. He encouraged the British Government to support this school by pointing out the sort of student likely to benefit from it was sent to the United States, which strengthened connections with a country “where the prejudices growing out of the existence of slavery continue to prevail” and where respect for the institutions of the mother country was unlikely to be imbibed.<sup>93</sup>

A bill was passed in 1836, meeting “the views of all sects and denominations of Christians”.<sup>94</sup> It set up a Board to make rules and regulations for the public schools. The sum of one thousand pounds sterling was appropriated to cover the costs of the objects of that year. The Central School in Nassau was to be adapted for a Normal School, with some of the pupils from there being transferred to a new school in the Eastern District. The Assembly also guaranteed the salary for one year for two masters for the King’s College School. It seemed that a start had been made to establish a uniform system of public education. The ideas behind the public education policy might seem patronising and illiberal (although colour blind), but they were the norm in England too. It was a system of “teacher as social missionary and the school as a functioning centre of sound influences”<sup>95</sup>; a system of social control, “an enormously ambitious attempt to determine, through the capture of educational means, the patterns of thought, sentiment and behaviour of the working class”.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>93</sup>William Colebrooke to Lord Glenelg, CO23/96/121-128.

<sup>94</sup>William Colebrooke to Lord Glenelg, 14 May 1836, CO23/96/481-482. See 6 Wm. IV C.17.

<sup>95</sup>Richard Johnson, “Educational Policy and Social Control in Early Victorian England”, Past and Present 49 (November 1970): 116.

<sup>96</sup>*Ibid.*, 119.

Colebrooke's plans soon started to become unstuck after his departure when, under a fervent Anglican Governor, the Board became embroiled in sectarian disputes. The Normal School for training teachers never became permanently established so that the standard of teaching remained poor. The 'Bell System', using senior students to teach younger pupils, was adopted. The King's College School struggled financially until it was closed in 1849. The ruling classes did not see the education of the lower classes as a priority. Although they could appreciate the utilitarian nature of its underlying philosophy, the expense of running a satisfactory public school system thwarted progress. There was also no technical training for the liberated labourers; no attempt to educate the apprentices and emancipated to make a living in the free labour market.

#### The Liberation of the Apprentices

During 1837 the subject of the liberation of all classes of apprentice labourers was being mooted in public and a motion relative to this had been introduced into the House, though subsequently withdrawn.<sup>97</sup> Joseph Hunter, Administrator and local proprietor, informed Lord Glenelg that "some of the most experienced and intelligent of the Special Justices in this colony" have viewed this move desirable. He saw two difficulties in pursuing this line of action. Firstly, owners had to be reconciled to the loss of the remaining portion of the services of apprentices. Secondly, provision had to be made for the effective administration of justice in the Out Islands, particularly to repress "any tendency to idle or disorderly habits". His idea was that the apprentices should compensate the employers out of their future wages. He also suggested the Special Magistrates should be kept longer as they had influence over the apprentices, which implies that at least some of the local elite could see the virtue of that judicial body.

Lord Glenelg sent a circular to the governors of West Indian colonies in April 1838, letting them know the strength of public opinion against the apprenticeship system in Britain. In the early part of 1838 the British Government had already been forced to promote legislation to remove abuses from the apprenticeship system, the anti-apprenticeship movement having gathered strength at the end of 1837. Lord Glenelg

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<sup>97</sup>Joseph Hunter to Lord Glenelg, 14 March 1837, CO23/99/98-101.

encouraged the Governors to endeavour, with the concurrence of the local Legislature, to bring the system to an early close.<sup>98</sup> However, the new Governor, Francis Cockburn was “not sanguine as to any measure being adopted by the Legislature here”.<sup>99</sup> The Governor’s message to the House on 12 July 1838 informed them of the Imperial Government’s wishes, but stressed it was particularly anxious not to interfere “with the general tranquillity” nor to expose the old or infirm.<sup>100</sup>

Contrary to the fears of the Governor, the House did not put up a fight to preserve apprenticeship and consented to prepare and pass a bill to release from their unexpired term the praedial class of apprenticed labourers. The bill passed into law on 21 July 1838.<sup>101</sup> Thus, the term of apprenticeship for all apprentices was to end from 1 August of 1838. The old and infirm, incapable of earning their subsistence and with no relative to care for them, would be provided for at the public expense. Employers of praedial apprenticed labourers had to give two months’ notice to them to quit their housing, if they required them to leave.<sup>102</sup>

This Emancipation Day also passed quietly; those freed rejoiced but “without the slightest disposition to tumult or insubordination”.<sup>103</sup> At least, there was more to celebrate on this occasion. Now the former slaves could begin to fashion new lives, for as a Methodist minister noted in 1835: “The change observable since the new state of things commenced is rather in feeling than in any real practical and palpable advantage reaped by the lately liberated slaves. But little can be affected as long as the apprentice system continues which

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<sup>98</sup>K. N. Bell and W. P. Morrell, *Select Documents on British Colonial Policy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1928), 401-402. See also W. K. Marshall, “The Termination of the Apprenticeship in Barbados and the Windward Islands: An Essay in Colonial Administration and Politics”, *Journal of Caribbean History*, 2 (May 1971): 19.

<sup>99</sup>Francis Cockburn to Lord Glenelg, 14 May 1838, CO23/102/201-203.

<sup>100</sup>Extract from Governor’s Speech to the House of Assembly, 12 July 1838, CO23/103/43.

<sup>101</sup>2 Vic. c.1: “A law for releasing from the unexpired term of their apprenticeship, the Praedial class of Apprenticed labourers within these islands”. Only the member for Turks Island, Stubbs, voted against.

<sup>102</sup>Cf. Barbados, which made ex-apprentices responsible for the upkeep of poor relations, but allowed three months’ tenure of house and ground. The Antigua Act had given twelve months’ residence on estates for former slaves. The St. Vincent Act also gave tenure for house and ground for twelve months (Marshall, “Termination of Apprenticeship”, 20-22).

<sup>103</sup>Francis Cockburn to Lord Glenelg, 6 August 1838, CO23/103/82.

is but a very short remove from the old thing in some respects".<sup>104</sup> According to the Governor, the labourers seemed to have a "sincere wish to continue in the service of their former employers, and the employers to enter into arrangements for their mutual benefit".<sup>105</sup> However, Rev. J. Eacott, reporting from Eleuthera, wrote that the whites were complaining of loss of labour.<sup>106</sup> Both sides had adjustments to make in a free labour economy.

Full freedom had now arrived for the former slaves. Lord Glenelg defined that freedom thus:

The great cardinal principle of the law for the abolition of slavery is, that the apprenticeship of the emancipated slaves is to be immediately succeeded by personal freedom, in that full and unlimited sense of the term in which it is used in reference to the other subjects of the British crown.<sup>107</sup>

All Governors were required to scrutinise laws to ensure they did not involve any racial discrimination.

Freedmen were expected to partake in a capitalist economy. The aspiration to acquire material goods would be the motive force for industrious labour and capital accumulation in savings.<sup>108</sup> The Magistrates' reports had always complimented apprentices who worked industriously. The apprentices were no longer envisaged in a position of dependency, but it was still expected that they would show deference to their betters. Generally, the British intended the former slaves should become 'civilised' according to the western value system. Hence, the emphasis on education, especially moral education. As in nineteenth century England, where children of the lower classes were educated to be disciplined workers in the factory system, so the children of ex-slaves were also to be schooled in obedience, industriousness and thrift.

The transition to freedom was just as, if not more, difficult for the planter class. Holt points out that "men born or even long resident in a slave society developed not just

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<sup>104</sup>Rev. J. Crofts, Nassau, to Revs. Bunting, Beecham & Alden, WMS, 13 April 1835; Box 136, no.118; FBN no.11, West Indian Correspondence General 1835, sheet 527.

<sup>105</sup>Francis Cockburn to Lord Glenelg, 10 August 1838, CO23/103/90.

<sup>106</sup>Rev. J. Eacott, Eleuthera, to WMS, 18 November 1838; Box 217, no.24; FBN 27, West Indian Correspondence: Bahamas, sheet 1300.

<sup>107</sup>Holt, *Problem of Freedom*, 72.

<sup>108</sup>Savings Banks had been established in The Bahamas by 5 Wm. IV c.39, 1835. Further Acts amended this in 1836, 1837 and 1840.

different economic interests but different mores and values from those of even the absentee planters”.<sup>109</sup> Since Emancipation was anticipated for so long, accompanied by social unrest and hostility between the local governing body and the Imperial Government, some of the elite might not have regretted the change. Indeed, Rev. T. Pugh wrote home that he was “happy to say that some of the slave owners appear to be glad that the question is set at rest, while on others, it operates [*sic*] quite differently”.<sup>110</sup> It was a matter of adjustment to a new climate and set of social relations. Also, there had to be realisation that the law and justice system now was supposed to cover all equally and impartially. There was an inclination to use corporal punishment for the most minor offences on the part of Bahamian proprietors and local justices. This had been mitigated during apprenticeship by the English Magistrates’ emphasis on and schooling in negotiation and agreement. When they departed the lower classes would once again be left to a group who were used to administering undisputed authority. The question was whether the ruling class of whites would join in the spirit of the new order of things or whether they would reduce the former slaves to a state of dependency using other strategies.

#### Assessment of Apprenticeship in The Bahamas

Employers in The Bahamas did not have the labour problems of the sugar planters, who needed round-the-clock labour during the crop-taking season. There was a sufficient work force, even at the salt ponds, where it was provided by a combination of apprentices and Liberated Africans. Voluntary agreements proved to be most successful there. William Colebrooke considered: “These engagements have considerably relieved the labour in salt raking by enabling the apprentices to perform their tasks at the hours most convenient to them, while the opportunity is afforded to them of profitably employing their own time in raking salt for themselves”.<sup>111</sup> Thomas Winder asserted both parties were generally satisfied where the task system was adopted and on average no more than six hours’ work per day was performed there.<sup>112</sup> However, apprentices in The Bahamas were not in such strong

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<sup>109</sup>Holt, Problem of Freedom, 91

<sup>110</sup>Rev. T. Pugh, Nassau, to WMS, 19 November 1833; Box 133, no.212; Fiche Box no.10, West Indian Correspondence General 1833, sheet 485.

<sup>111</sup>William Colebrooke to Lord Glenelg, 6 May 1836, CO23/96/359-360.

<sup>112</sup>Report of Special Magistrate Thomas Winder in reply to Circular Letter of Secretary of State, 4 November 1836, CO23/97/507-519.

bargaining positions over wage rates for their free labour as those in sugar islands where the estates needed their extra labour and where there were alternative employers. Most settlements on the Out Islands were so isolated that there was no alternative to working for the master, if he required extra hours, or working the provision grounds or fishing. Winder confirmed that, except in Nassau and the salt districts, apprentices did not have the opportunity to work for money wages in their own time. However, rates of pay were fairly good in both Nassau, at about three shillings a day for labourers and between five and eight shillings for mechanics, and the salt islands, at about five to six shillings per day.<sup>113</sup>

Masters complained about the slow work rate of apprentices, but shirking had been a form of resistance to slavery and there was no reason why that would change under apprenticeship, still a form of compulsory labour. Charles Penny pointed out where there was no task work there were complaints about loss of time and efficiency.<sup>114</sup> He considered apprentices worked quite willingly and as much as one could expect, considering they had no interest in their own labour. More complaints concerning indolence and insolence emerged from 1837, perhaps because the initial euphoria over the change of status had worn off and expectation of full freedom was surfacing. One expects variation depending on the relationship between master and apprentices, the type of agreement in force and the character of the individual. At Governor's Harbour in 1836 apprentices themselves denounced another apprentice convicted of vagrancy and desertion as "an idle fellow, and a nuisance to their society".<sup>115</sup> Good feelings between employers and apprentices could be damaged when the former were not discharging their duties as required by the law. This was particularly the case at Turks Island where Penny reported "much want of good feeling" between apprentices and employers because of the withholding of allowances that were customary during slavery. Masters there seemed to display much resentment at the loss of arbitrary power over workers.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>113</sup>Ibid.

<sup>114</sup>Report of Special Magistrate Penny in reply to Circular Letter of Secretary of State, 24 November 1836, CO23/97/586-591.

<sup>115</sup>Thomas Winder to Lord Glenelg, 5 July 1836, CO23/97/85.

<sup>116</sup>Report of Special Magistrate Charles Penny in reply to Circular Letter of Secretary of State, 24 November 1836, CO23/97/586-591.

The apprentices seemed to have formed a high opinion of the English Special Magistrates. Most commentators seemed to think this was a deserved reputation. Rev. Thomas Lofthouse of Harbour Island made a typical remark: “Stipendiary Magistrate Major MacGregor... has exerted himself in the most honourable and praiseworthy manner in behalf of the Apprentices”.<sup>117</sup> Some Magistrates were elected to the Assembly to represent settlements they had assisted.<sup>118</sup> Generally speaking the Bahamian masters did not share the same dim view of the Magistrates as many Jamaican planters did and they were not harassed in the House.<sup>119</sup> Magistrates’ reports indicate sensitivity and impartiality in carrying out their duties.

The scandal of the regime of punishment used in Jamaica, which had led to the movement to emancipate all apprentices in 1838, was without parallel in The Bahamas. The treadmill was not used in the Nassau gaol or workhouse.<sup>120</sup>

There does seem to have been some attempt to prepare apprenticed labourers for full emancipation by the introduction of contracts, negotiated yearly under supervision of a Magistrate. Also, there was clearly a scaling down of punishments and thus coercion. However, there was no attempt at training. Self-help was much encouraged and the Friendly Societies described as “quiet, moral and loyal people”.<sup>121</sup> The Eastern Friendly Society expressed the sort of sentiments appreciated by the Government: “We are duly sensible of all blessings we enjoy as a free people in this part of His Majesty’s dominions”.<sup>122</sup> But these sentiments cannot necessarily be taken as representative of the feelings of the lower classes in The Bahamas, particularly of the Out Islands.

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<sup>117</sup>Rev. Thomas Lofthouse, Harbour Island, to Revs. Bunting, Beecham, Alden and Hoole, WMS, 9 August 1838; Box 217, no.19; FBN 27, West Indian Correspondence: Bahamas 1835-51, sheet 1300.

<sup>118</sup>William Colebrooke to Lord Glenelg, 11 March 1836, CO23/96/225-226. Magistrates elected to the House were Donald McGregor, Edward Hill and Thomas Winder.

<sup>119</sup>See Hall, *Apprenticeship in Jamaica*, 4-5 for comparison.

<sup>120</sup>Joseph Hunter reports a satisfactory inspection of both institutions in 1837; there was strict enforcement of the new regulations regarding classification, diet and secondary punishments (Hunter to Lord Glenelg, 11 February 1837, CO23/99/17-18).

<sup>121</sup>Francis Cockburn to Lord Glenelg, 29 October 1837, CO23/ 100/166.

<sup>122</sup>Address of the Eastern District Friendly Society, 1836, CO23/96/252.

The period of Apprenticeship passed painlessly for most concerned. Masters may have regretted their loss of authority and powers of arbitrary punishments, but they still remained the ruling class. It is perhaps because of the economic backwardness of The Bahamas that the system functioned without too much complaint from either side. That fact certainly helped the elite to retain its grip on the economic controls of the Colony. Most commentators agree that the apprenticeship system was not a good idea. Hall considers the 1833 Act was unworkable:

The prime fault of the apprenticeship system was that it attempted compromise between slavery and freedom. It involved the continuation of many features of slavery such as forced labour, the distribution of 'indulgences' and allowances, and the restricted mobility of the labour force; and it tried to mix with these such incompatible ingredients as labour for wages, and competition between employers for labour.<sup>123</sup>

Perhaps The Bahamas could have transferred from slavery to full freedom, since there was little demand for labour at this time and slavery was already an uneconomic system. On the other hand, the gradualism might have been the reason for the 'painless' transition. It certainly provided the ruling classes time to put in place other systems of domination that allowed them a smooth transference to full freedom.

### Compensation for Slave Owners

Slaveowners had shown some willingness to pass the Abolition Bill without obstruction in the House partly because they desired the compensation for the loss of property that Emancipation entailed. However, the Bahamian proprietors were not happy at the low rate of compensation granted to them by the Imperial Government. Only Bermuda received less than The Bahamas; the highest amounts were paid to owners in British Honduras and British Guiana. (British Honduras was also a marginal colony but had a larger proportion of adult males.)

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<sup>123</sup> Hall, Apprenticeship in Jamaica, 25.

Table 4. Compensation for emancipation of slaves in The Bahamas and some other islands of the British West Indies.

Colony	Number of Slaves	Total Compensation (in pounds)	Average Compensation per Slave (in pounds, shillings and pence)
The Bahamas	10,086	128,296	12. 14. 4.
British Honduras	1,901	101,399	53. 6. 9.
British Guiana	82,824	4,295,989	51. 17. 1.
Jamaica	311,070	6,149,955	19. 15. 1.
Barbados	83,150	1,719,980	20. 13. 8.
Bermuda	4,026	50,409	12. 10. 5.

*Source:* Hilary Beckles, A History of Barbados: From Amerindian Settlement to Nation-State (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 93.

“The amount to be paid for each slave would be based on the average annual market value of a slave of that sex, age, and occupation in the particular colony during the seven years preceding the emancipation. The compensation was not equal to that price, but a proportion of it.”<sup>124</sup> In The Bahamas the average price of slaves in that period had been twenty-nine pounds and eighteen shillings per head, whereas in British Guiana it had been over one hundred and fourteen pounds.<sup>125</sup> The *Royal Gazette* criticised this valuation and considered slave property was reduced in value by the actions of the “anti-Colonists”. It felt the valuations were disproportionate among the British slave colonies and the method employed had meant that the average was calculated on prices in a period when values in The Bahamas were depressed. In its opinion, the British Government was entirely to blame and spoke of the “egregious errors and mischiefs which Government has heaped upon the country”. Not only were the Bahamian slave owners not being compensated adequately, but they were also being loaded with responsibilities and life and liberty were endangered and threatened.<sup>126</sup> Bahamian proprietors considered they had laboured under a disadvantage, as they were resident in remote and scattered communities. They had not had the opportunities

<sup>124</sup>Douglas Hall, Five of the Leewards 1834-1870: The Major Problems of the Post-Emancipation Period in Antigua, Barbuda, Montserrat, Nevis and St. Kitts (London: Caribbean University Press, 1971), 16.

<sup>125</sup>James Martin Wright, “History of the Bahama Islands, with a Special Study of the Abolition of Slavery in the Colony” in George Burbank Shattuck, The Bahama Islands (New York: Macmillan, 1905), 483.

<sup>126</sup>*Royal Gazette*, 24 September 1834. Also, *Royal Gazette*, 7 March 1835.

of explanation available to proprietors resident in England or in large colonies. The value of slaves in The Bahamas had depreciated because they had been prohibited from transferring them from one island to another. Thus slaves in The Bahamas could not be employed to advantage and proprietors had had the charge of maintenance without an adequate return. The former slaveowners petitioned the British Government for further relief. But to no avail as Lord Glenelg responded that he could not interfere with the apportioned provisions as laid down by the British Parliament.<sup>127</sup> The meagreness of the compensation added to the Bahamian landowners' financial problems, but they proved to be a resourceful group, determined to maintain their ownership in the most profitable way possible.

### Maintaining the Social and Economic Order

Apprenticeship was designed to last for a limited time as a transition period for both owners and slaves. Meanwhile the white elite implemented various strategies, with long-term goals of ensuring economic domination. "The abolition of slavery forced every class into a new status struggle: the planters to survive as a ruling class, the colored and black middle class, who attained civil rights for the first time in 1830, to take their share of political power, and the ex-slaves to give economic and political meaning to the fact of legal emancipation".<sup>128</sup>

#### Land Ownership

'Freedom' in The Bahamas entailed difficulty for the emancipated to obtain land, ensuring they remained in a subordinate position. There was certainly no lack of desire on their parts, as reported by the Stipendiary Magistrates, and there were enormous tracts of Crown Land available,<sup>129</sup> as well as a number of abandoned or financially strapped estates. As far as Crown Land was concerned, Government policy was to sell only to those who

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<sup>127</sup>Enclosed petition from former slaveowners, 11 November 1835, CO23/94/241-242. Another petition was enclosed the next year, CO23/96/282-287. Lord Glenelg to William Colebrooke, Note in response to 1835 Petition, CO23/94/239-240.

<sup>128</sup>Mary Turner, "Slavery and Freedom: The British Experiment", Peasant Studies 8, 4 (Fall 1979): 31.

<sup>129</sup>There were 2, 434,000 acres of Crown Land in The Bahamas (W. L. Burn, Emancipation and Apprenticeship in the British West Indies (London: Cape, 1937), 305).

could afford a 'sufficient price'.<sup>130</sup> In 1836 Lord Glenelg had fixed that price at one pound an acre, but, from 1839, to be sold in a minimum of forty-acre lots. This policy was modified in 1840 to allow lots of twenty acres to be sold for twelve shillings per acre.<sup>131</sup> Thus most former slaves could not afford the purchase of Crown Lands.

Many chose to squat on either Crown Lands or abandoned estates. Their holdings were always insecure, but some managed to consolidate their occupation over a long number of years, which would have led to eventual recognition of, at least, their customary rights. One such occupant was "Daddy Sam" Hunter, a former slave, found by the Rev. F. B. Matthews, "living away back in the bush" on the ruined Lucky Mount Estate on San Salvador, with his children and grandchildren (twelve houses in all).<sup>132</sup> These squatters barely eked out a living from the worn out soil. More often, Government policy sought to discourage squatting. An Act of 1834 (4 Wm. IV c.37) decreed unauthorised persons could be evicted from private land, if the landowner requested it. This legislation was extended to Crown Land (2 Vic. C.2), although those who had enjoyed "quiet possession" for five years were excepted; resisters could be imprisoned.<sup>133</sup> By 1839, occupiers would not be evicted after "quiet possession" for twelve months but squatters' rights would only be recognised after sixty years on Crown Land (after twenty years on private land).<sup>134</sup>

In 1842 Special Justice William Hield found more than one hundred and fifty acres of the best Crown Land, adjacent to Cockburn Town on Watlings Island, cleared and in full cultivation by the inhabitants of the town. As far he was concerned, they were trespassers and must not be allowed to remain in undisturbed possession, as this would encourage other peasants to quit their employers and do the same. He reported that proprietors were finding

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<sup>130</sup>Influenced by the theories of Edward Gibbon Wakefield on maintaining "a proper balance between land, labor and capital". One means was for government to sell unoccupied land at a 'sufficient price'. The policy was stated in Lord Glenelg's Circular Dispatch of 30 January 1836 to the Governors of West Indian Colonies. See Philip D. Curtin, Two Jamaicas: The Role of Ideas in a Tropical Colony 1830-1865, (New York: Atheneum, 1970), 134-137.

<sup>131</sup>Government Notice of 29 September 1840, CO23/107/307.

<sup>132</sup> Rev. F.B. Matthews, San Salvador Described 1885-1889, ed. Patrice Williams (Nassau: Dept. of Archives, n.d.), 5.

<sup>133</sup> This Act was rejected by the Secretary of State, but more for its form than its implications and an amended Act was passed in 1840.

<sup>134</sup>Michael Craton and Gail Saunders, Islanders in the Stream: A History of the Bahamian People, vol. 2: From the Ending of Slavery to the Twenty-First Century (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1998), 53.

it difficult to procure field labourers, herdsmen and domestic servants. Employees were termed 'slaves' by others. Hield considered unavailability of labour was devaluing land and he insinuated a connection between some petty pilfering from the Dickson and Farquharson estates and these peasant cultivators.<sup>135</sup> There seemed to be some wavering in whether to strictly enforce Government policy against squatting, as Hield clearly thought they should where the land in question was near enclosed land, legally held, and where there were employment and sharecropping tenures available.

Apprentices had some valid expectations of being granted land at reasonable prices, if not free, as schemes for Liberated Africans had allowed them land outside Nassau at one dollar per acre, payable in instalments, and, in Grant's Town, freehold lots of one quarter of an acre for ten shillings and garden plots for two pounds an acre.<sup>136</sup> The only action, however, taken on behalf of former slaves was the philanthropy of two individuals. Judge Sandilands subdivided his estate into one hundred lots of one to ten acres and sold them for modest prices, forming the area known from 1849 as Sandilands Village, part of Fox Hill.<sup>137</sup> And a black Bahamian, Charles Bain, bought an area to the west of Grant's Town and divided it into lots to sell at modest prices.<sup>138</sup>

The Colonial Secretary, C. R. Nesbitt, blamed squatting on the Imperial Government's principles concerning land sales and the private proprietors, who cultivated little and offered no continuous employment with money wages. He felt the future welfare of the Emancipated and the Liberated African required their due settlement in villages, with sufficient land to support themselves and their families. Without this, he predicted vagrancy, depredation and emigration. He thus advocated a relaxation of regulations, particularly in regard to Crown lands.<sup>139</sup> Nesbitt, as Acting Governor, was granted some temporary discretionary power to vary the price and, reluctantly, to authorise lots as small as

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<sup>135</sup>William Hield, Rum Cay, to C. R. Nesbitt, Administrator, 1 June 1842, CO23/113/141-142. He had a point that land was worth little without a resident labour force.

<sup>136</sup>Settlements in New Providence (Nassau: Dept. of Archives, 1982), 24 and 30. Increase in demand led to an increase in price to about five or six pounds per acre in Grant's Town.

<sup>137</sup>*Ibid.*, 38. Payment could be paid in money or labour. The village was subdivided into Joshua, Congo, Nango and Burnside Towns, the first three occupied by freed African born persons and the latter by Creoles.

<sup>138</sup>*Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>139</sup>C. R. Nesbitt to Lord Stanley, no.18, 12 July 1842, CO23/113/127-130.

five acres.<sup>140</sup> The move did not greatly affect the land situation. Land that continued to be used by squatters or was sold to peasant cultivators generally was undesired by the large proprietors and of inferior quality. A balance was achieved, to the advantage of the landowning class, whereby squatting was tolerated on marginal lands, giving subsistence to the excess labouring population, and discouraged elsewhere, in favour of freehold title and tenancy.

Some former slaves successfully claimed commonage. The land was considered to belong to the community by custom, if not by law. Lord Rolle's ex-slaves believed they had been willed his land in Exuma and were left in possession of his considerable estate since the land proved unsaleable.<sup>141</sup> A commonage system also developed in Eleuthera based on The Bluff, Savannah Sound, Tarpum Bay and Rock Sound, around land granted to the inhabitants by Lord Dunmore.<sup>142</sup> Craton suggests a culture clash between African and European concepts of land ownership. Afro-Bahamians developed, where possible, claims to common land, to guarantee permanent usage, but not possession and the right for land to be transmitted through families ('generational land'), whereas the Bahamian elite favoured individual freehold tenure, on the European model. African cultural inheritance would involve joint inheritance, equal rights of all family members and the inalienability of land. Certainly the shifting type of agriculture and vagueness of boundaries and titles support Craton's view.<sup>143</sup> However, survival strategies and bowing to the inevitable were probably more to the point for ex-slaves. Moreover, the Eleutheran commonages were predominantly operated by white Bahamians, probably dating back to a practice that had begun with the Eleutheran Adventurers.<sup>144</sup> Jean Besson focuses on the persistence of kin-based customary tenures on a pan-Caribbean scale. She criticises explanations based on inert cultural survivals from Africa or Europe as underplaying the Caribbean context in which the institution evolved and persists. Most importantly, Caribbean family land is based on a

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<sup>140</sup>Lord Stanley to C. R. Nesbitt, no 73, 30 November 1842, CO23/113/132-134.

<sup>141</sup> Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream*, vol. 2, 52. Commonage was based on the villages of Rolleville, Rolletown, Steventon, Ramsey's and Mt. Thompson.

<sup>142</sup>Francis Cockburn to Lord John Russell, No.63, 21 October 1840, CO23/107/308-310 and enclosure CO23/107/312-313.

<sup>143</sup>Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream*, vol.2, 50-53.

<sup>144</sup>See page 11.

cognatic descent system, not on matrilineal descent, as in many of the African systems. Unrestricted descent maximised the transmission of freehold land rights, regardless of sex, birth order or legitimacy.<sup>145</sup> In addition, Bolland points out that we must not only consider the economic and material importance of land to former slaves, but also its symbolic significance. Land symbolised freedom and provided property rights and prestige. Moreover, family land reestablished kinship ties that slavery had alienated. "Family land emerged as a 'resistant response' to the slavery-plantation system, and as a symbol and potential core of a different kind of society, in which the relationship between personal autonomy and dependence seems to be conceived in ways that differ from those predominating in the liberal-bourgeois society."<sup>146</sup> Control of land and labour offered former slaves opportunities to gain some degree of control over their own lives and communities.

The most common practice in the islands was for former slaves to become tenants of their former master and his heirs, usually on a sharecropping basis. An example of this set up was the arrangement on the Farquharson estate. The family, by means of the slave compensation and sale of stock, was able to retain the land on Watlings Island. Most of the ex-slaves and their descendants remained as tenants. Charles Farquharson was almost bankrupt when he died and his heirs, like many Bahamian landowners, could not afford to finance a wage-labour system.<sup>147</sup> Agreements were made to share the crop, although probably at first not formalised and left to trust. By 1865 written agreements decreed one third of the produce had to go to the proprietor.<sup>148</sup> This was probably a quite typical division, although there was variation in share arrangements depending on custom, the fertility of the land and the condition of the market. Pineapple cultivators were required to give up as much as a half to the landowners later in the century as pineapples were in

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<sup>145</sup>Jean Besson, "Freedom and Community: The British West Indies" in Frank McGlynn and Seymour Drescher, eds., The Meaning of Freedom: Economies, Politics and Culture after Slavery (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1992), 200-202.

<sup>146</sup>O. Nigel Bolland, "The Politics of Freedom in the British Caribbean" in *ibid.*, 141-142.

<sup>147</sup>See Howard Johnson, "Post-Emancipation Labour Systems" in Howard Johnson, The Bahamas in Slavery and Freedom (Kingston, Ian Randle, 1991), 69-83 and Johnson, From Slavery to Servitude, chap. 5.

<sup>148</sup>Copies of three agreements with tenants are to be found in the O'Brien Family Papers, Dept. of Archives, Nassau.

demand abroad. In fact, the landowners in this case, often large companies, were so in control that sharecroppers were led into the credit system and debt (see page 77).

Bahamian proprietors generally lacked capital and often had to use the slave compensation to pay off mortgages and debts. Besides, the market for land in The Bahamas was a weak one (until the twentieth century); using labour tenancy and sharecropping, they could pursue other occupations in Nassau and still derive income from the land. For Bahamian landowners this was a permanent solution to financial troubles and not the same situation as prevailed in the British Windward Islands, where sharecropping was used as a temporary expedient between 1846 and 1855. There landowners wanted labourers to share the risks and expenses, as well as the profits, during a depression, but felt an independent peasantry would threaten their oligarchic positions.<sup>149</sup> The share system in The Bahamas did not stimulate the formation of an independent freehold peasantry and was of most benefit to the proprietors. Above all, it actually prevented the labouring classes aspiring to land ownership, relegating them to a position of dependency.

Quit rent tenure was the most common form of land holding in The Bahamas, the rent being a small amount, although most tenants were years in arrears.<sup>150</sup> The Commutation Act of 1846 (9 Vic. c.10) made possible the conversion of quit rent tenures to freehold upon payment of a fixed capital sum, a multiple of the annual quit rent.<sup>151</sup> However, this again benefitted those who could afford the payment and provide valid documentation.

Nigel Bolland examined the hypothesis concerning the availability of land and the density of population as critical factors for labour control.<sup>152</sup> In many ways The Bahamas resembled the pattern in Belize where the elite continued its control over labour by means of

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<sup>149</sup>W. K. Marshall, "Metayage in the Sugar Industry of the British Windward Islands 1838-1865" in Hilary Beckles and Verene Shepherd, eds., Caribbean Freedom: Economy and Society from Emancipation to the Present (Kingston, Ian Randle, 1996), 64-79.

<sup>150</sup>44 Geo. III c.1, 1802. The rent for each town lot was five shillings per annum and for all other lands one penny per acre.

<sup>151</sup>G. A. D. Johnstone, "Land Tenure in The Bahamas", Journal of the Bahamas Historical Society 6 (Oct. 1985): 16.

<sup>152</sup>O. Nigel Bolland, "Systems of Domination after Slavery: the Control of Land and Labour in the British West Indies after 1838" in Beckles and Shepherd, Caribbean Freedom, 107-123. He found that Belize did not fit the hypothesis as it had vast areas of land and a low population density, yet the elite still managed to control labour supplies.

the credit and truck systems and by labour contracts and laws, favourable to employers. Significantly Bolland stressed the interrelatedness of land and labour. There were vast amounts of land in The Bahamas, but the ruling class did not need to completely monopolise ownership, much could stay as unworked Crown Land. The important issue was not to allow the lower classes to become freeholders and independent of the need to work for the Nassau elite. Labour, supposedly free, could be forced in a number of subtle ways.

#### Systems of Labour Domination

Wage labour was not the predominant labour system on the Out Islands after Emancipation. The share and the credit and truck systems were both in operation extensively until the end of the century. These were coercive systems designed to tie down a steady pool of labourers in often unattractive working conditions and frequently called ‘a modified form of slavery’.<sup>153</sup> The share system evolved during apprenticeship, while the credit and truck systems were more a response to external demand for products such as pineapples, salt and sponges. Both, though, were methods utilised by the Nassau elite to procure a stable and dependent workforce.

Owners of pineapple lands in Eleuthera operated a credit system that bound the sharecroppers by creating a debt relationship.<sup>154</sup> Credit could be in money or goods. Labourers needed credit during the period between planting and reaping the crop and then tended to remain in debt to the landowner/merchant<sup>155</sup> because of the high rates of interest and the inflated prices for supplies. The truck system was also used in transactions with peasant producers who used Nassau merchants as marketing agents, the latter benefiting most as the value of the goods used for payment was generally less than the cash payment would have been. Magistrate L. D. Powles, while travelling on circuit, encountered the suffering farmers of Hatchard’s Bay, who had sold their pineapple crop the previous year,

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<sup>153</sup>Governors Blake and Shea compared them to slavery on a number of occasions. Blake referred to a position of “practical slavery” (Henry Blake to Earl of Derby, no.108, 12 August 1884, CO23/225/25-39); Shea described the “slaves of the petty traders” (Ambrose Shea to Lord Knutsford, no.51, 21 May 1888, CO23/230/199-208). Shea also called the credit system “pernicious” (Ambrose Shea to Lord Knutsford, no.86, 28 May 1890, CO23/232/299-308).

<sup>154</sup>See Howard Johnson, “The Credit and Truck Systems in the Nineteenth and early Twentieth Centuries” in Johnson, *Slavery and Freedom*, 84-109 and Johnson, *From Slavery to Servitude*, chap. 6.

<sup>155</sup>The landowner frequently was a merchant located in Nassau.

but had only just received a portion of the payment, paid in flour of poor quality.<sup>156</sup>

Wrecking, the salt industry and the sponging and turtle fishing industries were also organised on a labour-service and debt system. In the sponging industry, credit from Nassau merchants was needed to fit out boats and to buy supplies for the families of seamen away at sea. There were no alternative sources of credit for captains had no security to offer. At the end of the voyage, after the division of proceeds, spongers were frequently still in debt to the merchant/agent and the merchant/store keeper, so were forced to sign up again and accept more credit. Moreover, payments to crew were often in truck. Because of the secrecy surrounding the sale of sponges in Nassau, merchants had ample opportunity to further cheat the spongers. For many years the sponger, engaged in one of the more profitable economic enterprises, had no share in the spoils but survived from voyage to voyage, at the mercy of Nassau merchants.

In the Turks Island the large-scale salt producers bought the shares of the poorer cultivators with truck of low quality.<sup>157</sup> The Stipendiary Magistrate for Turks Island and Inagua reported in 1847: "The truck system is much in vogue here... Every leaseholder is a shopkeeper and every labourer pays weekly 100 per Cent. on the prime cost in the US of America for the necessaries of life".<sup>158</sup> It was often the interruption of salt production by unseasonal rains that forced rakers to seek credit; indebtedness usually followed. Debt tied labourers to the unpleasant work in the salt pans. Payment in truck avoided the high wages that would have been necessary to attract workers to work in such insalubrious conditions.

Shipbuilding and piloting also used the truck system. The latter activity in Bimini employed white mariners and poor whites in other areas of the economy were just as dependent on Nassau merchants. Thus, it was more a question of 'class' than colour, controlling the labouring class and maintaining dependence on the merchant elite. The poor whites, though, did not identify with the black labouring class and developed instead strong family ties and notions of racial superiority.

The Bahamian employers successfully directed labour where it was required; tied it down by debt peonage and paid very little for the labour services exacted.

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<sup>156</sup>L. D. Powles, Land of the Pink Pearl or Recollections of Life in the Bahamas (London: Sampson, Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1888), 215-216.

<sup>157</sup>The share system had been in operation in the salt pans since slavery.

<sup>158</sup>Johnson, From Slavery to Servitude, 103.

### Labour Legislation

During apprenticeship various laws were passed to further subordinate the labourers. The most notorious were the Vagrancy Laws (4 Wm. IV c.2 of 1833 and 5 Wm. IV c.17 of 1835), considered “the most arbitrary” in the West Indies by Lord Glenelg. He desired the acts to be repealed as “essentially different in principle” from those enacted in the Crown Colonies.<sup>159</sup> Indeed the prohibitions seem incredibly severe. They forbade assembling for “no specific and lawful object, loitering and carousing... in the liquor shops, loud singing or whistling, flying kites in or near highways, and calling loudly in the markets to attract customers”.<sup>160</sup>

A new Larceny Act in 1834 made burglary punishable by death, simple larceny punishable by imprisonment for up to four years or a whipping, and stealing or killing an animal punishable by three years’ imprisonment and a whipping. An 1837 Act prevented hawking without a licence, as this was considered an undesirable occupation and unfair competition to shopkeepers. Control of the Assembly permitted the elite to pass such Acts, irrespective of the wishes of the Colonial Office. Moreover, it set up a formal constabulary for the first time in 1833.<sup>161</sup> The ruling class regarded the law as an instrument of social control.

### Merchant Hegemony

“The abolition of slavery was legalistic rather than a real social reform. A root and branch policy would have tackled the basic problem of breaking the economic stranglehold of the plantocracy, and given the free negroes the opportunity to establish their own economic independence”.<sup>162</sup> In The Bahamas the planters were absentee Nassau merchants, whose possession of the little available capital gave them the necessary weapon – credit – to tighten the stranglehold around the necks of the labouring classes in all economic activities.

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<sup>159</sup>Lord Glenelg to Francis Cockburn, no.17, February 1839, CO23/101.

<sup>160</sup>Quoted in Wright, “History of Bahama Islands”, 497.

<sup>161</sup>Craton and Saunders, Islanders in the Stream, vol. 2, 21.

<sup>162</sup>Johnson U. J. Asiegbu, Slavery and the Politics of Liberation 1787-1861: A Study of Liberated African Emigration and the British Anti-Slavery Policy (London: Longmans, 1969), 40.

A real social reform would have entailed land redistribution and peasant proprietorships. The local elite had the support of the British Government in not pursuing such goals. The merchant oligarchy introduced systems of exploitation and control that encouraged dependency. The labouring classes acquiesced from necessity. The power balance was against them, particularly the power of control over the economy and of decision-making in the Legislature.

CHAPTER THREE  
“OPPOSITION” AND SECTARIAN DISPUTES, 1834-1870

A characteristic of all West Indian societies in the nineteenth century was “the steady resistance that [they] evinced, both before and after slavery emancipation, against outside liberal influence”.<sup>1</sup> At the Colonial Office, the language spoken in the 1830s and 1840s was of liberal democracy and “the themes of the age were decidedly bourgeois: innovation, enterprise, practical education, self-reliance, the mutuality and interdependence of social class”.<sup>2</sup> There was a humanitarian impulse in the British Government and the enactment that best expressed this was the abolition of slavery in the British Empire. The most influential embodiment of that humanitarianism in the Colonial Office was James Stephen, Permanent Under-Secretary from 1836. He was much influenced by his Christian beliefs and was devoted to the cause of Abolition. As the legal expert at the Colonial Office, he saw to the detail of the implementation of the Abolition Act and the provisions of the enforcement. “In the fight to protect the rights of apprentices, Colonial Office generally meant James Stephen.”<sup>3</sup> Humanitarianism was accompanied in the 1830s and 1840s by the demand by the administration for the implementation of Benthamite principles of efficient government and utilitarianism. Combined, these two trends meant a movement towards ‘improving’ legislation and reform of abuses. Policies and administration of justice, education and taxation needed to conform to liberal democratic values.

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<sup>1</sup>Gordon Lewis, The Growth of The Modern West Indies, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1968), 53.

<sup>2</sup>T. C. Holt, The Problem of Freedom: Race, Labour and Politics in Jamaica and Britain, 1832-1938 (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1992), 182-183.

<sup>3</sup>Paul Knaplund, James Stephen and the British Colonial System 1813-1847 (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1953), 114.

The British Government only intervened in colonial legislative affairs in a positive sense in very rare circumstances, to effect the abolition of slavery being one such circumstance. “By passing the Emancipation Act Parliament had successfully interposed its authority in the colonies: it had asserted its overriding power in colonial government.”<sup>4</sup> The Imperial Government also had negative sanctions, used sparingly but more often. Thus it was able to disallow or request amendment of clauses of the local Abolition Acts that did not conform in spirit to the imperial legislation and to remove oppressive features of laws passed in the colonies (for example, the Vagrancy Acts).

Before the Abolition Act there had been much discussion of the nature of West Indian societies and the capacity of their ruling classes to govern in the changed circumstances after Emancipation. Many doubted the former slaveowners’ ability to adapt to the new conditions and feared they would obstruct improvement measures. Despite their accurate assessment of the former slaveholders’ attitudes, with Emancipation achieved, there appeared to have been little incentive in England to further intervene. Thus, the same people who governed the slave societies were left to govern the newly emancipated and “the Secretary of State’s duty would be limited to ensuring that administration in the West Indies was impartial, efficient and economical”.<sup>5</sup> Certainly, some of the personnel at the Colonial Office considered the white oligarchy were too irresponsible to govern and wanted to diminish the role of the planter class. Henry Taylor, head of the West Indian section from 1825, saw contradictions between the supposed objectives of the British Government in this period, that is the material and moral progress of the black population, and the intransigence of the ruling classes in the West Indies. He wrote:

That assuming the objects of the Government to be necessary to the establishment of the liberty and promotion of the industry of the negroes, and the habits and prejudices, if not the interests of the planters, are strongly opposed to them, then the only methods of accomplishing them effectually and completely, and the best method as regards irritation and discontent, will be by exerting at once and conclusively, a power which shall overrule all opposition and set the question at rest”.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>D. J. Murray, The West Indies and the Development of Colonial Government, 1801-1834 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), 204.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 217.

<sup>6</sup>Quoted in George Bennett, ed., The Concept of Empire, Burke to Attlee 1774-1947, vol. 6 of The British Political Tradition, eds. Alan Bullock and F. W. Deakin (London: A & C Black, 1953), 287.

He questioned “whether the West Indian Assemblies be or be not, by their constitution and the nature of the societies for which they legislate, absolutely incompetent and unfit to deal with the new state of things”.<sup>7</sup> Taylor favoured a more authoritarian type of government for the colonies, but the British Government did not desire to impose the Crown Colony model on territories it had not recently conquered or acquired by war. Anyway, at this time, it was more concerned with the problems of the sugar islands and The Bahamas was not endangered yet with threats to alter its constitution. When Crown Colony government was imposed on Jamaica and the Leeward Islands later in the century, it was at the request of the local legislature. There was no danger of The Bahamas’ Legislature voting itself out of existence. The Colonial Office wanted a policy of cooperation with the colonial legislatures. Thus, the creation of a free society in The Bahamas, as in all the British West Indies, would be left to the former slave owning class. Enlightened policies, conforming to the ideology of liberal democracy, could hardly be expected. The British Government, with “occasional pulls at the tiller”, would leave the colonists and the colonial officials to work out the lines of development.<sup>8</sup>

It was the Governor who had to reconcile the interests of the Colonial Office and the local legislature. He was a buffer between colonial and Colonial Office opinion and, thus, could not always carry out British policy to the letter.<sup>9</sup> In theory the Governor was merely the agent of the British Government. James Stephen stated: “The Gov[ernor] has, properly speaking, no independent authority at all. All that he does he does on behalf of the Queen. Whatever power he exercises one[sic] exercised on H[er] M[ajesty]’s account”.<sup>10</sup> In reality, Government in the colonies often had to be left to the discretion of the Governor and Stephen opposed censuring them for their actions. Trying to procure legislation desired by the Colonial Office was far from easy since the Governor could not introduce legislation, merely propose measures in his Address to the House at its opening or send messages to the Assembly while sitting. Trying to procure a majority for bills desired by the Government

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<sup>7</sup>Quoted in Holt, Problem of Freedom, 109.

<sup>8</sup>Murray, Development of Colonial Government, 231.

<sup>9</sup>See George R. Mellor, British Imperial Trusteeship 1783-1850 (London: Faber and Faber, 1951)

<sup>10</sup>Quoted in Knaplund, James Stephen, 45.

was also difficult and the necessity of finding a reliable Government spokesman was soon apparent to newly arrived Governors.

Two particularly enlightened Governors came to The Bahamas in these years. Sir James Carmichael Smyth was Governor during the period of amelioration, 1829-1833. He met hostility from the House in his attempts to enforce the British policy, particularly to outlaw the flogging of women slaves. The House refused to conduct business and demanded his removal from office. Smyth managed to govern without the Assembly for two years and was regarded as something of a hero by the slaves and the free coloureds and blacks.<sup>11</sup> William Colebrooke was Governor during the crucial years 1835-1837 when adjustments to new conditions and preparations for full freedom were being made. He too would face obstruction on every side from a Legislature elected during slavery. Moreover, having lost their property rights in ownership of their slaves, members of the white elite clung tenaciously to their rights of self-government and guarded jealously their constitutional privileges.

#### The House of Assembly during the Apprenticeship Period

Blayney Balfour came to The Bahamas, as a temporary Governor, at a crucial time. The British Parliament had passed its Emancipation Act in 1833, while the House of Assembly, in the midst of its stormy dispute with James Carmichael Smyth, was not sitting. Balfour could not have expected an easy time. He tried to be open and explain British intentions, but “there was no leader to whom he could appeal, no party to whom he could address himself, no definite policy to be followed”.<sup>12</sup> He complained to the Secretary of State that “any new violent expression of opinion was received with applause”.<sup>13</sup> The first breach of good feeling was over a Market Bill as the House insisted on naming the clerk. The Council refused to concede this demand as they considered it an executive function.<sup>14</sup> The House defiantly passed a set of resolutions, stating it would not appropriate any money

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<sup>11</sup>Smyth established the free African settlement of Headquarters, with its own Church and school. It was renamed Carmichael in his honour.

<sup>12</sup>James Martin Wright, “History of the Bahama Islands, with a Special Study of the Abolition of Slavery in the Colony” in George Burbank Shattuck, The Bahama Islands (New York: Macmillan, 1905), 487.

<sup>13</sup>Blayney Balfour to E. G. Stanley, no.61, 1833, quoted in *ibid*.

<sup>14</sup>Votes of the House of Assembly (1833), 260.

for public facilities “until the right of the people” over them was recognised. They insisted the Executive should assent to a bill entrusting the care of public buildings to a commission nominated by the House.<sup>15</sup> Balfour admonished and dismissed the House.

An election took place within ten days. The new House did have some interesting new faces, principally the coloured and black members, candidates for election for the first time.<sup>16</sup> One of the few Government supporters in the last House, James Malcolm, was defeated. He disputed the result, but the House refused to consider his petition until he entered into a bond of two hundred pounds to cover the expenses of the investigation.<sup>17</sup> Malcolm refused, but one of the members for Harbour Island resigned and Malcolm was allowed to take his seat. The new House, while having some members of a more moderate view, still claimed the right to appoint building commissioners and stalemate continued.

The passing of the Abolition Act, without fuss or obstruction, must have come as a pleasant surprise to Balfour. However, the House members did not allow the event to pass without expression of the resentment they felt. In the Address of the House at its opening in July 1834, the Speaker remarked on:

The unprotected state of the colony at this alarming crisis, when the whole state of our social system is about to be disorganised, and those ancient Laws and Customs, by which it was bound and kept together, and under which a long period of happiness and peace has been enjoyed, are to be suddenly broken up and rendered entirely useless.<sup>18</sup>

The representatives felt the British Government had made no provisions for good order or for their safety: “Having wrought this mischief [they] now recklessly leave us to our fate”.<sup>19</sup> They complained, in their accustomed fashion, about the loss of political rights and legislative independence and “the harsh and cruel spoliation of Our Property”. Nevertheless, despite bowing to the wishes of the Imperial Parliament with ill grace, the Bahamian

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 300.

<sup>16</sup>Newly elected were the coloured candidates Stephen Dillet (Town District) and John P. Dean (Western District) and black candidate Thomas Minns (Western District).

<sup>17</sup>Votes of the House of Assembly (1834), 47 and 51.

<sup>18</sup>Address of the House at the Opening of the Assembly, 15 July 1834, CO23/91/307-310.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

Legislature did not attempt to pass a second Act to regain local control and repeal clauses beneficial to the apprentices, as the Jamaican Assembly vainly tried to do.<sup>20</sup>

Governor Colebrooke, from his arrival in 1835, was well aware of simmering bitterness in the House of Assembly. He explained to Lord Glenelg that the ‘opposing’ party had never been reconciled to the new society and to improvements in favour of the labouring classes. He had considered it was just been a matter of time before their leaders regained the upper hand. Early in 1836 Colebrooke was forced to dissolve the House. The immediate cause of dissolution was the rejection of a number of Acts, which the Governor felt indicated the attitude of many members towards the reconstructed society.<sup>21</sup> A number of unrelated issues revealed the temper of the majority and made it clear the Governor did not have enough support to get through measures he desired, while those opposed to the new state of affairs could pass measures not sanctioned by the Government. The first difference came over payments of public money for services rendered by Henshall Stubbs, member for Turks Island. In 1832 Stubbs had offered to use his boat to stop slaves, who believed Parliament had freed them, eloping from Grand Cay. Thirty-seven persons, including five magistrates, certified the vessel was needed to keep the peace. Thus, Stubbs had done his guard duty until March 1834. A House Committee decided he was entitled to remuneration to the tune of one thousand eight hundred and ninety pounds. This was included in the Appropriation Bill of April 1835. Ten members opposed such an amendment to the bill and the bill was carried by a single vote, Stubbs himself naturally voting for it. Those who opposed the amendment tried to strike it out again when another member was present in the House; this time the voting was even, but the Speaker used his casting vote to retain the payment. The Council<sup>22</sup> rejected the whole Appropriation Bill because of this item, which was not sanctioned by the Governor. Colebrooke prorogued the House, which had the desired effect as the claim was reduced to nine hundred pounds during the next session. The

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<sup>20</sup>Holt, *Problem of Freedom*, 95-97.

<sup>21</sup>William Colebrooke to Lord Glenelg, 5 February 1836, C.O.23/96/55-74.

<sup>22</sup>The composition of the Council in August 1834 was William V. Munnings, Chief Justice; Joseph Hunter, planter of Cat Island; Patrick Brown, Registrar of the Court of Vice-Admiralty and local merchant; John Thomson, merchant; Robert Sandilands, Assistant Justice; John Good, Commander at Turks Island; William Hield, magistrate and resident in Nassau; Lewis Kerr, Attorney-General; James Walker, Collector of Customs; John Irving, Receiver General and Treasurer (CO23/91/329). Both Thomson and Kerr died in 1834 and William Webb of the Customs Office was appointed to the Council. Munnings was lost at sea in 1835 and John C. Lees, the new Chief Justice, appointed. Hunter took over the leadership.

Council decided to pass the bill this time, but resolved not to pass any more such claims unless submitted through the Executive.<sup>23</sup>

Colebrooke took the opportunity of the Prorogation to remind the House of the Government's commitment to Liberal Democracy. "I see no reason why any British settlement, however limited in extent or remote in situation, should not emulate the spirit of the parent country in every liberal pursuit".<sup>24</sup> This nudge produced no fruit. The House was informed soon after resuming that the British Government had disallowed the Militia Act because it excluded Africans. The Secretary of State, Charles Grant, gave this rebuke: "The enactment appears to me calculated to keep alive those distinctions which had their origin in negro slavery, and which should as far as possible, disappear with its extinction".<sup>25</sup> When the attempt was made to amend the offending law, the amendment was lost by twelve votes to five.<sup>26</sup> The House then objected to a clause in the Justice Act preserving jury trial in certain cases and only passed the Education Bill by four votes after strong opposition. This was followed by a resolution that the sum of ninety-six pounds paid to cover the expenses of persons from a brigantine brought into Nassau and returned to New York "has been in the opinion of this House illegally and improperly paid out of the Public Treasury". The vote to disapprove the charge was overwhelmingly carried.<sup>27</sup> The Governor interpreted this vote as one against himself. He stated: "It would be uncandid in me to interpret your resolution in any other sense than as a formal dissent from a deliberate act of the Lieutenant Governor in Council, and expressed in terms calculated to excite feelings of regret and disappointment, that their intentions should have been uncourteously misconstrued".<sup>28</sup> Stubbs declared some

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<sup>23</sup>Votes of the House of Assembly (1834 -1835), 130, 227, 230 and 247. Against the amendment (and thus pro-Government) were non-white members Dillet, T. Minns, S. Minns and Dean; William Munnings, Provost Marshall; C. R. Nesbitt, Acting Public Secretary; John Pinder, Police Inspector; George Wood, Advocate General; Hugh Kerr and George Armbrister, merchants, and Samuel Clutsam, attorney? Nesbitt had entered the House in 1831 at the insistence of Carmichael Smyth in order that he might explain government policy, particularly the amelioration and abolition of slavery. He remained the Government spokesman until 1867 when he retired.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, 292.

<sup>25</sup>Votes of the House of Assembly (1835-1836), 26-7.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, 50. Yeas – Dillet, Dean, Minns, Pinder, Nesbitt.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, 130 and 132. Only George Wood, Samuel Minns, Thomas Minns and Charles Nesbitt voted against the resolution. Even Dillet and Dean approved.

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*, 138.

members were not fair representatives of their constituencies and an appeal to the people should be held. Colebrooke could not agree more and dissolved the House in January 1836.

Colebrooke wanted a new Assembly elected which would be more representative of the new state of affairs and, hopefully, more inclined to pass measures of improvement. The British Government's response to his dissolution of the House was non-committal: the rejection of the specific Acts did not really justify the extreme course of dissolution, but the separate Acts taken together could be considered as an indication of a disposition averse to good government. The Governor did find the newly elected Assembly more favourably disposed and he detected an "increased confidence" among "those who are favourable to order and improvement".<sup>29</sup> The change in atmosphere was immediately apparent when there was an attempt to amend the speech in reply to the Governor. The amendment wished to add these words:

...although our wishes for the improvement of the colony cannot be exceeded by those of the most sanguine of our constituents; yet, the very peculiar position of the colonists at this particular moment of mercantile and agricultural depression, will render us cautious of embarking in any schemes, which, however feasible on appearance, may fail when attempted to be brought into practice<sup>30</sup>

The amendment was defeated by eleven votes to eight.<sup>31</sup> The Militia Act was duly passed, with only two votes against.<sup>32</sup> Two Stipendiary Magistrates had just been elected (Thomas Winder and Edward Hill for Long Island). John Meadows moved an Address to Her Majesty "remonstrating against persons who have been sent out from England as Stipendiary Magistrates, from being permitted by the local Government, to interfere in the local politics of the colony, or to sit in the Colonial Assembly as representatives of the people of these islands".<sup>33</sup> The motion was lost by fourteen votes to seven. Certainly, as far as the Governor was concerned, things had changed for the better, although there was still a hard-

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<sup>29</sup>William Colebrooke to Lord Glenelg, 24 March 1836, CO23/96/306-307. A similar report was given at the closing of the session, William Colebrooke to Lord Glenelg, 2 June 1836, CO23/96/499-501.

<sup>30</sup>Votes of the House of Assembly (1836), 44-45.

<sup>31</sup>Those that voted for the amendment (and thus anti-Government) were William Vesey Stuart (a new member), John Saunders, Henry Adderley; Robert W. Sawyer, Henry Greenslade, Harry R. Saunders (new member), James Malcolm, John G. Meadows. Adderley and Meadows refrained from not passing the Address.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 111. Stuart and Meadows voted against.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 112-114. He was supported by Stuart, J. and H. Saunders, Adderley, Sawyer and Greenslade. Hill was subsequently disqualified as he had not been resident in The Bahamas the requisite twelve months.

core of adamant anti-Government members. Colebrooke was a liberal, conscientious and hard-working Governor, who was determined that the Abolition Act would be effectively and efficiently administered. His policies did bring him into conflict with the House of Assembly, when the old guard had control of it, but now he had a body of supporters in the House. The Council, led by Joseph Hunter, also a planter and former slave owner, had proved supportive throughout.<sup>34</sup>

Hunter, being President of the Council, was temporarily nominated Governor on Colebrooke's departure in 1837, but he too faced difficulties with the House of Assembly and dissolved it in March 1837, blaming 'the party' opposed to the liberal views of Government and determined to defeat measures of general utility.<sup>35</sup> He explained to Lord Glenelg that the party against changes in society had gained strength in the late session, when some Government supporters were absent. The attendance of Stubbs, representative for Turks Island, was particularly unwelcome and Hunter claimed his conduct was "violent and overbearing".<sup>36</sup> The anti-Government party's objective seemed to have been to prevent all further progress on measures of improvement and to counteract what had already been done. Hunter considered they wanted to provoke a crisis. The Assembly rejected a bill to assist apprenticed labourers engaged in salt raking. In addition, a bill to sanction the erection of a church in Nassau was twice lost over a disagreement over the composition of the commission, which was most embarrassing to the Government as the old church had already been pulled down. During the debates there was much angry feeling and derogatory remarks about the Council were made. Disorderly conduct continued as the authority of the Speaker<sup>37</sup> was "rendered nugatory". The final straw came with the refusal to admit two members for Turks Island, claiming improper procedures were followed during the

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<sup>34</sup>On his departure the Council said of Colebrooke that he had an "anxious wish to consult the best interests of all classes of this community" (Council's Address to William Colebrooke, October 1836, CO23/97/477).

<sup>35</sup>Joseph Hunter to Lord Glenelg, 3 March 1837, CO23/99/95-96.

<sup>36</sup>Henshall Stubbs was the only major employer at Turks Island who refused to make voluntary agreements with apprentices and was in constant dispute with the Stipendiary Magistrates (Wright, "History of the Bahama Islands", 521).

<sup>37</sup>George Campbell Anderson.

election.<sup>38</sup> The Opposition succeeded in imprisoning Charles Nesbitt, the Public Secretary, for an alleged breach of House rules. Informed that the House intended to attack the Speaker next, Hunter called for a dissolution.<sup>39</sup> The *Bahamas Argus*, who described the behaviour as “despotic” and “a disgrace”, asked: “Why did the ‘opposition’ act in this way?” The newspaper decided that those that opposed the Government perceived the opportunity to recover their lost ground. They also feared the strengthening of the Government’s hand.<sup>40</sup>

Ironically the new House brought more opposition members and a new Speaker, John G. Meadows, decidedly anti-Government. Meadows’ career had begun in Government service, in the Commissariat, but he was dismissed by James Carmichael Smyth for his conduct in a case concerning the treatment of a gang of slaves while he was acting as agent for the absentee proprietor. In the House, in 1834 he was the mover of the resolution to censure the Council; in 1836 he had introduced the measure that led to the dissolution; in 1837 he was active in the measures leading up to the second dissolution. On account of the turn of events, the newly arrived Governor, Francis Cockburn, was not “sanguine as to any measure [to bring apprenticeship to a close] being adopted here”.<sup>41</sup> He soon altered his opinion, having mistaken the general obstructiveness of the House for opposition to a measure members had already mooted in public. By June he wrote that he now believed “some measure will be brought forward with such intent and object, but it will, I understand, be accompanied with a restriction” to prevent praedial labourers quitting the colony before 1 August 1840.<sup>42</sup> While passing the bill, the House again expressed its dismay at this “unprecedented and unmerited infringement of our constitutional rights” and viewed this as

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<sup>38</sup>There seemed to have been some confusion over the representation for Turks Island. Henshall Stubbs had been elected in the 1834 general election. In March 1836 Horatio N. Chipman took the seat, followed in August by William Munnings. In January 1837 Chipman regained it, but in February Munnings and John H. Perpall are recorded as elected. In March Stubbs reappeared as the representative. Election Book: 1808-1868, Department of Archives, Nassau.

<sup>39</sup>Joseph Hunter to Lord Glenelg, 17 March 1837, CO23/99/109-117.

<sup>40</sup>*Bahamas Argus*, 4 March 1837.

<sup>41</sup>Francis Cockburn to Lord Glenelg, 14 May 1838, CO23/102/201-203.

<sup>42</sup>Francis Cockburn to Lord Glenelg, no76, 2 June 1838 quoted in Frederick Madden, ed., with David Fieldhouse, Imperial Reconstruction: The Evolution of Alternative Systems of Colonial Government: Select Documents on the Constitutional History of the British Empire and Commonwealth, vol.III (New York: Geenwood Press, 1987), part IV, 3. Proprietors were concerned labourers would go to Demerara.

“unexpected and undeserved”. They felt

most keenly the deep humiliation which the British Parliament has subjected us to, by the exercise of its authority to legislate for the internal affairs of the colony, without having previously afforded us an opportunity of views to the extent which might have been considered necessary for the protection of the apprentices.<sup>43</sup>

Governor Cockburn soon faced the obstruction of House members opposed to his Government. This time they rejected a measure to prevent unauthorised occupation of Crown Lands, a measure modelled after an Order-in-Council. The discussion was heated and it was apparent that opposition members would take any opportunity to express their lack of confidence in measures proposed by the Government. Cockburn was urged to dissolve but he held out for six months until he was sure there was no alternative. The election that followed was hard fought, particularly in Nassau. John Pinder, the Police Inspector, had advocated the claims of Africans in the debate over their naturalization; the Opposition turned this round to label him “the enemy of negroes”.<sup>44</sup> He was nevertheless elected.<sup>45</sup> Many public officials drawing salaries from the Government were frightened to actively support pro-Government candidates, in the knowledge that the new House would soon be discussing the salary list.<sup>46</sup> Nevertheless, Turks Island, Crooked Island and Acklins, formerly dominated by the Opposition, now returned pro-Government representatives.<sup>47</sup> At this time, it usually took several weeks to sort out the House of Assembly in The Bahamas, with some candidates being elected for more than one seat and seats being vacated for various reasons. Once this had been achieved, there was a bare majority for the Government

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<sup>43</sup>Proceedings of the House of Assembly, 24 July 1838, CO23/103/49.

<sup>44</sup>The significance of such a claim is that he was standing in Andros, an island 99.9% black (see Michael Craton and Gail Saunders, Islanders in the Stream: A History of the Bahamian People, vol.2: From the Ending of Slavery to the Twenty-First Century (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1998), 60). Several West Indian legislatures asserted Africans needed to apply for naturalization. Stephen maintained the Emancipation Act treated all bondsmen as British subjects and when freed British citizens (Knaplund, James Stephen, 114).

<sup>45</sup>Wright, “History of the Bahama Islands”, 530.

<sup>46</sup>In 1838 the House had reduced the salary of the Provost Marshall by one hundred pounds. The Surveyor General had not been paid for several years.

<sup>47</sup>Dr. Francis Eve for Turks Island; he was the Health Officer there. Stephen Hile, a Stipendiary Magistrate, for Crooked Island and Acklins (Election Book: 1808-1868).

'party'. Still, while Charles Nesbitt was away on leave, Cockburn delayed convening the Legislature.<sup>48</sup>

At the first session, members were equally divided over the choice of Speaker. One candidate was Meadows and the other George Campbell Anderson, now the Attorney General, who had held the Speakership from 1831 to 1837. Cockburn declined to intervene, but when stalemate persisted he prorogued the Assembly for one month. In the interval, one of the opposition members sailed for England, leaving the field clear for Anderson.

The Opposition seized on the fact that a number of persons recently elected belonged to the military forces stationed in Nassau and they charged undue influence had been used to bring about their election.<sup>49</sup> A motion was presented to unseat these members, who withdrew while it was discussed. A majority favoured their retention of the seats. The Opposition persisted in trying to obstruct legislation and hinder business, but enjoyed no success, although several bills only passed by the casting vote of the Speaker.<sup>50</sup> Cockburn did manage to procure the salary list bill, which secured government officials' salaries, always a potential weapon for the Assembly. In September 1840 Cockburn reported: "Great unanimity of good feelings has prevailed".<sup>51</sup> In fact, 1840 marked the end of the first phase of post-Emancipation opposition to the Government. The period was characterised by a fierce truculence, but a realistic appraisal that nothing would bring the old order back. The ruling class had accustomed itself to the changes wrought by the Abolition Act and found other strategies to successfully maintain its position. Now it turned to demand reforms that its members desired; the state Church was the first target.

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<sup>48</sup> Francis Cockburn to Marquess of Normanby, 13 July 1839 and 20 September 1839 cited in John M. Trainor, "The Ascendancy of Charles Rogers Nesbitt, Politician, Civil Servant, Administrator", Journal of the Bahamas Historical Society 3 (October 1981): 4 and Note 17, 9.

<sup>49</sup> I can identify three such persons from the returns, viz. S. Adderley, elected for Eleuthera, John Cooke, elected for Nassau, and John Richardson, elected for Exuma (Election Book: 1808-1868).

<sup>50</sup> The bills concerned the placing of the control of the militia in the hands of the Governor, the prevention of unauthorized occupation of lands, the Master and Servants Act and the Vagrancy Act. These were hardly liberal ordinances and an indication that the 'opposition' was merely trying to counteract the Government.

<sup>51</sup> Francis Cockburn to Lord John Russell, 14 September 1840, CO23/107/286.

### Sectarian Disputes 1840-1860

#### The Religious Denominations in The Bahamas

The Anglican Church was established in The Bahamas by the end of the seventeenth century, but it was the coming of the American Loyalists that was decisive for the firm foundation of the Anglican establishment. The Church was never active among the black population, as the Loyalists did not encourage Christian instruction among the slave population. Moreover, the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel did not send out missionaries to The Bahamas between 1807 and 1835. In 1835 the Anglican Church had four ordained ministers and two catechists, with 930 adherents.<sup>52</sup> During the Emancipation issue two of the Anglican clergy, Rev. William Hepworth of Christ Church and Rev. William Strachan of St. Matthew's were opposed in their views. The latter had supported Governor Carmichael Smyth in the early 1830s, while Hepworth had joined the opposition.<sup>53</sup> Even so, Rev. William Strachan nowhere expressed any enthusiasm for the Governor's ideals in regard to the abolition of slavery.<sup>54</sup> Because of their personal views the Established Church in The Bahamas took no active role in promoting Abolition.

Despite the authorisation to erect a new chapel of ease in Nassau in 1840 and the appointment of another minister for the Out Islands, Governor Cockburn pointed out to the Secretary of State that this still was not sufficient for the needs of the Church. Many settlements, already well populated, had no means of religious instruction from the Established Church.<sup>55</sup> At Harbour Island the old church had been destroyed in a hurricane, but the Anglicans were slow to rebuild and by 1835 the Wesleyans had built a chapel there. Cockburn wanted more clergymen sent out and more pains taken to secure the population to the Established faith, requesting help from the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel. He also considered the more efficient carrying out of duties by the Anglican Church required a

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<sup>52</sup>Enclosure CO23/93/84-86 in William Colebrooke to Earl of Aberdeen, 10 March 1835, CO23/93/81-83.

<sup>53</sup>Smyth suspended Rev. William Hepworth (and Patrick Brown) from the Council in 1832 for "disreputable behaviour" (Carmichael Smyth to Lord Goderich, no. 200, 6 December 1832, CO23/87/102-104).

<sup>54</sup>R. Shedden, Ups and Downs in a West Indian Diocese (A. R. Mowbray, London, 1927), 45.

<sup>55</sup>Francis Cockburn to Lord John Russell, 25 July 1840, CO23/107/207-211. For example, Rock Sound, with a population of 2,500, had neither Church nor minister (Wright, "History of the Bahama Islands", 540).

resident leader. The Bahamas was in the Diocese of Jamaica and Cockburn sought the appointment of an Archdeacon, granted in 1844.

The Methodists were active in The Bahamas from the end of the eighteenth century, when Joseph Paul, a freed American slave, went first to Abaco and then to Nassau in the 1780s.<sup>56</sup> Anthony Wallace and his wife, free Bahamian blacks, established another branch of the Bahamian Methodists. In 1799 William Turton, a Barbadian mulatto, was sent by the Manchester Methodist Conference to The Bahamas and he began preaching from the Wallaces' house and in the open air. In 1803 the first white Bahamian joined the Methodists and became Turton's wife, causing quite a scandal.

The success of conversions to Methodism among the slaves led to restrictions. Methodists were instructed not to hold services during the hours of the Anglican Church's services and not to administer communion. A bill was passed in 1816 forbidding religious meetings between sunset and sunrise (repealed in 1822). Another Act of 1821 placed Methodist and Baptist preachers in the category of rogues and vagabonds.<sup>57</sup> Despite this, the Methodist congregation numbered one thousand by 1822. In 1802 a chapel was built in eastern Nassau and another missionary was sent in 1803 so Turton could visit the islands. Flourishing congregations were soon established at Eleuthera, Harbour Island and Abaco and Methodism was now attracting white Bahamians in large numbers.<sup>58</sup> However, racial divisions soon beset the Methodist Church; one chairman wrote: "I am sorry to say there is a vast deal of prejudice of colour in the circuit".<sup>59</sup> Nevertheless, by 1840, the Wesleyan Methodist Mission was firmly entrenched in Nassau, Harbour Island, Abaco and Eleuthera and, as Bishop Shedden commented, "Its following among the white people was considerable."<sup>60</sup> By 1842 the Methodist Church reported 2171 members.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>56</sup>V. M. Prozan, "A Religious Survey of the Bahama Islands, British West Indies" (Thesis, Columbia Bible College, 1961).

<sup>57</sup>Knaplund, James Stephen, 134. Act disallowed.

<sup>58</sup>"Our members are as follows: *New Providence* 54 Whites and 257 Blacks. *Eleuthera* 232 Whites and 120 Blacks, *Harbour Island* 11 Whites and 22 Blacks. *Total Whites and Blacks 703.*" (Actually the total is 696.) From Minutes of Methodist meeting, 7 May 1813, quoted in Cash, Gordon and Saunders, Sources of Bahamian History, 129.

<sup>59</sup>District Chairman to WMS, 4 August 1838, quoted in *ibid.*, 144.

<sup>60</sup>Shedden, Ups and Downs, 63.

<sup>61</sup>Report of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society (London, 1842), 132.

The Baptists were also present in The Bahamas from the 1780s, being freed slaves from the United States, coming to preach among the slave and free black population. Their emphasis on freedom and participation, full immersion baptism, emotional sermons, lively singing and hand-clapping and spirit possession appealed to the slave population. The site of the present Bethel Baptist Church in Meeting Street, Delancy Town, was bought in 1801 by the Society of Anabaptists, with Sambo Scriven as pastor and Prince Williams as assistant.<sup>62</sup> Frank Spence's Chapel, situated in Negro Town, was founded in 1814 and was also thriving. However, a rift between Church members at Bethel Baptist in 1825 led to Prince Williams, now the pastor, taking his group to start a new chapel down the road, later called St. John's Native Baptist Church.<sup>63</sup> In 1833 Joseph Burton came from Jamaica, representing the Baptist Missionary Society of England. He worked with both Bethel and Prince Williams' congregations, but Prince Williams parted company when Burton began to tighten up rules for members. In 1835 Burton opened a new chapel, Zion Baptist, on the ridge overlooking Nassau.<sup>64</sup> Burton estimated that the BMS's Churches had 1,310 members by 1835.<sup>65</sup> On Exuma, San Salvador, Watlings Island and Long Island there were no chapels, although the majority of the population called themselves Baptists. A wooden chapel was being constructed in Grant's Town, seating about two hundred and fifty people. Generally, the Baptists' needs were for more chapels and more ministers.

The division between the 'national' Baptists and the 'native' Baptists was deep and immensely damaging to the Baptist Church. Two new BMS missionaries sent a letter of complaint about Prince Williams, who was preaching throughout the islands, to Governor Francis Cockburn, no friend of Dissent. The ministers called Prince Williams "a self appointed preacher" and "a man of notoriously immoral character", who led "many astray from the paths of morality and religion". They promised to endorse any measures to end the "iniquitous proceedings of these ignorant wicked and designing men, who are doing so

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<sup>62</sup>Antonina Canzoneri, "Early History of Baptists in The Bahamas", Journal of the Bahamas Historical Society 5 (1983): 9-10.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., 10.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., 11.

<sup>65</sup>Enclosure, CO23/93/86-91 in William Colebrooke to Earl of Aberdeen, 10 March 1835, CO23/93/81-83. There were two chapels in Andros, one in Eleuthera and two in Rum Cay. (This return antedates the opening of Zion Baptist Church.)

much mischief through this colony”.<sup>66</sup> Cockburn too wanted strict licensing of preachers. But these two missionaries were replaced by Henry Capern in 1840, an immensely popular minister, who healed the differences between the two rival Baptist groups. Perhaps this was the reason for Cockburn taking such an instant dislike to him.

The fourth denominational group in The Bahamas was the Presbyterian Church. In 1798 the St. Andrew’s Society was organised in The Bahamas and by 1810 Presbyterianism had become an organised religion here. This Church, like the Anglican, took little interest in the black population.<sup>67</sup>

#### Sectarian Disputes and the Process of Disestablishment

Although neither the Anglicans nor the Presbyterians had, up to this time, made many attempts to carry their message to the black population or make them welcome in their churches, the work of the Dissenters among the lower classes was considered dangerous. There was no doubt of their success; in the Out Islands almost whole communities would attend the worship conducted by a visiting Dissenting preacher. Cockburn, nevertheless, assured the British Government, after his tour of the islands, that islanders were generally “quite devoted to the Established Church, [although] in many instances from the want of clergymen...[they were] forced to avail themselves of schools and places established and contracted by sectarians”.<sup>68</sup> Hence Cockburn’s insistence on encouragement of the worship and teaching of the Established Church. Spurred by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, the Anglican Church did indeed start to come to life at this time, but the Dissenters had planted stronger roots than Cockburn imagined and the scene was set for conflict.

Bishop Shedden described the atmosphere of the late 1830s and 1840s thus: “A considerable bitterness of feeling against the Established Church was engendered by a number of irritating and pettifogging restrictions upon the ministrations of Dissenting ministers”, while the policy of Governor Cockburn, “a churchman of strong views”, “tended to embitter the Dissenters still further”.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>66</sup>Letter from Baptist Missionaries to Governor Cockburn, September 1838, CO23/103/146-148.

<sup>67</sup>See Prozan, “Religious Survey”.

<sup>68</sup>Report on Tour of the Islands by Governor Cockburn, CO23/107/57-60.

<sup>69</sup>Shedden, Ups and Downs, 27-28.

Dissenting clergy were empowered to marry persons, as long as they were licensed (5 Wm. IV c.15). Governor Cockburn became most irritated with one of the Wesleyan ministers, Thomas Lofthouse, when he transferred the licence given to him to perform marriages in Harbour Island to a Justice of the Peace, who was also a Leader in his Church there. The JP went on to perform a marriage ceremony. The reason for Lofthouse's action was that his wife had become very ill and he had to leave the island suddenly. He also claimed that Anglican clergymen frequently transferred their licences to JPs.<sup>70</sup> The Anglican minister at St. John's, Harbour Island, though, reported the matter to the Governor, who referred it to the Attorney General, who pronounced the marriage illegal. The Methodist Circuit leader, Rev. John Corlett, did agree that only ordained ministers should perform marriages, but he wanted the rule applied in all cases, regardless of denomination. He was anxious the Governor might use the case to remove the privilege of conducting marriages from Dissenting clergy on account of Cockburn's well-known prejudice. The minister related an incident that indicated the extreme bias and pettiness of the Governor. On the night of a prayer meeting in Grant's Town, Cockburn ordered continuous bell-ringing and required all Africans to sign a paper that they would go to neither the Methodist nor the Baptist meeting. The Methodist minister was justified in feeling that Dissenters' rights might be reduced, rather than extended in The Bahamas.

At the same time that the Governor was complaining to the Secretary of State about the Methodists, he complained about the newly arrived Baptist minister, Henry Capern, who failed to report to him on his arrival, showing a "want of respect". Capern had also offended by going to Carmichael, where there was an Anglican chaplain stationed, informing the inhabitants there he intended to visit frequently. Cockburn considered this an introduction of schism.<sup>71</sup> The next year Cockburn complained that Capern "loudly declared his independence of the authorities here" and claimed to have been sent to watch over "Her Majesty's Black Subjects" in The Bahamas.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup>Rev. John Corlett, Nassau, to the General Secretaries, WMS, 15 July 1840; Box 217, no. 23; Fiche Box no. 27, West Indian Correspondence: Bahamas, sheet 1305.

<sup>71</sup>Francis Cockburn to Lord John Russell, no. 44, 25 July 1840, CO23/107/207-211.

<sup>72</sup>Francis Cockburn to Lord John Russell, no. 95, 10 March 1841, CO23/109/176-179.

Still these were only trivial incidents, resultant upon the personal intolerance of the incumbent Governor. Religious rivalries and restrictions became of concern to more Bahamians when arguments spilled over into 'political' matters.

#### The Battle over the Control of Education

The Anglican Church had early on had the upper hand when it came to control over public schools, such as they were prior to 1836. The Education Act of 1799 had placed the control of schools under the Established Church and each school was to be managed by Commissioners, comprising the Rector, Churchwardens and Vestrymen of the parish wherein the school was situated.<sup>73</sup> The Rector would catechise scholars.<sup>74</sup> An Act of 1816 required schoolmasters of the public schools to be members of the Church of England or Church of Scotland.<sup>75</sup> Government funds were used to found schools for the Liberated Africans at Carmichael and Adelaide and an Anglican chaplain was present at Carmichael.

When, however, Governor William Colebrooke established a commission in 1835 to investigate the educational needs of The Bahamas, it was composed of "Gentlemen of different religious persuasions".<sup>76</sup> By this means, Colebrooke opened the door to other denominations to share in the task of promoting national education. The 1836 Act established a 'Board of Public Instruction' to promote education throughout The Bahamas and to supervise the public schools.<sup>77</sup>

Rev. Thomas Lofthouse described meetings of the Board to his superiors: "The school commission has met several times & the discussion has been very inflammatory & noisy".<sup>78</sup> Lofthouse mentioned that at one meeting, where it was proposed to introduce the Madras System, the Rev. William Hepworth spoke "in terms of angry invective" against "the liberals as subverters of the Church" and accused Governor Colebrooke of "indifference to the support of the Establishment". In the ensuing argument, Judge Sandilands labelled the

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<sup>73</sup>C. V. Williams, "The Methodist Contribution to Education in the Bahamas" (Ph.D. Thesis, St. David's University College, Lampeter, 1977), 88.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., 96.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., 105.

<sup>76</sup>William Colebrooke to Lord Glenelg, CO23/96/121-128. See page 61.

<sup>77</sup>6 Wm. IV c.17. See page 62.

<sup>78</sup>Rev. T. Lofthouse, Nassau, to Revs. Bunting, Beecham & Alden, WMS, 12 August 1836; Box 138, no. 186; Fiche Box no. 12, West Indies Correspondence General 1836, sheet 563.

Church of England “a sect” and “a Parliamentary Church”.<sup>79</sup> Lofthouse, though, wrote a cautionary note to his headquarters as he saw dangers for Methodism. “The school business has created a peculiar feeling in the minds of many towards dissenters generally. The Baptist minister has been very hot and violent and spoken out very fully and given great offence and there are many who can scarcely separate our society from another”.<sup>80</sup>

One problem was the unwieldy nature of the Board, which had over sixty members. But the primary difficulty was the view of the Anglicans, who considered they should have the monopoly of public education. Once Francis Cockburn arrived to back the Anglican priests, then the writing was on the wall for the Dissenters. Governor Francis Cockburn reported to the Colonial Office that there were frequent differences of opinion on the Board and he, as President, had to use his casting vote. He noted that discussions were “of a very angry and objectionable nature” and he gave notice to the Secretary of State that he intended to avoid attending meetings until future instructions from London.<sup>81</sup> By 1839 he was able to dissolve the Board and reconstitute it with a smaller number of members. But it remained interdenominational and included senior members of each Church.<sup>82</sup>

In 1840 Cockburn was still lamenting the quarrelsome nature of the Board. He complained: “There is little, if any hope of Religious Boards composed of members of different persuasions ever acting together with unanimity of advantage for the public good”.<sup>83</sup> The disagreements soon spilled over into one of the public schools when, at the end of 1840, the Board suddenly dismissed Charles Spence, the master of the Central School in Nassau, allegedly for not keeping his books properly. The Board then stated he was not dismissed just for this one offence but “for a long continued, dogged, mulish obstinacy and a marked perverseness of manner”, although in both the newspapers the previous December a

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<sup>79</sup>Rev. T. Lofthouse to Rev. Sharrock, Turks Island, 15 July 1836; Box 138, no. 158; Fiche Box no. 12; West Indian Correspondence General 1836, sheet 561. The Madras System included the Anglican Liturgy and Catechism in the syllabus.

<sup>80</sup>Rev. T. Lofthouse, Nassau, to Revs. Beecham, Alden & Hoole, WMS, 6 March 1837; Box 139, no.56; Fiche Box no. 12; West Indian Correspondence General 1837, sheet 578. Rev. Joseph Burton was the Baptist minister.

<sup>81</sup>Francis Cockburn to Lord Glenelg, 16 October 1837, CO23/100/142-144.

<sup>82</sup>2 Vic. c.15.

<sup>83</sup>Cockburn’s Tour of the Islands Report, CO23/107/57-60.

testimony in his praise had been published.<sup>84</sup> The Board declared he was generally disrespectful to Board members on their monthly visits and the school was going downhill. Two Nonconformist ministers publicly dissented from the Board report.<sup>85</sup> This action confirmed in the Governor's mind that matters had to be taken to the Legislature in order to alter the Act, because of the difficulties, "I might say the improbability", of reconciling the views of those favourable to the Established Church system of education with those of Sectarians.<sup>86</sup>

Thus, the Education Board came to be composed exclusively of lay members, presided over by the Governor. The public schools were to be conducted under the Madras system but instruction in the Anglican Catechism was not enforced when parents or guardians objected. Children were not compelled to attend any other place of worship other than that to which they belonged.<sup>87</sup> Cockburn agreed with the provisions of the new Act and deemed it "not only a judicious but a temperate and praiseworthy measure".<sup>88</sup> He saw this as the only way out, having "left no means untried to reconcile the conflicting views and opinions of those belonging to and those dissenting from the Established Church", all in vain. He claimed he had tried not to interfere with the Dissenters, whom he afforded "all possible assistance and protection".

The Dissenters were most unhappy with the changes and their removal from the Board. Cockburn judged their complaints as unreasonable and felt "that nothing short of being placed on a dead level with the Established Church will suit their views and expectations".<sup>89</sup> The Dissenters petitioned the Governor, the Assembly, the Council and the Secretary of State for the Colonies, to no avail. Cockburn felt the language of the petition "will speak as it seems to me but little in praise of its composure". The Dissenters, in their petition to the Governor, blamed the Anglicans, who they claimed were now getting all the

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<sup>84</sup>Francis Cockburn to Lord John Russell, no. 86, 5 February 1841, CO23/109/64-65.

<sup>85</sup>Enclosures with Francis Cockburn to Lord John Russell, no. 86, 5 February 1841, CO23/109/64-65.

<sup>86</sup>Francis Cockburn to Lord John Russell. no. 86, 5 February 1841, CO23/109/64-65.

<sup>87</sup>4 Vic. c. 5, 1841. This was the model for the National Schools in England. The Act did specify that on every Friday instruction on the Liturgy and Catechism of the Church of England would be given in all public schools, but the right to withdraw one's child was also stipulated.

<sup>88</sup>Francis Cockburn to Lord John Russell, no. 95, 10 March 1841, CO23/109/176-179.

<sup>89</sup>Ibid.

Assembly”.<sup>95</sup> Despite the efforts, Hamilton was returned.

Sectarian strife in the field of education continued, expressing itself mainly in one-upmanship and pettiness. In 1842 the Methodists assumed responsibility for a charity school that was about to close in Nicoll’s Town, Andros. . In 1843 the Baptists set up in opposition to the Methodist school, forcing the latter to close. The Board of Education then chose Nicoll’s Town for the site of its school in Andros, forcing the Baptist school to close.<sup>96</sup> In 1843 the Methodist Synod complained to the Methodist Missionary Society that Methodist children of Ebenezer (East) Chapel, who attended public schools, were “being subjected to proselytisation”.<sup>97</sup> Rev. Dr. Fletcher, Head of King’s College School and deputizing at St. Matthew’s, even complained to the Governor of the disturbance of the Wesleyan Church bell.<sup>98</sup> More seriously, in 1844 an Anglican clergyman tried to take possession of a Baptist Chapel in Exuma and had several people, including the preacher, arrested, imprisoned (one also whipped) or fined. Henry Capern found a lawyer for the preacher and others and a jury acquitted them.<sup>99</sup> In 1850 a Catechist running a day school refused to teach children unless they attended his Sunday school, compelling Methodist children either to leave the day-school or their own Sunday school.<sup>100</sup> Although contrary to the terms of the Education Act, this was probably a common occurrence.

In 1844 the Education Act expired and the new Act made the newly appointed Archdeacon of The Bahamas a member of and President of the Board.<sup>101</sup> This, once again, put the Anglican Church in the driving seat. The Act was amended in 1845, but merely increased the number of Board members (the Archdeacon plus seven others).<sup>102</sup> However, the Archdeacon lost his place in 1847; the new Act established a Board comprised of the

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<sup>95</sup>Rev. H. Capern to James Gardiner, 20 February 1841, CO23/109/189.

<sup>96</sup>Williams, “Methodist Contribution”, 347-348.

<sup>97</sup>Ibid., 344.

<sup>98</sup>Rev. J. Corlett, Nassau, to General Secretaries, WMS, 24 July 1843; Box 217, no. 8; Fiche Box no. 27; West Indian Correspondence: Bahamas, sheet 1311. The two buildings are on opposite sides of Shirley Street.

<sup>99</sup>Canzoneri, “Baptists in the Bahamas”, 15.

<sup>100</sup>Letter from “Clericus” in *Nassau Guardian*, 15 August 1850.

<sup>101</sup>7 Vic. c.14.

<sup>102</sup>8 Vic. c.13.

Governor and five other lay persons appointed by him.<sup>103</sup> The Act also stipulated there was to be no sectarian teaching and no Treasury grants to schools maintained by churches. This change was due to the fact Francis Cockburn had left The Bahamas and the new Governor (George Mathew) was not a devoted Church member and to the fact the House of Assembly was composed of enough Nonconformists to pass Acts no longer supportive of the Established Church. Another Act in 1848 also furthered religious liberty; an alien no longer had to receive the sacrament of the Lord's Supper in the Anglican Church before being granted naturalization.<sup>104</sup>

Some of the Methodist ministers were becoming intertwined with local families. This was perhaps inevitable since many were young and unmarried when they first came to the Nassau circuit. Thus, they either had to request leave in order to go to England to find a wife (as many of their letters do ask) or they found a suitable local woman. Consequently, some ministers were related to prominent Nassau families. One such minister was Rev. J. Blackwell, whose mother-in-law was Mrs. Sawyer (the Sawyers were stalwart Methodists and becoming very powerful politically), who was sister to Saunders of Abaco, "the great man in that place".<sup>105</sup> In 1846 the minister decided to electioneer for his brother-in-law, one Moore, of the "Opposition Party". Governor George Mathew described Moore as "one of the most disaffected residents in the Bahamas". He sent a letter of complaint to the leader of the Circuit, feeling an example was required to Harbour Islanders "where the American flag was lately hoisted over the British on their vessels". He claimed Election Day had closed with a riot, headed by Blackwell.<sup>106</sup> Rev. Thomas Lofthouse had also married locally and

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<sup>103</sup>10 Vic. c.1. By the 1864 Education Act the public schools came under the control of the Assembly; the Governor's appointees had to be Assemblymen.

<sup>104</sup>Canzoneri, "Baptists in the Bahamas", 15.

<sup>105</sup>Rev. T. Whitehouse, Nassau, to General Secretaries, WMS, 24 February 1849; Box 128, no.4; Fiche Box no. 27; West Indian Correspondence: Bahamas, sheet 1331. Either John or Henry Saunders.

<sup>106</sup>Rev. J. Blackwell, Harbour Island, to WMS, 23 March 1846; Box 218, no.11; Fiche Box no. 27; West Indian Correspondence: Bahamas, sheet 1320. George Mathew to Rev. J. Corlett, 10 June 1846; Box 218, no.23; Fiche Box no. 27; West Indian Correspondence: Bahamas, sheet 1322. There was also an association between the Governor's accusation and Blackwell's anti-papery activities. The Governor had supported two newly arrived Roman Catholic priests. The clergy took alarm. Blackwell was invited to speak to the Colonial Church Society on the evils of popery. A resolution was passed against "the encouragement lately given to Popery by Parliament, by passing the Maynooth Bill" & to the "recent introduction of that Anti-Christian religion into the Bahamas". All Protestants were urged to unite. A magistrate reported Blackwell to the Governor (Rev. J. Blackwell to General Secretaries, WMS, 30 April 1846; Box 218, no. 15; FBN 27; West Indian Correspondence: Bahamas, sheet no. 1321).

his former brother-in-law was the Attorney General, George Anderson.<sup>107</sup>

By the 1840s, a growing body of Nonconformists, many from leading white families, were led by ministers who were not only missionary minded but also political. They were willing to protest aggressively against regulations that restricted their Churches and against the favoured position of the Established Church. With the religious affiliations of the population changing quite rapidly and the Sectarian ministers not averse to advising their congregations how to vote, it is not surprising that by the time of the Burial Grounds dispute the House majority was Nonconformist. Notably they labelled themselves ‘liberal’ since they were fighting for equal treatment of all denominations. The tide had turned since the 1830s, when the Government was ‘liberal’ and the Opposition ‘reactionary’. Parallels can be drawn to England where Dissenters were also seeking relief from the bias of the law and the constitution. With Nonconformist ministers sent out from England they would bring ideas for a reforming movement with them and pass them on to their congregations, some of whom were House members.

#### The Burial Grounds Dispute

Although Dissenting ministers were licensed to perform weddings and funerals, they were not allowed to perform burial services in the public graveyards. Dissenters petitioned the Vestry of Christ Church, asking for the right for their adherents to be buried according to their own rites, in ground purchased and maintained by taxes to which they contributed equally with Anglicans. The Vestry minutes show that their response was a series of questions, of which the *Nassau Guardian*, sympathetic to the Dissenters, deemed only one relevant to the matter in hand.<sup>108</sup> The relevant question was “Have the Wardens and Vestry of Christ Church Parish the legal right to accede to the prayer of the petitioners, irrespective of the non-concurrence of the Rector?” The newspaper felt that some of the Vestry’s questions were “apt to revive religious animosities”. (Present at the Vestry meeting was C.R. Nesbitt, the Colonial Secretary.) The Governor, John Gregory, also felt that the “majority of questions are either hypothetical or abstract” and did not feel justified in referring them to the Attorney General. Besides, he pointed out, the Attorney General’s

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<sup>107</sup>Rev. Thomas Lofthouse was the father of T. H. C. Lofthouse, later to be a member of the Assembly.

<sup>108</sup>*Nassau Guardian*, 9 June 1849.

opinion was only for guidance and would not settle the matter – “Nothing short of a Judicial decision can have that effect”.<sup>109</sup>

A meeting of the petitioners to respond to the Vestry’s answer was “numerously and respectably attended”.<sup>110</sup> It resolved that the Vestry’s answer was unsatisfactory, in fact, “no answer at all”. It also resolved to apply to the Vestry again “for the purpose of ascertaining whether they will offer an obstruction” to Dissenting ministers using the public Burial Grounds and it appointed a committee to carry out its object. The committee included Rev. Maclure of St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church and Rev. Henry Capern of the Baptist Missionary Society. A letter writer to the *Bahama Herald*, a newspaper supportive of the Anglican Church, gave the opinion: “The whole business seems to me to be nothing more or less than the fomenting of a spirit of discord in a small community”. The letter was signed from “A Churchman” and he described the Dissenters of the Bahamas as “just like a set of noisy mosquitoes, ever buzzing about your ears, and seeming to take the greater pleasure in bothering you the more, the quieter you keep yourself”. He indignantly asked: “Is the Vestry thus to be bullied by some *fifty* disaffected dissenters, who choose to set up a right?”<sup>111</sup> The *Bahama Herald* wrote, “We unhesitatingly express our regret that public harmony should be so disturbed”.<sup>112</sup> The paper put the blame squarely on the Sectarians, who it believed were going about the matter in the wrong way. In another edition they wondered what the fuss was about since all the parties, except the Presbyterians, had burial grounds of their own and the Presbyterians could have had their own if they had liked as they had been offered money to purchase land. “We believe that this is not the only or principal object which some of the parties in the present movement have in view”.<sup>113</sup>

Governor John Gregory (1849-1854), who appears to have genuinely tried to mediate between the two sides, commented: “There is unhappily one subject upon which the feelings of the Community are strongly excited, and all my efforts to restore unanimity have hitherto

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<sup>109</sup>Governor’s reply to the Vestry, *ibid*.

<sup>110</sup>*Nassau Guardian*, 13 June 1849.

<sup>111</sup>*Bahama Herald*, 15 June 1849.

<sup>112</sup>*Bahama Herald*, 19 June 1849.

<sup>113</sup>*Bahama Herald*, 10 July 1849.

failed".<sup>114</sup> He reported to Earl Grey that the question has "lamentably divided this Community for Eight months past" and "a violent newspaper war ensued".<sup>115</sup> The final straw for the Governor was an unseemly 'collision' on one of the Burial Grounds (Potter's Field). The family of a deceased child and the Rev. Maclure insisted on burying the child according to Presbyterian rites. Three of the Anglican clergy were present, one proceeding to the head of the procession and beginning the Service for the Burial of the Dead from the Book of Common Prayer. The Rev. Maclure and the family and friends present kept their hats on and "intentionally disregarded the service", apparently seeing to the sealing of the vault. At the end of the service, the Anglican clergy withdrew a short distance and Rev. Maclure offered up his own prayer. The Governor blamed both parties for the "scene" and it obviously caused quite a scandal in Nassau. "The excitement...now became worse than ever, and broke up this small society into parties".<sup>116</sup>

It was the Governor who tried to settle the question by sanctioning the Colonial Secretary, Charles Nesbitt, the Government spokesman in the House, to introduce a bill into the Assembly. Gregory had been in correspondence with the Bishop of Jamaica, who concurred entirely with the Governor in order to reach a settlement of the dispute. However, the Archdeacon and Anglican clergy and laity did not want to concede anything to the Dissenters. The concessions the Governor and Bishop were willing to make was to grant the Dissenters the privilege of ceremonially using all four public burial grounds which were not bona fide "churchyards" or "attached to the fabric of the church". However, they would neither admit nor deny the claim of right, which the Dissenters wanted. They felt that only a law court could decide that.<sup>117</sup> The Governor was to be disappointed as the House of Assembly rejected the bill as it stood by an overwhelming majority. The Governor observed that the House now comprised a majority of Dissenters and they insisted on abstract natural rights. They also added to the bill's provisions the burial ground called St. Matthew's. The Anglican Church of St. Matthew's stood in this Burial Ground. At one time it consisted of

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<sup>114</sup>John Gregory to Earl Grey, 14 February 1850, CO23/134/62-65.

<sup>115</sup>John Gregory to Earl Grey, 28 February 1850, CO23/134/81-89.

<sup>116</sup>Ibid.

<sup>117</sup>Ibid. The Governor presented the Bishop's letter of 10 August 1848 to the House of Assembly on 5 February 1850. He wished the Governor to take the initiative in submitting legislation "for the final and

three distinct portions, the original churchyard, a piece of land purchased by the House of Assembly to add to the churchyard and a piece added under the gift of the Crown by Governor Francis Cockburn in 1844. A wall had separated the churchyard from the added land but this was pulled down five years before.<sup>118</sup> The Bishop refused to concede St. Matthew's burial ground and, if the bill passed as it now stood, he threatened to petition the Queen to withhold the Royal Assent.<sup>119</sup> The Governor was also angry with Charles Nesbitt, the Colonial Secretary and Vestryman of Christ Church. Gregory had entrusted Nesbitt to introduce the bill, but he had not argued for nor voted for the bill.<sup>120</sup>

It was the arrival of the Bishop on 3 March 1850, just prior to the second reading in the Legislative Council, which settled the issue. He decided to concede all the Dissenters asked, provided there was some kind of security from the Legislature there would be no further encroachment on the "exclusive rights of the Church of England".<sup>121</sup> This was written into the new bill. As it happened the Church of England's title to its property was not secure because of the defective way the Churches and churchyards were established in former times. Now the Anglican Church was assured of the rest its property.<sup>122</sup> The Archdeacon and the Clergy did not approve the Bishop's course. Archdeacon Trew resigned his seat on the Legislative Council because the Bishop had made it clear to him he was placed on the Council as the Bishop's representative and should express his views and wishes.<sup>123</sup> The Bishop also wrote a Charge to the Clergy, which Governor Gregory hoped would "produce the most beneficial results in healing the wound, which has been festering in

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peaceful settlement of the question" and he believed this would "by no means impair the real strength of our Church" Votes of the Bahamas Assembly, 1848-1850, 22-26.

<sup>118</sup>Explanation of the division of land in St. Matthew's Burial Ground and the conveyance history to be found in Votes of the Bahamas Assembly, 1848-1850, 110-112.

<sup>119</sup>Bishop of Jamaica to John Gregory, 19 November 1850, CO23/134/98-100.

<sup>120</sup>Enclosure with John Gregory to Earl Grey, 28 February 1850, CO23/134/105-106. Nesbitt's justification: Charles Nesbitt to Earl Grey, 25 February 1850, CO23/104/113-114.

<sup>121</sup>John Gregory to Earl Grey, 13 March 1850, CO23/104/215-218.

<sup>122</sup>13 Vic. c.5. Clause VIII stated that certain property was to belong exclusively to the Church of England.

<sup>123</sup>Archdeacon Trew to John Gregory, 5 March 1850, CO23/104/227; Archdeacon Trew to Earl Grey, 13 March 1850, CO23/104/229-231. The Archdeacon and the Bishop of Jamaica had had differences of opinions previously, when Trew was serving in Jamaica. Trew was a High Churchman and there had been doctrinal differences. (Information received from Father Irwin McSweeney, Nassau.)

this divided community”.<sup>124</sup> The Bishop explained that his advice had been given for “moral and political expediency, under the peculiar and altered character of the population of the Bahamas”.<sup>125</sup> He reminded the clergy it was their duty to respect this Act. He also wanted to conserve the alliance between Church and State and it was exactly that alliance that some of the Dissenters were hoping to break - this was just the first blow.

### Anglican Criticism of the Governor

The so-called Trew Affair had already dealt the close alliance between the Governor, as the Queen’s representative, and the Established Church a hefty blow. The Reverend Dr. John McCammon Trew was the first Archdeacon of Nassau and The Bahamas (from 1844). It was probably his over zealotry that had resulted in a Board of Education composed entirely of laymen in the 1847 Education Act. The dispute with Governor Mathew, also appointed in 1844, seems to have been ignited by Trew believing he had suffered a personal insult at the hands of the Governor, from which time Trew proceeded to attack the Governor’s morals.<sup>126</sup> Governor Mathew certainly left himself open for criticism. His wife had left the colony in April 1845 and divorce proceedings had followed in London, where Mrs. Mathew had claimed adultery and cruelty. This charge was unopposed by the Governor, according to legal advice.<sup>127</sup> The British Government immediately advised Mathew to resign, since such behaviour “must disqualify you from retaining the position in the Queen’s service”.<sup>128</sup> The Governor refused and in lengthy correspondence defended his character.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>124</sup>John Gregory to Earl Grey, 24 March 1850, CO23/104/296-297.

<sup>125</sup>Charges to the Clergy, 21 March 1850, CO23/104/299-301. In reference to the “altered character of the population of the Bahamas”, the Bishop had already observed in his letter of 1848 that “a large majority of the people dissent from the Church of England”.

<sup>126</sup>Archdeacon Trew to Lord Stanley, 10 January 1846, CO23/122/108-110 and George Mathew to William Gladstone, no.56, 12 August 1846, CO23/122/314-316

<sup>127</sup>George Mathew to Earl Grey, confidential, 15 March 1847, CO23/124/47-50.

<sup>128</sup>British Government to George Mathew, 29 January 1847, CO23/124/51-54 and 30 April 1847, CO23/124/59-61.

<sup>129</sup>George Mathew to B. Hawes, Under-Secretary of State, 29 June 1847, CO23/124/94-95; George Mathew to Earl Grey, private, 23 June 1847, CO23/124/184-188; George Mathew to Earl Grey, 11 July 1847, private, CO23/124/200-206.

Others began to join Archdeacon Trew in his attack on the Governor. Mathew alleged a conspiracy against him, mainly involving office-holders who had suffered pay reductions in the cut-backs of the previous year or who had not been appointed to vacant positions.<sup>130</sup> The main charge against Mathew was sexual misconduct. John Pinder, a long-serving member of the Legislative Council, sent a memorial to the Secretary of State, containing, in Charles Nesbitt's words, "various calumnious and libellous importations affecting [the Governor's] character".<sup>131</sup> Archdeacon Trew called a meeting of the Anglican clergy on 11 September 1848, where a resolution was made that on account of the alleged misconduct of the Governor, which had caused great scandal, the Anglican clergymen must "withdraw from private intercourse with him". This was signed by the Reverends William Strachan of Christ Church, Maxwell of St. Matthew's and MacDougall of St. Mary's and the Garrison Chaplaincy. The Reverends Handford of St. Agnes (situated in Grant's Town) and Chambers of St. Ann's (situated in Fox Hill) refused to sign.<sup>132</sup> Mathew complained to the Bishop of Jamaica, with whom he was on exceedingly friendly terms, and the latter refrained from condemning the Governor or supporting his Archdeacon.<sup>133</sup>

The Governor now seemed to lose all control and made a catalogue of complaints against various office holders.<sup>134</sup> Two of these, John Anderson and George Wood, served on the Executive Council; in the October Council meeting the Governor attacked these for their "unscrupulous hostility".<sup>135</sup> He expected complete support from Council members and placed a minute on the record that members' "support should not be limited to the board

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<sup>130</sup>Matthews, the Chief Clerk, who had drawn up a petition against Mathew, had had his stipend reduced and had failed in his application for position of Police Magistrate (George Mathew to Earl Grey, 13 March 1850, CO23/124/215-218).

<sup>131</sup>Charles Nesbitt to Archdeacon Trew, Rev. W. Strachan and Rev. Maxwell, 4 September 1848, CO23/129/11-12. John Pinder was the uncle of a Miss Dorsett; he alleged that she had borne the Governor's baby. Mathew did admit he allowed her to stay the night at his house, but only because she was drunk and needing help. He vehemently denied that the child was his, being born "somewhat more than nine months after her departure from Nassau" (George Mathew to Earl Grey, 27 September 1848, CO23/129/64-76).

<sup>132</sup>Resolution of the Clergy, CO23/129/34-36.

<sup>133</sup>George Mathew to Bishop of Jamaica, 23 September 1848, CO23/129/244-246 and George Mathew to Bishop of Jamaica, 16 November 1848, CO23/129/247-251. Mathew felt the similarity between the first resolution and Pinder's first paragraph confirmed his conspiracy theory (George Mathew to Earl Grey, 25 September 1848, CO23/129/17-20).

<sup>134</sup>George Mathew to Earl Grey, 26 September 1848, CO23/129/39-40.

<sup>135</sup>George Mathew to Earl Grey, no. 71, 4 October 1848, CO23/129/186-188.

room, but be avowed in public and private”.<sup>136</sup> Wood was suspended from office, as was John Pinder from the Legislative Council.<sup>137</sup> Those in minor posts also suffered. Thomas Dillet, a young coloured lawyer and son of the postmaster, had his licence as Notary Public revoked as Mathew alleged he had “distinguished himself by the most violent partisanship” and was “singularly ungrateful and discreditable”.<sup>138</sup>

Archdeacon Trew obtained more evidence of the Governor’s immorality and another complaint was forwarded to the Secretary of State.<sup>139</sup> The Governor now suspended Trew from the Legislative Council and implored Earl Grey to revoke his commission “under the extraordinary circumstances of his conduct”.<sup>140</sup> But, after Mathew secured a post for Miss Dorsett’s new husband, the Colonial Office removed the Governor from his office.<sup>141</sup> Wood was restored to the Executive Council and Trew and Pinder to the Legislative Council. All the other officers were reinstated.<sup>142</sup>

Thus a group of disgruntled officeholders, led by the leader of the Established Church, had got rid of the Governor. The community had certainly been rocked by the scandal, but opinion was not unanimous. One Methodist minister noted: “The white

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<sup>136</sup>Minute to Executive Council, CO23/129/190.

<sup>137</sup>George Mathew to Earl Grey, no. 82, 21 November 1848, CO23/129/258-261. Wood was also removed as Queen’s Advocate and a certain Marriott from the Commission of the Peace.

<sup>138</sup> Mathew claimed to have evidence that Dillet had been unscrupulous in business, although the fact Dillet had signed Matthews’ petition was probably more to the point. William Pinder, John Pinder’s brother, was also removed as Notary Public. George Mathew to Earl Grey, 21 November 1848, CO23/129/256-257; George Mathew to Earl Grey, no. 85, 24 November 1848, CO23/129/326-327; Police Magistrate to George Mathew, CO23/129/330-331; Enclosure from W. Pinder in George Mathew to Earl Grey, 19 December 1848, CO23/129/333-334.

<sup>139</sup>A Mrs. Macpherson sent Trew a letter in which she alleged Mathew had approached her daughter in a clandestine manner. Mathew countered that a trap might have been laid for him as he was told she had important information regarding the Dorsett affair. He was sure others had dictated the letter. Mrs. Macpherson to Archdeacon Trew, 28 October 1848, CO23/129/228-229; George Mathew to Earl Grey, 29 October 1848, CO23/129/224-225.

<sup>140</sup>George Mathew to Earl Grey, no. 84, 24 November 1848, CO23/129/307-308; Trew’s reply, 22 November 1848, CO23/129/316-317.

<sup>141</sup>George Mathew to Earl Grey, 19 December 1848, CO23/129/350-358. Mathew considered the Colonial Office’s action was a “cruel and undeserved injustice upon me”, George Mathew to Earl Grey, 27 January 1849, CO23/132/36-40.

<sup>142</sup>Concerning the Councillors, Colonial Office Note to George Mathew, 16 January 1849, CO23/129/268-271. In the other cases, it was felt Mathew had perpetrated “an arbitrary use of power” and there was “the appearance of private hostility”. Colonial Office to John Gregory, 10 February 1849, CO23/129/338-340.

community is split into factions respecting the removal of the Governor”.<sup>143</sup> But it was not just a case of Anglicans howling for his blood and Wesleyans, for once, backing the Governor. Two Anglican ministers had refrained from supporting Trew’s actions and, although the Methodists took no part publicly in calling for Mathew’s removal, Rev. Thomas Whitehouse wrote to his superior: “The Government would do well to remove him: I have seen some of his letters to females in this place... It would be best for him and for the community as he has lost respect”. He approved of the Archdeacon’s conduct. On the other hand, Rev. Thomas Lofthouse, with his close associations with Nassau’s white families, signed Mathew’s farewell. Although some officeholders earned the Governor’s wrath and petitioned against him, others, such as George Campbell Anderson, the Attorney General and John Anderson’s brother, supported him throughout. When Mathew left the Colony in February of 1849, an Address was presented and signed by 549 residents of Nassau, assuring him of their “deep and unfeigned regret” and “high appreciation” of his “administrative abilities”, “indefatigable application to business, the facilities afforded to all classes to approach [him] on public affairs, [his] just, liberal and enlightened policy in reference to all the various religious persuasions...and untiring exertions to promote the welfare of the colony”.<sup>144</sup> The Governor had reduced the debt and carried through several beneficial reforms: establishment of a well-organised poor-house and hospital, a public library (with provision for the working class), an Agricultural Society and dispensary (again with provision for the poor); reform of the militia to improve its efficiency; abolition of unnecessary offices and improvement of the administrative system; introduction of a liberal tariff and creation of more facilities for trade and commerce. In fact, Earl Grey acknowledged the general efficiency and success of the administration.<sup>145</sup>

The whole episode does seem to boil down to personal indiscretion and the crusade (or personal vendetta) of one forthright and self-righteous cleric. But the affair undermined the Anglican Church, just at the time when it was becoming more vulnerable. Just after the Trew Affair, it was faced with the attack of the Nonconformists in the Burial Grounds

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<sup>143</sup>Rev. T. Whitehouse, Nassau, to Rev. Hoole, WMS, 29 September 1848; Box 218, no.25; Fiche Box no. 27; West Indian Correspondence: Bahamas, sheet 1330. See also Rev. T. Whitehouse to GS, WMS, 28 November 1848; Box 218, no.27; FBN 27; West Indian Correspondence: Bahamas, sheet 1330.

<sup>144</sup>Address to George Mathew, 24 February 1849, CO23/132/85-86.

<sup>145</sup>George Mathew to Earl Grey, no. 71, 4 October 1848, CO23/129/186-188 and Earl Grey to George Mathew, CO23/129/189.

Dispute. Indeed, the Bishop of Jamaica conceded the point because he realised the anomalous position of the Established Church in a Colony where the majority of the population dissented from it. The key was the change in the religious affiliations of the House of Assembly. The House had not made any move against Governor Mathew and tacitly supported him, thereby showing disapproval of the Archdeacon. In the Burial Grounds Dispute it had got the bill it wanted in its quest for gradual disestablishment of the Anglican Church. It was only a matter of time before it would seek to disendow the Established Church.

#### Disestablishment and Disendowment of the Anglican Church

By 1860 the Wesleyan Missionary Society had seven circuits and nine missionaries in The Bahamas, catering to 3,675 members.<sup>146</sup> However, the Anglican Church had recovered somewhat from its trials under Archdeacon Trew. A separate see was created in 1861 and the first Bishop of Nassau was consecrated. In 1863 Bishop Addington Venables, ward of Sir Robert Peel, and adherent of the Oxford Movement, succeeded to the office. “The episcopate of Bishop Venables definitely stamped the ‘Catholic’ character upon the work of the diocese” and, in protest, “the white inhabitants drifted away from the Church”.<sup>147</sup> “With the succession of Bishop Venables the active missionary work of the diocese may only be said to have in truth begun.”<sup>148</sup>

The race and colour patterns of Church membership in The Bahamas in the post-Emancipation era differed from that of other British islands. In Jamaica, whites were Anglicans, while membership of the Methodist Church was almost exclusively coloured and the Baptist Church black. In Bermuda the Anglican, Presbyterian and Independent Churches served the whites and the Methodists the blacks. The Anglican Church in The Bahamas was the church of the British colonial officials, but it was not the preference of the majority of the white Bahamian ruling class. Many of the descendants of the slaveowners, who had limited the activities of Methodist missionaries among their slaves, had now become

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<sup>146</sup>Report of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society (London: 1860).

<sup>147</sup>Shedden, Ups and Downs, 70.

<sup>148</sup>W. Francis Henry King, Addington Venables, Bishop of Nassau (London: W. Wells Gardner, 1877), 21.

Methodists themselves. In the campaign for Disestablishment, the Nonconformist members of the Assembly, in truth, could claim to be pursuing justice for the Dissenting congregations forced to support a Church that scarcely served a quarter of the population. In fact, even in England the Anglican Church “could not be regarded any more as co-existent with the state”.<sup>149</sup> Nonconformists there were also forced to fight for civil equality, although only the militants of the Liberation Society demanded Disestablishment and Disendowment. The difference in The Bahamas was that the Anglican Church only catered to a minority of its inhabitants. Moreover, the British Government seemed indifferent to the fate of the Established Church in the West Indies, withdrawing the Imperial Grant in 1868.<sup>150</sup> Still, the Assembly would be forced to fight for the reform since Governor Rawson Rawson (1864-1868) would resolutely defend the Establishment.

The Disendowment of the Church in The Bahamas would be connected to a policy of retrenchment, necessitated by the financial difficulties caused by the ending of the American Civil War and the devastating hurricane of 1866. Rather suddenly in February 1868, House member Robert Sawyer gave notice of a motion to disendow the Established Church.<sup>151</sup> Governor Rawson had, in fact, warned the Colonial Government of “the coalition which has since been matured against the Establishment of the Church of England in the Colony” which seemed likely “to lead to a general antagonism against the Government”.<sup>152</sup> Nevertheless he might have been caught unawares as at the opening of the session “the address of the Assembly is friendly, and expressive of confidence”.<sup>153</sup> This was despite the fact there had already been opposition to a government measure.<sup>154</sup> Another reason for the

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<sup>149</sup>Norman Gash, *Aristocracy and People: Britain 1815-1865* (London: Edward Arnold, 1979), 336

<sup>150</sup>A. Caldecott, *The Church in The West Indies* (1898; reprint, London: Frank Cass, 1970), 137-138. It is worth bearing in mind that Gladstone’s Government disestablished and disendowed the Irish Church in 1869. The British Government was urging Disestablishment and concurrent Disendowment in the West Indies. See Alan Burns, *History of the West Indies* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1954), 667.

<sup>151</sup>*Votes of the House of Assembly* (1868), 14.

<sup>152</sup>Rawson Rawson to Duke of Buckingham & Chandos, 18 February 1868, CO23/191/119-120.

<sup>153</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>154</sup>C.R. Nesbitt had retired from the post of Colonial Secretary in 1867 and the Government failed in its attempt to get the new Colonial Secretary, C. Lempriere, into the House. It had needed a bill passed to exempt him from the residency qualification for election to the Assembly. On its second reading in the House it was thrown out by an overwhelming majority, only five members voting for it, of whom three were members

surprise was that the Opposition had been inactive for the previous eighteen months, explained by Rawson by the fact that they themselves had just obtained a grant of one thousand five hundred pounds for restoring Wesleyan Methodist churches.<sup>155</sup> The Governor, however, was still optimistic, feeling that the manner in which the attack was recommenced, “so unprecedented, and so arbitrary”, would mean that it would probably be defeated by moderate men allying with the Anglicans.

One of the reasons given for the motion was to reduce the public expenditure:

Whereas the Public Expenditure now greatly exceeds the Revenue, and it is absolutely necessary that some scheme of retrenchment, both present and prospective, should be devised, by means of which the expenses of the Government may be reduced, and further embarrassment in the finances of the Colony prevented.<sup>156</sup>

Supporters of Disendowment blamed the bankruptcy of the Colony on the extravagance and greediness of public officials. One supporter’s ‘history’ of the campaign castigated most of the officials in turn. The Governor, he stated, received five percent of the total Revenue and, in addition, the services of prisoners gratis. He wrote that the Colonial Secretary “figures largely, although the duties of his office afford him ample leisure for picnics and maroons, for fishing parties and shooting excursions. For weeks together he can afford to quit his office, and traverse the islands of the colony in the character of electioneering agent”. Despite all his free time, the duty of Registrar of Records had been taken from the Colonial Secretary and given to a protégé in 1862. Likewise, the posts of Provost Marshall and Police Inspector had been separated. He complained that the Customs Office was overloaded with overpaid staff, here was a “hive of indolence”. He thought the salaries of the Chief Justice, Assistant Justice and Attorney General were out of proportion to the means of the Colony. In summary, most of the two hundred salaried officers’ services could be “disposed with without any detriment whatever”.<sup>157</sup> These sorts of gripes about public offices were to be a regular item on the Bahamian Opposition agenda. Charles Adderley,

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of the Executive Council and two were public officials (Rawson Rawson to Duke of Buckingham & Chandos, 2 March 1868, CO23/191/148-150).

<sup>155</sup>Rawson Rawson to Duke of Buckingham & Chandos, 7 March 1868, CO23/191/157-164.

<sup>156</sup>Votes of the House of Assembly. Resolution, 18.

<sup>157</sup>The Disendowment Movement in the Bahamas in the Year 1868, 7-14. This is an anonymous pamphlet, merely stating it is by one of the promoters. It is held in the Royal Commonwealth Society Library, University of Cambridge.

under-secretary at the Colonial Office (1866-1868) and related to a Bahamian family, saw the “true history” of retrenchment as the struggle between opposing powers, “the body of office-holders united to resist any diminution of their emoluments” and “the unofficial portion of the community, endeavouring, in the constitutional way, to effect what they believed to be just, necessary and timely reductions in the expences [*sic*] of the Government”.<sup>158</sup> Of course, in this resolution the reduction required was in ecclesiastical expenditure, seen to have also much increased by the import of more priests.<sup>159</sup>

Another reason for the resolution was the resentment felt by members of the other denominations at the double taxation that they were forced to pay. The Resolutions reported from the Committee stated:-

1. Present conditions of Colonial Finances make it necessary for Public Expenditure to be reduced.
2. The United Churches of England and Ireland and the Presbyterian Church of St. Andrew are supported and maintained by the General Revenue.
3. A large majority of inhabitants of the islands are connected with other denominations and contribute voluntarily towards support and maintenance of their Ministers and Churches.
4. This double burden of private contributions and taxation is unfair and objectionable.
5. It is expedient that all denominations should support their own clergy and ministers and maintain their own churches.<sup>160</sup>

The Anglo-Catholic nature of the Anglican Churches in The Bahamas, however, may have been the key to the widespread support for Disendowment. Rev. Henry Bleby considered: “The most repulsive feature of the case here is, the prevalence of Ritualism”. He went on: “With many of our friends here, therefore it is not simply a matter of equity, but of conscience also, to press the disendowment contest to a successful issue. They feel it to be a grievance of no small magnitude, to be taxed for the support of a system which is in no

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<sup>158</sup>C. B. Adderley, Colonial Policy (Nassau: Nassau Times, 1870), 4.

<sup>159</sup>The Disendowment Movement, 5. A letter to the *Nassau Guardian*, 25 April 1868, from ‘Z’, gave an alternative viewpoint. He wrote that the published Government notice of appropriations for Church purposes during the last ten years served “to correct a good many erroneous notions entertained upon the subject”. Ordinary Expenditures of the Church were covered by the Pew Rents. The grants in aid of erection of new churches, including the restoration of those damaged in the hurricane, had been 11,222 pounds, 5,822 pounds to the Church of England and 5,400 pounds to the Methodists, so “the Methodists have no cause for complaint”. He also pointed out that the figures showed that the exchange of Pew Rents for Annual Grants would enrich Christ Church and St. Andrew’s, but press heavily on poorer congregations, especially in the Out Islands.

<sup>160</sup>Votes of the House of Assembly (1868), 18-19.

respect better than Popery".<sup>161</sup> The anonymous pamphleteer confirmed: "The active exertions made by many of the clergy to introduce the semi-Romanish doctrines and practices of the High Church party have given great offence to the loyal Protestants of the Colony, and arrayed against the establishment a large number of them, of all denominations, who would not, at present, have assumed a hostile attitude towards the Church".<sup>162</sup> It was this issue that led to the alliance of the Presbyterian members of the House with the Wesleyan members, thus attaining a majority against the Government.<sup>163</sup>

Four resolutions were passed in February. The support of the fabric and officers of the Church of England was to be the responsibility of the respective congregations. Pew rents, hitherto received by the Government, would be surrendered to the Church. The several benefices would be disendowed. The present parochial system of the Colony would be annihilated. The minister of the Presbyterian Church would also be disendowed and management vested in the Minister and Elders. These resolutions were carried by a majority of fifteen to ten.<sup>164</sup>

The Dissenters threatened that if their measure were to be defeated they would not pass an Appropriations Bill and thus would stop the supplies. Four of the members of the Legislative Council were also members of the Diocesan Council, so the Dissenters had genuine fears of defeat.<sup>165</sup> They were also preparing for a general election, in anticipation of dissolution. Their opponents were doing the same and "Nassau is at present in all the

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<sup>161</sup>Rev. Henry Bleby, Nassau, to General Secretaries, WMS, 9 January 1869; Box 220, no.26; Fiche Box No. 28, sheet 1385.

<sup>162</sup>The Disendowment Movement, 3-4.

<sup>163</sup>Governor Rawson reported the correspondence that had been commenced by the Minister of the Presbyterian Church upon the subject of Ritualism and its progress in the Church in Nassau and some of the Out Islands in Rawson Rawson to Duke of Buckingham & Chandos, 7 March 1868. CO23/191/157-164. One electioneering placard, 'A Few Plain Reasons Why I Think The Church of England Should Not Be Loved', mentions the introduction of "Romish doctrines and Romish ceremonies" (CO23/191/578). Another, 'Reasons Why I Will Seek to Disendow the Church of England in This Colony', states: "Because she has, to a great extent, ceased to be Protestant, and evangelical, and is doing the work of Popery" (Ibid.).

<sup>164</sup>Votes of the House of Assembly (1868), 19. In favour were: H. R. Saunders; A. J. Thomson; W. Maclure; O. Malcolm; T. Darling; S. O. Johnson; A. T. Holmes; J. S. Johnson; Dr. G. Kemp; M. Menendez; G. Higgs; R. Sweeting; R. Sawyer; S. P. Saunders; R. Menendez. Against: H. Adderley; W. Armbrister; B. Burnside; R. Farrington; B. Bode; J. J. M. Thomson; G. Harris; W. Webb; Dr. F. Duncombe; E. B. A. Taylor.

<sup>165</sup>Shedden, Ups and Downs, 76.

excitement of a heated controversy, and an active canvass".<sup>166</sup>

The Governor reported that the Legislative Council was divided on the maintenance of Church Endowments, three of the members opposing them.<sup>167</sup> Two of the three, though, believed it was their duty to safeguard the supplies and only one would push the bill to that extent, being warned by Rawson to resign his seat on the Council if he wished to follow that course.<sup>168</sup> The Governor personally opposed change as he believed that Disendowment of the Church of England would be prejudicial to the interests and welfare of those on the Out Islands needing religious instruction and ministrations. He noted that the Wesleyan Methodists confined their ministry to four islands - New Providence, Abaco, Harbour Island and Eleuthera, and the Presbyterians had only a limited congregation in Nassau. He discounted the Baptists as they had only "one educated Englishman among their ministers. All the rest are colored [*sic*] men, of the most limited education and humble position".<sup>169</sup> The Baptists had no representation on the Council or in the House and, in fact, kept a very low-key position in the whole affair. Rawson's comment showed the typical bias of colonial officials against them.

A Bill to Amend the Ecclesiastical Laws of the Colony was read for the first time on 9 March 1868 and immediately printed.<sup>170</sup> It was read for the second time on 12 March 1868 but the printed version was only given to the members that afternoon.<sup>171</sup> It was passed and the House went into committee. It was read for the third time on 16 March 1868 and approved by sixteen votes to ten.<sup>172</sup> Thus the Bill had passed in the interval of a week. Henry Adderley, a government supporter, had each time attempted to get the Bill postponed for six months, but failed. On 19 March the Legislative Council rejected it, by five votes to two. Dr. Kirkwood and Grant had supported the bill and Dillett, Rothery, Hall, Dr. Chipman

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<sup>166</sup>Rawson Rawson to Duke of Buckingham & Chandos, 7 March 1868, CO23/191/157-164.

<sup>167</sup>The Legislative Council in 1868: Dr. W. Kirkwood (P); W. H. Doyle (P); Dr. H. N. Chipman; J. S. Grant (P); C. R. Rothery; W. Hall; T. Dillett. P = Presbyterian.

<sup>168</sup>Rawson Rawson to Duke of Buckingham & Chandos, 7 March 1868, CO23/191/157-164.

<sup>169</sup>Ibid.

<sup>170</sup>Votes of the House of Assembly (1868), 23.

<sup>171</sup>Ibid., 24 and Rawson Rawson to Duke of Buckingham & Chandos, 6 April 1868, CO23/191/266-276.

<sup>172</sup>Votes of the House of Assembly (1868), 33-34. R. Albury was the extra vote.

and Doyle were against.<sup>173</sup> The House then requested the Governor, by a majority of fourteen votes to eleven, to dissolve and order a new election.<sup>174</sup>

There were other signs of opposition to the Government. On 19 March H. R. Saunders moved for leave to bring in a bill to repeal, from 31 December next, the Act of 1864 granting an additional salary to the Governor, on grounds of retrenchment. But this was lost (twelve to ten) as two of the Opposition voted against. A committee also had been earlier called to enquire into the working of the Wrecking Laws; the majority report recommended sweeping changes, including abolishing the licensing system and the publication of the salvage shares. There was not the least chance of carrying this but it served the electioneering interests of the Opposition in a couple of the wrecking districts.<sup>175</sup>

The Governor regarded the request for dissolution as an infringement of his prerogative and refused to dissolve, stating there was no precedent in the Imperial Parliament or other colonial legislatures.<sup>176</sup> He also felt there was no evidence of discontent or dissatisfaction on this question, as claimed by the House.<sup>177</sup> Besides, he queried the urgency since the Bill had only been under discussion for five weeks. Charles Adderley considered the reports of Rawson were “without doubt deeply coloured by the Governor’s prejudices”.<sup>178</sup> Rawson did admit to the Secretary of State that an early dissolution was unavoidable, although he believed the Opposition had forced, without reasonable excuse, a conflict with the Government. He delayed as long as possible until “angry passions had cooled down” and in an attempt to strengthen the Government’s hand.<sup>179</sup> The House

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<sup>173</sup>Minutes of the Legislative Council, 39.

<sup>174</sup>Votes of the House of Assembly (1868), 42. A. J. Thomson was absent; William Darling changed sides.

<sup>175</sup>Rawson Rawson to Duke of Buckingham & Chandos, 6 April 1868, CO23/191/266-176.

<sup>176</sup>Votes of the House of Assembly (1868), 44. “The prerogative and responsibility of dissolving the Assembly rests entirely with the Governor.”

<sup>177</sup>The Opposition claimed that the election results, with 5,568 in favour of Disendowment, proved otherwise. The Disendowment Movement, 17.

<sup>178</sup>Adderley, Colonial Policy, 4.

<sup>179</sup>Rawson Rawson to Duke of Buckingham & Chandos, 6 April 1868, CO23/191/266-276.

managed to unearth precedents for their action and adjourned for three months.<sup>180</sup> During this session the Speaker, George Campbell Anderson, resigned as he was at odds with the majority over this question and could not endorse proceedings to which he was personally and strongly opposed.<sup>181</sup> The Governor prorogued the House on 7 April 1868.<sup>182</sup>

Two holders of public offices, Ormond Malcolm, the Acting Secretary to the Board of Education, and Dr. William Maclure, the Coroner of New Providence, were removed from their offices for voting with the majority, despite warnings.<sup>183</sup> Malcolm considered this an “infringement of my rights and privileges as a representative of the people”.<sup>184</sup> Members of the House of Assembly, merchants and Nassau inhabitants protested at the dismissal of these two and warned of “the serious consequences which are likely to result, if his [the Governor’s] conduct be approved by Your Grace, and the Imperial Government”. They claimed this was a “gross breach of Parliamentary privilege, an infringement of the liberties of her Majesty’s loyal subjects, on the part of His Excellency, the Governor, and a grievous injury to the best interests [*sic*] of the Colony”. They firmly believed that holders of public offices should be free to vote according to their conscience, otherwise they should be ineligible to sit in the Legislature. They pointed out that the practical effect of the present action of the Governor was to exclude from public service all but members of the Church of England, a minority in the Bahamas.<sup>185</sup> Ormond Malcolm and William Maclure were both Presbyterians and their constituents almost exclusively Baptists and Methodists, so they could be considered as acting in the interests of both conscience and constituents. The petitioners believed that the Governor was bringing about “a collision between the Crown and the House of Assembly on a question of Parliamentary privilege, and a refusal on the

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<sup>180</sup>Votes of the House of Assembly, 50. The Opposition referred the question to three barristers in England: Sir Roundell Palmer, ex-Attorney General; Sir Thomas Erskine May, clerk of the House of Commons; F. Haynes. They were unanimous that the Assembly had the right to advise and request the Governor to dissolve if they saw fit. The Disendowment Movement, 33 and Appendix B, 54-67.

<sup>181</sup>*Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>182</sup>Rawson Rawson to Duke of Buckingham & Chandos, 8 April 1868, CO23/191/304-305.

<sup>183</sup>Rawson Rawson to Duke of Buckingham & Chandos, 6 April 1868. CO23/191/228-232 and C. Lempriere to O. Malcolm, 30 March 1868, CO23/191/235-236.

<sup>184</sup>O. Malcolm to C. Lempriere, 1 April 1868, CO23/191/237; Dr. W. Maclure to C. Lempriere, 1 April 1868, CO23/191/238; C. Lempriere to O. Malcolm, 2 April 1868, CO23.191/239; O. Malcolm to Duke of Buckingham & Chandos, 4 April 1868, CO23/191/361-363.

<sup>185</sup>Petition to Duke of Buckingham & Chandos, 6 April 1868, CO23/191/428-433.

part of the House to transact any business with the Crown, until the privileges of its members shall have been vindicated and established". They pointed out that since they were born and reared in The Bahamas they knew better than the Governor did which measures were needed to promote the welfare of the Colony. Rawson did not deign to give the petition credence on the grounds that it was signed by only Methodists and Presbyterians and he noted a few forged signatures.<sup>186</sup>

Active electioneering and organisation of forces made this an exciting election between two definite parties, the Conservative (Church) Party and the Reform (Disendowment) Party. Governor William Colebrooke had referred to 'parties' in his correspondence of the 1830s but there does not seem to have been any unifying organisation then. It was more an attitude of mind concerning the restructuring of society after Abolition. One could designate the supporters of change (and thus pro-Government) as 'liberal' and those against 'opposition'. In 1868 most people used the party labels; pamphlets were written; speeches were made; slogans were used; supporters were organised. Because the Conservative Party was the Government position, accusations were made that pressure was put on public officers. The Attorney-General allegedly threatened one of the overseers of the prison; the master of the Boys' Central School, a Presbyterian, had an official letter telling him how to vote; Bruce Burnside told the Deputy Receiver at Governor's Harbour that he was not allowed to be neutral. Moreover, those at Fox Hill (Eastern District) who had borrowed from the Hurricane Relief Fund were ordered to vote for the Conservative Party and those using Crown Lands were similarly ordered.<sup>187</sup> These were the allegations of the Reform Party and it is difficult to estimate their truth. The slogan used by the Conservative Party was "The Queen and the Government", but this was innocent enough. A more reliable statement was made by Dr. Kirkwood, a Presbyterian member of the Legislative and Executive Councils, who retained the support of the Governor. At an Executive Council meeting, he claimed that the majority for Disendowment in the election would have been

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<sup>186</sup>Rawson Rawson to Duke of Buckingham & Chandos, 4 May 1868, CO23/191/416-421. He noted that the messenger in the Colonial Secretary's office, a Baptist, signed his own name plus seven others. The Baptist Superintendent, Rev. Davey, did not sign it. The Governor understood he was not in favour of Disendowment, but the circumstances of a general election forced him to declare in favour of voluntarism, although he had no wish for extreme measures.

<sup>187</sup>The Disendowment Movement, 34-39.

more if the Government had not used “undue and improper means”.<sup>188</sup> The Colonial Secretary, Charles Lempriere, certainly went beyond the acceptable, drawing the disapproval of the Governor.<sup>189</sup>

During the election there were accusations of violent and criminal behaviour from both sides. The Reform Party accused the members of a political club, known as the Churchmen’s Union, of acting “in so violent and riotous a manner as seriously to threaten the safety of peaceable citizens”.<sup>190</sup> It alleged they broke into the store of A. J. Thomson, a Government officer and Reform Party member of the House, and knocked down his mother-in-law. They are also supposed to have attacked George Higgs’ store. These were apparently a group of young coloured men from Nassau, who canvassed vigorously, but probably not violently, in the Town District, where two prominent Methodists were defeated.<sup>191</sup> The Governor stated that in Harbour Island, a centre of Methodism, “much excitement was displayed, threats of violence in the strongest language were profusely used, and inflammatory addresses were made to the people by the Methodist minister both in and out of the pulpit”.<sup>192</sup> Assaults were committed on the day of the poll and there were two attempts at arson, one at the house where Burnside, the Church Party candidate, was lodging. He alleged there was intimidation of Conservative Party voters. One of those canvassing for the Church Party wrote of Harbour Island: “I have never set foot on so disloyal a place before...People parading the streets with clubs and using threats against anyone voting for Mr. Burnside”.<sup>193</sup> . He stated that he had been told by many that they

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<sup>188</sup>Rawson Rawson to Duke of Buckingham & Chandos, no.132, 19 August 1868, CO23/192/287-291. The Colonial Secretary, Lempriere, was behind a campaign against Dr. Kirkwood; the Governor continued to support him.

<sup>189</sup>One placard of Lempriere read: The majority of the House of Assembly having run from their solemn duty to their sovereign in refusing to provide her with the means of carrying on Her Government. I as the Chief Executive Officer in this colony call upon Her loyal subjects to mark their sense of this insult to the Queen’s Crown and dignity”. Petition to Duke of Buckingham & Chandos. CO23/191/238-240 and 354-359. In Rawson Rawson to Duke of Buckingham & Chandos, CO23/191/257-259 the Governor calls him “over zealous and indiscreet”.

<sup>190</sup>The Disendowment Movement, 43.

<sup>191</sup>Rawson Rawson to Duke of Buckingham & Chandos, 4 May 1868, CO23/191/434-439. Joseph Love was a member, *Nassau Guardian*, 5 December 1866.

<sup>192</sup>Rawson Rawson to Duke of Buckingham & Chandos, 4 May 1868. CO23/191/452-456.

<sup>193</sup>G. A. McGregor to G. C. Anderson, 25 April 1868, CO23/191/573-574. McGregor was a coloured police magistrate.

would have voted for the Church Party, but they were in fear of their lives and property. The Government sent a strong force of policemen and special constables to make sure the elections proceeded freely. However, this proved inadequate and the magistrate requested another detachment of soldiers. Their presence, accompanied by the Attorney General, had the desired effect and the election day itself passed off quietly. The Police Magistrate blamed Rev. Francis Moon for the increased state of agitation. He wrote that this Methodist Minister had exhorted from the pulpit: "The policemen have arrived; they have come to eat your Johnny cakes. Stand your ground".<sup>194</sup> Moon called members of the Church Party "designing and unscrupulous men" and a "set of liars and thieves".<sup>195</sup> The night of the pulpit address by Moon was the night of the fire at Burnside's quarters. The Governor maintained that the Anglican clergy did not profane "their pulpits with political discourses" and tried to maintain order.<sup>196</sup> However, the Governor was not an impartial commentator and members of the Churchmen's Union were apparently in Dunmore Town.<sup>197</sup>

A telegram sent from Havana by the *New York Herald* reported that "at the polls color was arrayed against color".<sup>198</sup> The Governor was quick to inform the Secretary of State that the statement was "wholly untrue" in Nassau and "improbable" in the Out Islands.<sup>199</sup> But he admitted that the question of colour had been raised. The Church of England had asserted that it "provides for the poor and has a toleration and sympathy for the coloured races" and that in that respect it differed from both the Presbyterian and Methodist Churches. Thus the Church Party did raise the question of colour and "their opponents have

<sup>194</sup>G. C. Camplejohn to G. C. Anderson, 26 April 1868, CO23/191/575-576.

<sup>195</sup>Address of Francis Moon, CO23/191/567 enclosed in Rawson Rawson to Duke of Buckingham & Chandos, 25 May 1868, CO23/191/559-563. He exhorted his followers to "use your liberties as Christian patriots and as Protestant Christians". Also the address of Rev. Joshua Jordan, CO23/191/568-573. McGregor reported that two members of the Methodist congregation stated that Rev. Moon said: "The Churchmen are here; they must take the consequences" and that the people in the street were saying: "We have our minister on our side; we will fix them" (McGregor to Police Magistrate, 26 April 1868, CO23/191/576-577).

<sup>196</sup>Rawson Rawson to Duke of Buckingham & Chandos, 25 May 1868. CO23/191/559-563.

<sup>197</sup>The Disendowment Movement, 45. The author of this pamphlet felt that Rawson "has compromised the dignity of his office by making himself a political partisan", *ibid.*, 43. Sending troops to Harbour Island he called "an outrage upon the liberty of British subjects", *ibid.*, 46. He admitted the men of the Churchmen's Union were quiet there.

<sup>198</sup>Telegram from *New York Herald*, Havana, 16 April 1868.

<sup>199</sup>Rawson Rawson to Duke of Buckingham & Chandos, 4 May 1868, CO23/191/434-439.

attempted to make a little political capital by abusing them for doing so". In the circumstances of the known racial divisions in the Methodist Church it would have been surprising if the Church Party had not used the issue among non-white voters.

The Church Party gained two seats overall in the election. In the Town District of Nassau the Conservative Party recorded a clean sweep, ousting Robert Sawyer, who had introduced the Bill, and Harry Saunders, another Wesleyan (see Table 5). In the Eastern District two strong Government supporters, one the Attorney General, were reelected. One from each party was selected for the Western District, Thomson for the Conservatives and Johnson, a Presbyterian, for the Reform Party. A Churchman had made an unsuccessful challenge here. Thus, in Nassau seven out of eight returned members supported the Church. Abaco was a Methodist stronghold and there was no change in representation. In Harbour Island Bruce Burnside, Conservative Party, was defeated, so that all three seats were now held by Reform Party members (two Methodists and one Presbyterian). Ormond Malcolm changed constituencies to be selected for Eleuthera, along with A. T. Holmes and W. G. Rattray, all Reform Party members. There was no contest here. This made the tally ten – seven to the Reform Party. In the remaining seats, Rum Cay, Long Island (2), San Salvador, Crooked Island and one of the seats in Exuma went to the Church Party. Inagua, Grand Bahama and two of the Exuma seats went to the Presbyterians. Andros went to the Wesleyans. In total the Church Party now had thirteen seats and the Reform Party fifteen (nine Wesleyan and six Presbyterian). One member of the Church Party, Henry Adderley, left the Colony soon after the election, which reduced its number to twelve. Timothy Darling, although a Presbyterian, was a member of the Executive Council and was supportive of the Government position.

Table 5. The 1868 Election Results.

District	Elected in 1866	Elected in 1868
Nassau: Town	Henry R. Saunders Robert H. Sawyer Byron Bode Dr. F. Duncombe	T. M. Mathews (C) T. Williams (C) Byron Bode (C) Dr. F. Duncombe (C)
Nassau: Eastern	G. C. Anderson Henry Adderley	G. C. Anderson (C) Henry Adderley (C)
Nassau: Western	John J. Thomson Samuel O. Johnson	John J. Thomson (C) Samuel O. Johnson (W)
Abaco	Raymond Menendez Joseph S. Johnson Samuel P. Saunders	Raymond Menendez (W) Joseph S. Johnson (W) Samuel P. Saunders (W)
Harbour Island	Bruce Burnside M. Menendez George W. Higgs	J. Higgs (W) M. Menendez (W) George W. Higgs (P)
Eleuthera	George Preston George D. Harris Dr. G. Kemp	A. T. Holmes (W) W. G. Rattray (W) O. D. Malcolm (P)
Andros	Robert W. Albury	Robert W. Albury (W)
Long Island	W. G. M. Maclure Richard Sweeting	J. H. Webb (C) D. A. Brice (C)
San Salvador	W. E. Armbrister	W. E. Armbrister (C)
Crooked Island	Richard W. Farrington	Richard Farrington (C)
Inagua	Timothy Darling	Timothy Darling (P)
Exuma	E. B. A. Taylor N. Webb D. L. Farrington	E. B. A. Taylor (C) Dr. W. Maclure (P) J. H. Gamblin (P)
Rum Cay	A. J. Thomson	R. Butler (C)
Grand Bahama	(no seat) <sup>a</sup>	J. H. Young (P)

Source: Election Book: 1808-1868 (Manuscript held in Department of Archives, Nassau).

Note: C = Church Party; P = Presbyterian; W = Wesleyan.

<sup>a</sup> – Andros had two seats in 1866; C. R. Nesbitt held the other Andros seat but had retired.

Ormond Malcolm was elected Speaker of the new House, by fourteen votes to twelve.<sup>200</sup> The first item considered by the Assembly was the disputed seat in the Town District, Robert Sawyer having petitioned the House. There was a counter charge and petition from Williams. The select committee decided in Sawyer's favour, giving the

<sup>200</sup>Votes of the House of Assembly, (1868), 4.

Reform Party another vote and decreasing the Church Party's total to eleven.<sup>201</sup> The Executive Council decided that they would continue to resist Disendowment, but would be prepared to make reasonable changes to the present Establishment to remove objections and reduce expenditure. Only Dr. Kirkwood represented the Opposition view.<sup>202</sup> He advised the Church Party members not to introduce its own measure, as it was likely to end in defeat. He counselled that a second rejection of a total Disendowment measure by the Legislative Council would probably result in moderates accepting a compromise measure.

On 4 August Robert Sawyer again moved for consideration of Disendowment and a bill passed its third reading on 10 August by fifteen votes to eleven.<sup>203</sup> The Legislative Council again rejected it by a majority of six to one.<sup>204</sup> But there was no need of a compromise bill; the decisive event leading to the passing of the Disendowment Bill was the change of Governors in 1869.<sup>205</sup> The new Governor, James Walker, was far more concerned about the financial state of The Bahamas; "the place is in a condition very closely allied to Bankruptcy".<sup>206</sup> He explained: "On my late arrival here I found the most bitter feeling prevailing on the subject [of Disendowment], and so entirely overshadowing every other question that it has been difficult to make the people on either side realize their financial difficulties".<sup>207</sup> The election to replace Henry Adderley resulted in the defeat of Burnside for the Church Party and the victory of Dr. George Kemp, Wesleyan, by a large majority. This weakened the Church Party's position even more. In March 1869 Sawyer introduced

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<sup>201</sup>Ibid., 9-10, 14-17 and 47-49. Select Committee consisted of Holmes, Anderson, J. S. Johnson, Butler and Maclure. This was a partisan vote with a majority of one for Sawyer. Williams was given a seat in the Legislative Council (Rawson Rawson to Duke of Buckingham & Chandos, 10 December 1868, CO23/192/334-335).

<sup>202</sup>Rawson Rawson to Earl Grey, 27 June 1868, CO23/192/83-88.

<sup>203</sup>Votes of the House of Assembly, 69.

<sup>204</sup>Rawson Rawson to Duke of Buckingham & Chandos, 22 August 1868, CO23/192/343-345.

<sup>205</sup>Rawson Rawson to Duke of Buckingham, 12 November 1868, CO23/193/161-162. James Walker took up the office in January 1869.

<sup>206</sup>James Walker to Earl Granville, 4 February 1869, CO23/195/73-75. There is a shift in emphasis in the Governor's letters; indeed the Disestablishment issue gets hardly a mention from Walker, compared with Rawson's long diatribes on the subject.

<sup>207</sup>James Walker to Earl Granville, 29 April 1869, CO23/195/293-294.

the Bill again; it passed its third reading by sixteen votes to nine.<sup>208</sup> Suddenly, the Legislative Council no longer stood in the way. There was no change in the balance of the Council (Williams had replaced Hall) but Walker reports that “a parley took place” and a compromise was agreed upon by which the operation of the Bill was to be suspended for seven years.<sup>209</sup> The Act to amend the Ecclesiastical Laws of the Colony and for other Purposes (32 Vic. c.27) was assented to on 1 June 1869. Thus, after such a bitter battle and the colony divided with support for two ‘parties’, the Bill was passed with a mere whimper of opposition. One Methodist minister reflected: “We have had a year of terrible agitation over this subject; a vast amount of bad blood has been stirred up; private friendships have been ruptured by the intensity of political feeling. The line which separated the Churchman from the Dissenter has been drawn deeper and wider than it ever was before”.<sup>210</sup>

Organising along party lines had been significant for the success of the Reformers. The attitude of the Governor was just as important; Rawson, just as Cockburn had done before him, had done all in his power to stem the tide against the Established Church.<sup>211</sup> Thus ‘liberals’ were equated with Opposition in this struggle. Also key was the religious affiliations of the population; the House merely mirrored the Nonconformist preferences of the majority (although not the specific denominations). The disputes over religious equality were fought initially outside the Assembly, led by a militant clergy (not least by the Presbyterian minister).<sup>212</sup> The historian of the Church in the nineteenth century West Indies stated that the movement towards Disestablishment and Disendowment generally “became associated with a principle of government which for years had been gathering force, namely,

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<sup>208</sup>Votes of the House of Assembly, 32, 55 and 61.

<sup>209</sup>James Walker to Earl Granville, 29 April 1869. CO23/195/293-294 and Votes of the House of Assembly (1869), 86-87. Williams, Dillet and Chipman still voted against the Bill.

<sup>210</sup>Rev. G. Huxtable, Nassau, to General Secretaries, WMS. 6 March 1869; Box 220, no.31; Fiche Box no. 28, sheet 1385.

<sup>211</sup>“We think the Governor, although he had the right to present his own views, yet should not have opposed and thwarted the most important, powerful, and responsible branch of the Legislature in carrying out theirs”, Adderley, Colonial Policy, 33.

<sup>212</sup>One Methodist minister denied the clergy had any part in the Disendowment movement in The Bahamas. He claimed: “The Methodist body, as such, was never set in motion, at all, on this or any other political questions” (Rev. H. Cheeseborough, Nassau, to Rev. Hoole, 9 January 1869; Box 220, no.27; Fiche Box no. 28, sheet 385). The evidence against Rev. Francis Moon and Rev. Joshua Jordan suggests otherwise.

the rule of the majority”<sup>213</sup> However, the new parties were formed over one issue and the weakness of the unity of the Reform Party was soon apparent when the Presbyterians broke ranks over other retrenchment measures. The Opposition initiated an ‘extreme’ measure of retrenchment in order to reduce expenditure but avoid the income tax that had been proposed. The Governor had already noted that the shopkeeping class would suffer from an income tax. The number of this class among House members had increased and was “likely to become an impediment to enlightened legislation”. Voting for this Opposition measure were twelve shopkeepers and three merchants and in the minority five public officers (including two barristers and one physician), two barristers, one doctor and two merchants. Three members of the Church party voted ‘for’, viz. one merchant and two shopkeepers. The Presbyterians voted against. Thus there was division between Methodists and Presbyterians. Neither Retrenchment scheme nor the Income Tax bill was passed.<sup>214</sup>

The decades of the 1840s and 1850s had been quite uneventful in many ways in The Bahamas. The representatives of the elite in the Colony had restructured their opposition to the Government, no longer looking back to the past but assessing their own desires for the present and future. Religious equality was pursued for its own merits, in the eyes of a majority of Dissenters, but also as part of a programme of retrenchment after the ending of the boom period of the American Civil War. Over expenditure by Government, particularly on salaries, would be a permanent plank of the Opposition until the 1920s. Curtailing spending on social reforms and a preference for import duties over income or other progressive taxes would be other items in the Opposition’s programme. This platform reflected the personal interests of the individual members of the Opposition. A more detailed examination of the white elite and the composition of the House of Assembly and the Councils will demonstrate this.

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<sup>213</sup>Caldecott, *Church in The West Indies*, 135.

<sup>214</sup>Rawson Rawson to Duke of Buckingham & Chandos, 14 October 1868, CO23/193/122-125.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE "UPPER TEN": THE WHITE ELITE OF BAHAMIAN SOCIETY, 1840-1900

Reference has been made so far to the elite of The Bahamas without examining closely the make up of this ruling class. 'Class' is used here to signify both a political class and a social class. As a political class, this was a power group, not absolutely exclusive but heavily weighted in favour of the white sector of society. "The political class is probably always motivated by some socio-economic interest [;] sometimes this interest may be couched in a religious, racial, or even a nationalistic rationale".<sup>1</sup> Domination of the economy was key to the power base of the white Bahamian position, but their class consciousness was seldom expressed in economic terms. Not all whites belonged to the same social class; thus those at the top of the social pyramid exhibited a certain status-consciousness. They were meticulous in keeping class distinctions observed and were the "real bulwark of the status-quo".<sup>2</sup> After Emancipation, the object of most was to keep their former slaves as nearly as possible in the same condition and place in society.<sup>3</sup> Coercion had to take a new form. Thus race relations were "not an abstract, natural, immemorial feeling of mutual antipathy between groups, but rather a practical exploitative relationship".<sup>4</sup> The "superstructure" or institutional framework emerged out of, interacted with and

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<sup>1</sup>Oliver C. Cox, Caste, Class and Race: A Study in Social Dynamics (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1959), 159.

<sup>2</sup>See *ibid.*, 362.

<sup>3</sup>Philip Mason, Patterns of Dominance (London, Oxford University Press, 1970), 279.

<sup>4</sup>Cox, Caste, Class and Race, 332.

modified the economic base.<sup>5</sup> Thus, The Bahamas exhibited the colour concept that M. G. Smith called “structural colour”, referring to “those factors and aspects of the social process, and the relations between them, that give the society its distinctive form as an arrangement of units and processes”. It is “an abstract analytic category reflecting the distribution and types of power, authority, knowledge, and wealth, which together define and constitute the social framework”.<sup>6</sup> As would be expected in the socially and culturally plural colony, the superordinate sector tried to maintain the total social structure.<sup>7</sup>

### The White Social Class

L. D. Powles, the Stipendiary Magistrate, wrote that Nassau society in the late nineteenth century was “divided into ‘the Upper Upper ten’, eligible for invitation to Government House on all occasions, the ‘Lower Upper ten’, only invited on state occasions; the ‘respectable middle class’, including everybody who does not go to Government House but is acknowledged as white, and the ‘lower classes’, including everybody who is admittedly coloured”.<sup>8</sup> Colour was of defining importance and, although Powles admitted some ‘coloureds’ (i.e. of mixed race) were invited to Government House, he relegated all non-whites to the lower classes because the ‘conchs’ did so.<sup>9</sup> Powles also explained that a good deal of the upper crust of Nassau society was not of pure white blood, but these so-called whites were fair enough to pass for white in Europe and were considered white in Nassau. He stated: “Where the line that separates the white man, *so-called*, from the

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<sup>5</sup>The phraseology is Michael Burawoy’s in his article on South Africa, Michael Burawoy, “Race, Class and Colonialism”, Social and Economic Studies 23 (1974): 545.

<sup>6</sup>M. G. Smith, The Plural Society in the British West Indies (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1965), 65.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, 148.

<sup>8</sup>L. D. Powles, Land of the Pink Pearl or Recollections of Life in the Bahamas (London: Sampson, Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1888), 120. In mid-century the Andersons, Doyles, Adderleys and Darlings would have been in the topmost bracket. At the end of the century, the Malcolms, Moseleys, Adderleys, Sawyers and Armbristers.

<sup>9</sup>‘Conch’ was the nickname given to the Old Inhabitants by the Loyalists, but it was soon used indiscriminately to mean ‘white Bahamians’. It was the non-white Bahamians who generally used the term, usually in a derisory fashion, but white expatriates also employed it.

coloured is drawn in Nassau, must ever remain a mystery to the stranger”.<sup>10</sup> American James Stark made the same observation: “It is difficult in the Bahamas to know just where to draw the line, for although there is plenty of pure white blood throughout the island, yet a good deal of what passes for white is decidedly mixed”.<sup>11</sup> As one journalist remarked though: “One must have some pretense for Caucasian ancestry to be in society”.<sup>12</sup>

Sir Etienne Dupuch described white Nassau society at the beginning of the twentieth century in similar terms to Powles: the “Ins” and the “Outs”, the “Ins” being those invited to Government House and having the Governor’s ear, and the “Outs” being the rest of the whites.<sup>13</sup> Dupuch added that “every man had a place and every man was expected to know his place” in this hierarchical structure.<sup>14</sup> In fact, the Bahamian social system functioned, without too many social tensions, because each person knew his place in the social order and the behaviour expected of him.

The intermarriage among so small a number of families led to a very intimately related upper class. One Methodist minister remarked: “The white people here have intermarried for so many generations past, and are all related to each other and in most instances in several ways”.<sup>15</sup> These interrelationships could prove extremely useful in creating political power blocks. As Powles noted: “The House of Assembly is little less than a family gathering of Nassau whites, nearly all of whom are related to each other, either by blood or marriage”.<sup>16</sup>

Powles painted an unflattering picture of the dominant white group, whom he accused of being “a narrow-minded, overbearing clique, who imagines themselves [*sic*] to

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 121. Another expatriate sojourner agreed with Powles. Sergeant Major Bacot wrote: “Most persons of moderate hue would feel justified in placing themselves in the white rank”, Sergeant Major Bacot, The Bahamas: A Sketch (London: Longmans, Green, Reader and Dyer, 1869), 77.

<sup>11</sup>James H. Stark, History and Guide to the Bahama Islands (Boston: by author, 1891), 178.

<sup>12</sup>E. B. Worthington, “A Sketch of The Bahamas”, The Canadian Magazine (May-October 1899), 519.

<sup>13</sup>Etienne Dupuch, Tribune Story (London: Ernest Benn, 1967), 20.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 37.

<sup>15</sup>Rev. T. Raspas, Nassau, to Rev. C. Osborn, WMS, 15 September 1890; West Indian Correspondence: Bahamas, Box 222, no.15; Fiche Box no. 30, sheet 1450.

<sup>16</sup>Powles, Pink Pearl, 41.

be a species of untitled aristocracy”.<sup>17</sup> Stark agreed: “The isolation of these islands has very naturally led to a feeling of exclusiveness among the upper classes”.<sup>18</sup> Powles found them uncultivated and shallow; “the upper circle of Nassau is their summum bonum of social perfection”.<sup>19</sup> He reckoned they were not well read and had little experience of or interest in the world outside Nassau. He was not alone in such judgements; such comments abound in the nineteenth century literature on The Bahamas. But all descriptions of Bahamian society come from expatriate writers, with a varying amount of knowledge of the Colony depending whether they were visitors, Government officials or journalists. The most valid comments come from those who resided in The Bahamas, but many British and American expatriates had a condescending attitude towards the Bahamian white elite. Certainly society was limited in such a small town, isolated from the centres of social and cultural life. As Governor Mathew commented in a private letter to James Stephen: “Our Society is very limited – I wish I could say a good word for its tone”.<sup>20</sup> The limitations of such a small society had their effect on the Governors’ opinions of even the most competent officers. Despite describing George Anderson “the foremost man in the Colony”, Governor James Walker said his drawback was that “to him, Nassau is the world”.<sup>21</sup> Similarly Walker considered William Doyle, while “enlightened” and “well read”, “in his view of public matters he labours under the almost inevitable consequence of a long continued residence in a small place”.<sup>22</sup>

But not all views of Nassau were so negative. James Stark wrote: “The white inhabitants are hospitable, well informed and agreeable”.<sup>23</sup> Edgar Mayhew Bacon, resident

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<sup>17</sup>Powles, Pink Pearl, 109.

<sup>18</sup>Stark, The Bahama Islands, 177.

<sup>19</sup>Powles, Pink Pearl, 125.

<sup>20</sup>George Mathew to James Stephen, 10 May 1846, CO23/122/236-239. He wrote that he only habitually frequented the house of the Chief Justice, John Lees, who was British but a long time resident. In view of Mathew’s own questionable lifestyle this may not be the most reliable of sources (although it was written just prior to his quarrel with Archdeacon Trew).

<sup>21</sup>James Walker to Lord Kimberley, 18 February 1871, CO23/204/124-128.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

<sup>23</sup>Stark, The Bahama Islands, 176.

in Nassau in mid-century, referred to the “simple but cultured and proud aristocracy” of the town.<sup>24</sup> He concentrated, though, on the “small town intimacy that found expression in continual gaiety”. The white elite liked entertaining, particularly dancing. Amelia Defries, a regular winter resident, wrote of the local social scene: “the luncheons, card-parties, picnics, bathing parties and dinners, as well as motor-drives, and theatricals among this hospitable group make of the Nassau season something different from that of other resorts”.<sup>25</sup> Although she wrote during the new century, only the motorised transport was innovatory; in the nineteenth century it was fashionable to take the air in the afternoon, carriages for the ladies and horses for the gentlemen.<sup>26</sup> Hesketh Bell, who came to The Bahamas in 1894 from Britain, also considered: “The local ‘society’, though small, was very pleasant and hospitable, and life in Nassau was very agreeable”.<sup>27</sup> His diary included all the activities mentioned by Defries. She underscored, though, what many other outsiders felt: that gossip marred social life, along with “the usual pettiness and pretensions of Society on a small scale”.<sup>28</sup> Powles complained about the small talk and scandal and the favourite topic: “the iniquities of the coloured servants, and the inferiority of the coloured race in general”.<sup>29</sup>

The main distinction in slave society had been between slave and free; in the reconstructed society race and colour came to be the dominant consideration. In colonies such as The Bahamas, with a considerable number of whites, a more rigid and formal pattern of race relations emerged. White dominance, in face of numerical inferiority, was all-important.<sup>30</sup> Racism was rife among the white Bahamians and was used to enforce dominance. Writing from Nassau, in 1880, new arrival Rev. J. C. Richardson lamented that

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<sup>24</sup>Edgar Mayhew Bacon, Notes on Nassau, the Capital of the Bahamas (New York, 1927), 37.

<sup>25</sup>Amelia Defries, In a Forgotten Colony (Nassau: Nassau Guardian, 1917), 132.

<sup>26</sup>See “An Isle of June”, Scribner’s Monthly, November 1877, 9-26.

<sup>27</sup>Hesketh Bell, Diaries 1890-1899, 54, Royal Commonwealth Society Library, University of Cambridge.

<sup>28</sup>Amelia Defries, The Fortunate Islands: Being Adventures with the Negro in the Bahamas (London: Cecil Palmer, 1929), 14.

<sup>29</sup>Powles, Pink Pearl, 129.

<sup>30</sup>Figures for 1841: whites: 5,958 and blacks: 17,502 (from Report on The Bahamas 1861-1876: Colonial Secretary Papers ed. Patrice Williams (Nassau, Dept. of Archives, 1997). 3). After this time figures for the different groups are not separated. But the Colonial Secretary estimated in 1871 that four fifths of the population were black or coloured (ibid., 9).

“in the Bahamas colour prejudice prevails to a fearful extent”.<sup>31</sup> Much of this racial prejudice was a legacy of the slave system that identified black Bahamians not only with the menial and inferior status of slave, but with savagery and inhumanity. A racist ideology developed that could not be eradicated by the ending of slavery. Being white in The Bahamas, as throughout the West Indies, had special meaning, so that a certain degree of equality among whites was accepted (although there was still class snobbery). This meant that the economic interests of blacks and whites of the lower classes did not lead to their coming together.<sup>32</sup> One Methodist minister noted that racism “seems to be always most rampant where the white folk are specially illiterate”.<sup>33</sup> The Colonial Secretary, Captain Henry Jackson, when he visited Green Turtle Cay in 1891 informed the Secretary of State that most of the inhabitants there (whites of Loyalist decent) “have descended in the social scale, but they retain their pride of race, and keep rigidly aloof from the coloured people”.<sup>34</sup> Certainly, it was the case that racism was more blatant among the poorer classes of the Out-Islands. More wealth and a more elevated social position meant the white elite, principally of Nassau, did not live in close proximity to black Bahamians and contact between the two groups was normally in the context of master/servant. Divisions of class hid racial divisions in Nassau, but the elite whites shared the colour prejudice. The upper class whites could use notions of whiteness and racial superiority to divide the poorer whites from their fellow class members and enhance their own rule.

The white West Indian after Abolition exhibited racism of the crudest type, particularly noted in the white Out Islanders in The Bahamas. The Methodist ministers regularly reported, with some embarrassment, to their superiors in London the racist attitudes of their congregations. Rev. S. Annear felt that prejudice was greater in The Bahamas than in the other islands of the West Indies of which he had personal experience,

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<sup>31</sup>Rev. J. C. Richardson, Nassau, to Rev. M. Osborn, WMS, 15 May 1880; Box 221, no. 38; West Indian Correspondence: Bahamas, Fiche Box no. 29, sheet no. 1434.

<sup>32</sup>There was the more pernicious parallel in South Africa where “the prevailing ideology of white supremacy and the institutional framework which discriminated on the basis of colour, militated against inter-racial solidarity and led to shared interests between landed and landless Afrikaners” (Burawoy, “Race, Class and Colonialism”, 537.)

<sup>33</sup>Rev. R. Whittleton, Rock Sound, Eleuthera, to Rev. M. Osborn, WMS, 13 February 1882; Box 221, no.21; West Indian Correspondence: Bahamas, Fiche Box no. 29, sheet no. 1437.

<sup>34</sup>Henry Jackson to Lord Knutsford, no. 101, 2 September 1891. CO23/233/298-304.

viz. Jamaica, Barbados and Grenada. He wrote: "The prejudice which exists against colour is the principal reason which the devil uses to crush this place."<sup>35</sup> His congregation in Green Turtle Cay was divided on racial lines, white on one side and black on the other. The Sunday School was similarly divided and he confessed he dared not put a white child and a black child in the same class. In the public school there was not one white girl and only two or three white boys as the parents declared they would rather their children be reared in ignorance than attend school with a black child. Rev. T. Lofthouse had experienced a similar prejudice at Green Turtle Cay a decade earlier when he had proposed that non-whites should have prayer-meetings on Monday evenings, an evening not utilised by the whites for their meetings. No objection had been raised, but at the first Monday meeting, a crowd of young white men and women surrounded the chapel and interrupted the proceedings by shouting, blowing conch shells and hurling stones. The displeased whites threatened to withdraw their support from the chapel as they did not want black people to sit on their seats, even on evenings when they were unused. The minister hastily suspended the Monday night meetings, fearing bloodshed and riot.<sup>36</sup> Harbour Island suffered similar problems of white prejudice in its Methodist chapel. When the new chapel was built, whites refused to allow any arrangement whereby they would give up their exclusive right to the front pews, despite protest from the Governor, who had granted four hundred pounds of Government money to the chapel. The Rev. J. Blackwell encountered daily examples of prejudice there, for example if a missionary called on a black man to pray, the whites refused to kneel.<sup>37</sup> Seven years later, Rev. J. Hartwell came across the same intolerant attitudes: "I have been forced into decided collision with the unchristian distinction of caste. I found the usage had been to consider the two races as almost two distinct churches worshipping under the same roof...One zealot of the epidermal aristocracy seriously expressed her doubts to me whether black spirits and white would be allowed to mingle in

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<sup>35</sup>Rev. S. Annear, Green Turtle Cay, Abaco, to General Secretaries, WMS, 8 January 1849; Box 218, no.2; West Indian Correspondence: Bahamas, Fiche Box no. 27, sheet 131.

<sup>36</sup>Rev. T. Lofthouse, Abaco, to Revs. Bunting, Beecham & Alden, WMS, 28 October 1834; Box no. 135, no.23; West Indian Correspondence General, Fiche Box no. 11, sheet 512.

<sup>37</sup>Rev. J. Blackwell, Harbour Island, to General Secretaries, WMS, 24 February 1846; Box 218, no. 3; West Indian Correspondence: Bahamas, Fiche box no. 27, sheet 1320.

the courts above!”<sup>38</sup> There was more trouble for the Reverend J. Hartwell when a new chapel was constructed at Spanish Wells, again with the help of a grant from the Legislature. Not approving of the seat arrangements, most whites boycotted the services and then nailed up the building. They persecuted those whites that had stayed. This time the minister decided not to give in; he stood on a chair in the middle of the settlement and preached loudly. On this occasion, the whites submitted to the minister’s plan, although still it was one of separation.<sup>39</sup>

Yet, in 1871, Rev. H. Bleby could still deny racism within the Methodist Church in The Bahamas. “If there is any difference at all, it is only what is caused by the white people being more numerous in proportion, and forming the wealthier and educated class. We have coloured men as Government officers, at the Bar, and in the Legislature, and in our chapels you will see the coloured and white kneeling together at the Communion table.”<sup>40</sup> He did admit separation of races in chapels on the Out Islands. But he reasoned it was not the case in Nassau; Trinity Methodist Chapel’s whites had the prominent pews simply because they were more prosperous. While there is truth in what he says, there are two provisos. Firstly, he is referring to the admission of Bahamians of mixed race into these institutions. Secondly, when the congregation became more inclusive, some worshippers at Trinity Chapel moved across the road to St. Andrew’s Kirk. When the Wesleyan Missionary Society decided to post a black minister to the Nassau circuit, the Reverend R. Whittleton declared that to appoint “a coloured brother” would drive whites to the Episcopal Church.<sup>41</sup>

This racism was bolstered as the century progressed by a number of pseudo-scientific and philosophic arguments (phrenology, anthropology, Social Darwinism, teleography, Anglo-Saxonism). Whites felt all would be well as long as the social hierarchy was maintained. They were in tune with the comment of *The Times* of London of November 1865: “As long as the black man has a strong white Government and a numerous white

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<sup>38</sup>Rev. J. Hartwell, Harbour Island, to General Secretaries, WMS, 25 August 1853; Box 219, no. 24; West Indian Correspondence: Bahamas, Fiche Box no. 28, sheet 1354.

<sup>39</sup>Rev. J. Hartwell, Harbour Island, to General Secretaries, WMS, 2 August 1855; Box 219, no. 17; West Indian Correspondence: Bahamas, Fiche Box no. 28, sheet no. 1358.

<sup>40</sup>Rev. H. Bleby, Nassau, to Rev. Boyce, WMS, 5 January 1871; Box 221, no.1; West Indian Correspondence: Bahamas, Fiche Box no. 28, sheet no. 1394.

<sup>41</sup>Rev. R. Whittleton, Rock Sound, Eleuthera, to Rev. M. Osborn, WMS, 13 February 1882; Box 221, no. 38; West Indian Correspondence: Bahamas, Fiche Box no. 29, sheet 1434.

population to control him he is capable of living as a respectable member of society".<sup>42</sup> As Patrick Bryan wrote in the case of Jamaica, racism was "a hegemonic weapon"<sup>43</sup>, but how far this was consciously pursued and how far it was an unreflective, ingrained trait is difficult to estimate.

It is also difficult to demonstrate the racist attitudes of the white Bahamians towards blacks, as they did not write down their thoughts. Patronising remarks and the standard stereotyping are to be found in the comments of expatriates living amongst the Bahamian whites. Those such as Father F. Matthews gave his thoughts on the black population without rancour, but with the generally held Victorian views of black people clearly apparent. "It goes without saying, that they are good natured, merry, and lighthearted.... Intensely emotional, they act on the impulse of the moment, and are easily influenced in most things by excited talking or haranguing. I do not think the charge of indolence can be brought against the people of the Bahamas.... But what is lacking is the spirit of enterprise; and the easy going contented nature of the population leads them to accept many hard conditions that few people would submit to".<sup>44</sup> Most magazine articles refer to "loafers", "lotus-eaters", and "a happy, contented people".<sup>45</sup> Mockery is made of the Sunday fashions of the blacks. Thus one wrote: "They are got up regardless of expense, and in the most ludicrous manner, perfect caricatures of fashion; the ladies in the most gorgeous colours, all furbelows and starch with night-mares of hats".<sup>46</sup> Another: "It is killing to see the stylish ones punish themselves on Sundays with high silk hats and black cloth suits. No pen could convey the idea of a Grantstown dude".<sup>47</sup> Only one American journalist remarked that he might have got one of his ideas from "one of the Nassau gentlemen". "Here are ten thousand darkies who will do anything you want for a shilling, and I don't see the least reason for any white person doing any work at all-as long as he has a shilling....[The gentleman in question] said:

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<sup>42</sup>Quoted in Christine Bolt, Victorian Attitudes to Race (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971), 76.

<sup>43</sup>Patrick Bryan, The Jamaican People 1880-1902: Race, Class and Social Control (Macmillan Caribbean, 1991).

<sup>44</sup>Rev. F. B. Matthews, San Salvador Described 1885-1889, ed. Patrice Williams (Nassau: Dept. of Archives, n.d.). 6.

<sup>45</sup>See for example "An Isle of June", "A Sketch of The Bahamas" and "In Sunny Lands".

<sup>46</sup>Worthington, "Sketch of The Bahamas", 519.

<sup>47</sup>Drysdale, "In Sunny Lands", 11.

'I do enough work looking after things. I don't propose to work with my hands as long as I have a shilling in my pocket'.<sup>48</sup> This seems to give expression to the idea of "negro" as synonymous with "labourer", the racial exploitation of labour.<sup>49</sup> Another journalist recorded the comment of one white Bahamian Government official: "They are just children – and have to be treated as such".<sup>50</sup> But generally the Bahamians' own words are missing from the literature. Visitors did note the expectation of white Bahamians for deference from black people. "Outside of busy Bay Street, I soon found, every negro speaks to every white person he meets, touching his hat and expecting a nod in return". And "[the young boys] never think of speaking to a white person without taking off their hats, and 'sir' and 'ma-am' are as natural to them as eating sugar-cane".<sup>51</sup> 'Boy' was still the commonly used term for black labourers. The Bahamian newspapers were generally circumspect, but Leon Dupuch, a newspaper editor himself, pulled up the editor of the *Nassau Guardian* for the racist attitude of its editorial on the Library Report of 1905. He quoted the following sentence from it: "When it is remembered that about one-sixth of the population of New Providence is *white*, it seems certainly astonishing that so few should take advantage of the benefit to be derived from the excellent Library in their midst which can be enjoyed at such a moderate cost". The paper declined to comment on his query as to its meaning.<sup>52</sup> Most of the actions that demonstrated deep-seated racism were day-to-day occurrences and hence did not warrant recording and were accepted by all whites. One incident that did eventually find itself into the Government dispatches (four years later) concerned the two corps of volunteer militia, one white and one coloured. Charles Nesbitt, the Colonial Secretary, had proposed in 1866 that J. J. M. Thomson, a coloured officer of the Corps of Volunteer Artillery, should move the Address to the Governor and Albury, a white officer of the Corps of Volunteer Rifles,

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<sup>48</sup>Ibid., 6.

<sup>49</sup>See page 32.

<sup>50</sup>Richard Le Gallienne, "Nassau of the Bahamas", *Harpers Magazine* (December 1915), 24. This article is full of racist language. His description of the police court reads: "A paternally patient magistrate disentangles the usually tiny and pitiful troubles of his black 'children', ferreting out the absurd facts from evidence given with bewildering circumlocution and in a dialect which the stranger strives in vain to follow, coaxing preposterously thick-headed witnesses, and dropping into their own darky baby-talk to make them feel at home" (Ibid.).

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., 6 and 26-7.

<sup>52</sup>*Nassau Guardian*, 1 March 1905.

should second it. This caused conflict over precedence and, as Governor Rawson had predicted, raised the colour question. It caused much excitement in the community and led to the disbandment of one of the corps and the virtual end of the other.<sup>53</sup>

There was not legal segregation in The Bahamas, but there was white exclusiveness as they segregated themselves in their residential areas and social activities. Often a white Bahamian would meet a coloured Bahamian on friendly terms for business, on committees or even in Church<sup>54</sup>, but not in the home or club. In Nassau, the northern ridge was the northern boundary of black settlement. There were several segregated Out Island settlements too, such as Dunmore Town on Harbour Island, New Plymouth on Green Turtle Cay and Governor's Harbour, Eleuthera. Three-quarters of Christ Church's pews were subject to pew rents, ensuring the whites had the centre front seats. Few whites would attend St. Agnes in Grant's Town or St. Mary's in Delancy Town. The priests in all the Anglican Churches were white, even though a number of non-white Bahamians had trained for the ministry. The segregation of the Methodist Church has already been remarked on. Public school education was mixed, but few whites sent their children to it. The wealthier whites tutored their children privately and then sent them abroad. The Boy's Central School and the Anglican Nassau Grammar School did provide secondary education for those non-whites who could afford it, but these were few in number. Queen's College, founded in 1889 by members of the Methodist and Presbyterian upper classes, was for whites only. One area of blatant segregation was on the 'Dart', the mail boat running between Nassau and Harbour Island, where only whites were allowed to enter the cabin.<sup>55</sup>

Despite racist feelings among the white elite, a certain degree of co-optation of the coloured middle class was tolerated. The latter was encouraged to adopt elitist values and attitudes to law and order and social institutions. David Lowenthal stated that a plural society could be kept in equilibrium by "elite coercion, economic necessity, and widespread emulation of elitist values".<sup>56</sup> In this vein the Colonial Secretary, C.R. Nesbitt, could congratulate the coloured classes in The Bahamas for demonstrating that they deserved

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<sup>53</sup>CO23/195 and CO23/204/429-430.

<sup>54</sup>Although the pews would be arranged in hierarchical order.

<sup>55</sup>Powles, Pink Pearl, 210.

<sup>56</sup>David Lowenthal, West Indian Societies (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 90.

rights and privileges by their adoption of approved values and mores. The evidence he cited was “the abandonment of frivolous pleasures for more serious occupations; and particularly for the strong respect evinced for the great moral injunctions of social life, such as the solemnization of marriage, the education of their children, and their attendance at public worship”.<sup>57</sup> Despite this co-option, coloured Bahamians could still encounter problems, as this comment by C. R. Nesbitt to the Colonial Office concerning Thomas Dillet, the son of a coloured member of the Assembly, indicates: “Peculiar difficulties may possibly impede the professional, and social advancement, of Mr. T.W.H. Dillet, in this, his native country, which would probably not be encountered elsewhere”.<sup>58</sup>

The favours granted the mixed-bloods largely depended on their degree of whiteness. ‘Shade’ was an important factor in West Indian societies. “Degrees of color tend to become a determinant of status in a continuous social-class gradient, with whites in its upper reaches”.<sup>59</sup> Of course, this had a knock on effect, so that there were colour distinctions among the coloured population too. Etienne Dupuch wrote that the coloureds were split into groups “determined entirely by degree of colour, starting with black at the bottom, through to off-black, dark brown, brown, light brown, ‘high-yaller’- and near white”.<sup>60</sup> An American described the varieties of shades, rather more picturesquely, as varying “from Baker’s chocolate to indelible ink”.<sup>61</sup> The prejudice of the mixed-blood was derived from the dominant prejudice of whites and “strives to identify his racial sentiments with those of whites”.<sup>62</sup> The white class is “envied, admired, and imitated religiously, but they are never questioned”.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>57</sup>Charles R. Nesbitt, preface to The Vision and Other Poems, in Blank Verse, by John Boyd (London: Longman and Company, 1834), v.

<sup>58</sup>C. R. Nesbitt to Earl Grey, no. 57, 25 November 1847, CO23/126/400.

<sup>59</sup>Cox, Caste, Class and Race, 360. M. G. Smith stated: “In British West Indian colonies there is a clear overt rank-order of different pheno-typical colors in terms of a prestige scale, which places white phenotypes at the highest and black phenotypes at the lowest points” (Smith, The Plural Society, 60).

<sup>60</sup>Dupuch, Tribune Story, 37. ‘Yaller’ is used today as complexional colour, as is the more common ‘bright’.

<sup>61</sup>Drysdale, “In Sunny Lands”, 5.

<sup>62</sup>Cox, Caste, Class and Race, 361, N7.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., 361-362.

The white Bahamian elite might have delusions of grandeur, but its members were not individually particularly wealthy. The Rev. G. Lester wrote in 1893: “We have not a wealthy man in all the Bahamas. One of our London ‘big men’ could buy up the entire lot of our petty princes”.<sup>64</sup> An anonymous writer to L.D. Powles wrote in the same vein: “They have tastes, habits, airs and manners of rich people, when they are as poor as church mice”.<sup>65</sup> Likewise Governor Blake reported to the Secretary of State: “There are no wealthy men here, and very few of average political intelligence”.<sup>66</sup> This state of affairs would not much alter until the Prohibition Era of the 1920s. However, the members of the Nassau elite were able to control what little capital, credit and banking facilities there were in The Bahamas. Howard Johnson calls the dominant group “the agro-commercial bourgeoisie”<sup>67</sup> and it has been seen how they controlled the economic levers of power through the systems of land tenure, manipulation of credit and coercive labour systems. The prosperity of the merchant class largely derived from its control of the import and export trade. They controlled much of the land in The Bahamas too, as well as the salt lakes, the sponge fleets and the shipping agencies.<sup>68</sup> Many importers were also retailers and the stores owned by employers of labour were a vital component of the credit and truck system. But this wealth was relative and many merchants were also in need of credit from the local bank. In 1886, James Carmichael Smith, a coloured member of the Assembly, was involved in a discussion, conducted through the pages of the *Nassau Guardian*, with James Gardiner, a British scientific expert. He claimed there was seventy thousand pounds of capital available in the Colony for investment. Gardiner argued that, if there was that amount, it belonged to only about half a dozen merchants and the rest had no capital worth speaking of. He noted that when the Public Bank failed in 1885, most merchants, bar three or four, were found to be heavily in debt to the Bank; they were now paying off their debts with borrowed money at high

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<sup>64</sup>Rev. G. Lester, Nassau, to Rev. Marshall Hartley, WMS, 12 December 1893; Box 222, no. 55; West Indian Correspondence: Bahamas, Fiche Box no. 30, sheet 1458.

<sup>65</sup>Extract from a private letter to L. D. Powles, unsigned and undated. CO23/235/279-285, and enclosed in Powles, London, to Marquis of Ripon, 29 October 1892, CO23/235/277-278.

<sup>66</sup>Henry Blake to Earl of Derby, 10 May 1884, CO23/224/208-212.

<sup>67</sup>Howard Johnson, *The Bahamas from Slavery to Servitude, 1783-1933* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996), 98.

<sup>68</sup>The control of shipping was one of the factors militating against the independent production of pineapples in Eleuthera. Independent producers found they could not ship their perishable product.

interest.<sup>69</sup> Local merchants did set up another bank, the Bank of Nassau, but it too was on shaky ground, although supported by the Government, and it eventually failed in 1916.<sup>70</sup> The anonymous writer to Powles confirmed Gardiner's assessment: "All the merchants in Nassau, with a few exceptions which I will name, are mortgaged head and heels to money lenders".<sup>71</sup> His list had twenty names but he observed: "You see how few society people figure in this list". In fact, several were not merchants and at least one was coloured. So what about the Upper Upper Ten? He asserted Dick Farrington was bankrupt "at anytime" during the last twenty years; Otis Johnson was in the same state; the Moseleys did not own anything as their house was mortgaged to "ole Folkes"; the Sawyers were the same – everything mortgaged and the "Menendez people" were "just as bad", but were bailed out by in-laws<sup>72</sup>. The writer noted: There are dozens of black men in Nassau, with house property and orchards who have more money than half of the whites".<sup>73</sup> The reality was, though, in The Bahamas wealth, in liquid capital, did not assure dominance.

#### The British Administrative Class

The British administration was expected by the elite to promote the local white supremacy. The expatriate bureaucrats interacted with the local whites both in the work place and socially. In fact, the domination of the bureaucracy by whites helped to enforce

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<sup>69</sup>*Nassau Guardian*, 16 October 1886.

<sup>70</sup>The allegations of corruption and fraud led to court proceedings involving prominent merchants. There had previously been resignations of two directors, one of whom committed suicide. See page

<sup>71</sup> Extract from a private letter to L. D. Powles, unsigned and undated, CO23/235/279-285, and enclosed in Powles. London, to Marquis of Ripon, 29 October 1892. CO23/235/277-278. The exceptions were J. H. Young; Higgs (which?); George Higgs; M. C. Knowles; John Alfred; Albert North; Joseph Brown; Dr. Albury; C. T. Sands; Rev. F. Moon; C. S. Henry; T.P. Moore; Dr. Kemp; E.C. Kemp; "Old Folkes"; Mrs. Maxwell; Pyfrom (which?); Pritchard (which?); H. C. Albury; Uriah Sands of Abaco.

<sup>72</sup>He claimed one Menendez married a Yorkshire girl and her father capitalised the firm of Clough and Menendez.

<sup>73</sup>He mentioned two by name: David Patton, who owned a livery stable, and Ranger, who looked like "a drayman" but was worth "at least twelve hundred pounds in gold and silver, besides houses and land". He could also have mentioned the Adderleys (Alliday and his sons), who owned extensive property and businesses just off Bay Street.

the racial and class distinctions.<sup>74</sup> Bahamians, however, increasingly resented appointment of expatriates to local Government offices. When a local candidate, Gilbert Smith, was not appointed to the post of Receiver General in 1856, despite having been deputy and having acted in the post on the death of the holder, the *Bahama Herald* protested: "According to the doctrine of the Colonial Office it appears that the Colonists are capable of filling situations that are worth up to L300 per annum, but any thing over that, is too good for them".<sup>75</sup> The headline in an edition of *The Watchman*, the newspaper of the 'Outs', read: "No Native Need Apply". It concerned the position of Resident Justice in Harbour Island and the newspaper thought it was unlikely a Bahamian would be appointed. "The high water mark is L200 and any salary from that amount upwards is too much for a 'conch'".<sup>76</sup> One problem was the interrelatedness of the Bahamian whites (for this was the group on whose behalf the newspapers were advocating). The British felt this militated against non-whites getting a fair deal, especially in the administration of justice, and might lead to unprofessional favours being granted to relations. The local appointments also committed a disproportionate number of misdemeanours. Typical was J. H. Minns, Resident Justice at Long Cay, who was suspended from office "for gross and unpardonable carelessness" and "for suspicious conduct in connection with the wreck of the *Ada H. Hall*".<sup>77</sup> One Maura, Clerk of the Police Court and formerly Resident Magistrate at Green Turtle Cay, was arrested for embezzlement in 1879.<sup>78</sup> Hesketh Bell, the British Receiver General, soon discovered that J. A. Culbert, a popular local mulatto clerk, had been robbing the Treasury for years. When he came before the Court, the Chief Justice summed up against him but the

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<sup>74</sup>A few coloured Bahamians were appointed to Colonial Government offices. This was part of the co-optation of the middle class.

<sup>75</sup>*Bahama Herald*, 26 March 1856. Ironically, Smith was found guilty of fraud in November. He absconded but was caught in the Berry Islands. He was convicted the following year and imprisoned for two years with hard labour.

<sup>76</sup>*The Watchman*, 5 November 1901. The man given the post was Francis Armstrong, who had been acting in the position. He had come to The Bahamas five years before to grow citrus in Eastern New Providence, but had been unsuccessful. The newspaper had a point that this was unjust to those in the public service.

<sup>77</sup>William Robinson to Earl of Carnarvon, no.39, 26 February 1877. He had already been reprimanded twice. Robinson concluded that he was "neither worthy of respect nor of confidence" and was "a most incompetent and untrustworthy officer" (Robinson to Earl of Carnarvon, no.41, 5 March 1877).

<sup>78</sup>E. B. A. Taylor to Michael Hicks Beach. no. 153, 29 November 1879.

jury acquitted him. Bell found it difficult to believe: “An outrageous miscarriage of justice”.<sup>79</sup> Despite their complaints, Bahamians were appointed to some of the highest positions – Ormond Malcolm, George and John Anderson and Edward Taylor for instance. Some Bahamians in the Colonial Service were also transferred to overseas positions, including George Anderson, who became Chief Justice of Ceylon and William Doyle, promoted to Chief Justice of Antigua.

Most Britons shared the racial prejudice of the Bahamian whites. They would have been imbued with patronising, ethnocentric views. The generally held view of blacks paralleled that of the Bahamian whites: they were child-like, dependent, “irresponsible loafers in the sun”.<sup>80</sup> It is difficult to estimate the influence of prevailing British attitudes on individual administrators; yet it was undoubtedly important. The fact remained the expatriate community was isolated, by choice, from other than their own social grouping, which usually did not include non-whites.

While British colonial officials were patronising, they were often more liberal than West Indian whites and believed the latter to be grossly prejudiced. This led to criticisms of Bahamian whites from the expatriates; several governors deplored the credit and truck system and neglect of the Out Islands. However, there were limits to how far the Governor or any other British administrator wanted to upset the local elite and they would often back down rather than confront it over injustice and illiberal labour ideologies. British officeholders often had low opinions of Bahamian whites (Powles being one example). Bell mentioned the attitude of the Colonial Secretary, Spencer Churchill: “He is a very lordly person and expresses the utmost contempt for the good ‘Conchs’”.<sup>81</sup> As Hyam states: “At whatever level, expatriate Britons behaved more swaggeringly, more grandly than they could have done at home.”<sup>82</sup> . In general, the relationship between the colonial power and

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<sup>79</sup>Bell, Diaries, 56 and 61. He reflected that Culbert was bound to be acquitted as “almost the whole of Bay Street had benefitted by Culbert’s peculations”. Bell incurred much ill feeling for his action.

<sup>80</sup>V. G. Kiernan, The Lords of Human Kind: European Attitudes Towards the Outside World in the Imperial Age (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1969), 201.

<sup>81</sup>Bell, Diaries, 90.

<sup>82</sup>Ronald Hyam, Britain’s Imperial Century, 1815-1914: A Study of Empire and Expansion (London: B.T. Batsford, 1976), 376.

the white elite fluctuated between cordial social intercourse and mutual criticism. Much depended on the character of the individual administrator.

The other side of the coin was that the white elite in The Bahamas frequently felt contempt for the British officials sent to their colony. *The Watchman* accused them of doing nothing but draw their salaries.<sup>83</sup> Hesketh Bell felt that “Englishmen, though usually liked and respected, were considered ‘foreigners’ and their appointments were generally resented”.<sup>84</sup> The officers were often not from the top notch, as The Bahamas was not considered a desirable posting, particularly because of the low salary. Not granting a higher salary to these posts was a device deployed by the Bahamian House of Assembly to put off British administrators from coming to the islands. Another discouragement to the importation of officials was the Superannuation Act of 1862, which required ten years’ service in The Bahamas before granting a pension. Thus, it was a vicious circle.

The Governors appointed to The Bahamas were often of mediocre ability, either at the beginning of a career going on to better things, such as William Colebrooke, posted on to British Guiana, or at the end, like James Walker, plagued by ill health. The Governor had varied tasks to perform: correspondence with the Colonial Office, balancing the Revenue, supervision of local administration and initiative in reforms, although other duties, such as leading colonial society, could be considered fairly mundane. However, “the balls, dinners, and charity bazaars at Government House; the polo and the racing; the interminable personal clashes and frequent scandals that roused such disproportionate amounts of interest in small and isolated societies, were as much a part of the government of the colonies as official business.”<sup>85</sup> The social life of the Governor and his wife was front-page news and, as Dupuch suggested, to be regularly invited to share this social life was to have ‘made it’ for local whites. Form and etiquette were followed to the letter. An American commentator of the 1880s wrote that if one called on the Governor, one must be in full dress, even in the middle of the day, and must present two cards.<sup>86</sup> Bahamian whites seemed to revel in the

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<sup>83</sup>*The Watchman*, 5 November 1901.

<sup>84</sup>Bell, *Diaries*, 53.

<sup>85</sup> John Cell, British Colonial Administration in the Mid-Nineteenth Century: The Policy Making Process (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), 53.

<sup>86</sup>Drysdale, “In Sunny Lands”, 18.

protocol and Powles enjoyed poking fun at the “crème de la crème”.<sup>87</sup>

Generally, it appears British colonial officers could not wait to depart. Bell’s Notebook of 1896 contains a little ditty that was apparently popular among expatriates, summing up their view of Nassau society.

McCabe’s Curse on Nassau  
Land of cursed rocks and stones,  
Land where many lay their bones.  
Land of rascals, rogues and peddlars [*sic*],  
Busy scandalising meddlers [*sic*].

Land of poverty and want,  
Where pride is plenty, money scant.  
Take this my very heartiest,  
And if I could I’d give you worse.<sup>88</sup>

#### The Political Dominance of the White Elite

Patrick Bryan explained that, in the context of post-Emancipation Jamaican society, “the hegemony of the ruling class was then assured by the manipulation of the law, by the control of or influence upon the political and constitutional order, by the control of land resources, and by the projection of the concept of the indispensability of white leadership for the progress of the colony”.<sup>89</sup> These strategies were also utilised by the white Bahamian elite and it is its dominance of the political order that was most obvious. The electoral system ensured the white Nassauvians controlled most of the seats in the House of Assembly. There was a property qualification to vote, which immediately restricted the franchise on the basis of class (see note 45, page 22). In 1864 there were 5,949 registered voters or 16.9 percent of the total population<sup>90</sup>. In 1896 there were 9,103 registered voters (see Table 6) or 19 percent of the total population.<sup>91</sup> It is impossible to know how many black voters there were among these. The franchise was not as restrictive, though, as several

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<sup>87</sup>Powles, Pink Pearl, 127.

<sup>88</sup>Hesketh Bell, Notebook IV, Royal Commonwealth Society Library, University of Cambridge.

<sup>89</sup>Bryan, The Jamaican People, ix.

<sup>90</sup>Michael Craton, A History of the Bahamas, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Waterloo: San Salvador Press, 1986), 203. The 1861 census showed a population of 35,287, 17,466 males and 17,821 females.

<sup>91</sup>The 1891 census showed a population of 47,565, 22,555 males and 25,010 females.

other British West Indian colonies. In Bermuda in 1875 out of an adult male population of 1,137 whites, 640 were entitled to vote and out of 1,518 non-whites only 214 could vote. In the election of that year only 460 actually voted to return 36 members.<sup>92</sup> In Jamaica the Franchise Act of 1840 ensured a very limited electorate, scarcely more than two thousand voters on the rolls at any given time, about two percent of the adult male population.<sup>93</sup> An Act levying twelve shillings a year tax on the 'six pounds freeholder' deterred registration so by 1854 there were only 753 registered voters.<sup>94</sup> An 1858 Franchise Act lowered the requirements for the suffrage, but required a ten shillings tax stamp on all claims to vote. By 1863 there were 1,457 voters.<sup>95</sup> In Barbados there were 1,322 voters in 1849, less than five percent of the population.<sup>96</sup> In England too most of the members of the working class did not vote until 1867, but in the West Indies the differences of colour also distinguished the labouring class from the upper and middle classes.

In The Bahamas the representativeness of the system was further diminished by the unequal distribution of seats (Table 6). The islands of Abaco, Eleuthera and Harbour Island each had three representatives, while Andros and San Salvador only had two, despite having bigger populations and more registered voters. Crooked Island (population 2, 934) had only about one hundred less registered voters than Harbour Island (population 1, 472) but only had one representative to its three. Andros was expanding even more rapidly than New Providence, mainly as a result of the success of sponge fishing on 'The Mud', and had a population of 4,589 in 1891. Abaco, on the other hand, only numbered 3,686 inhabitants. Eleuthera did, in fact, have a proportionately high population of 7,358 persons, but some were likely to be temporary labourers for the pineapple season. After 1851 the census no longer gave a breakdown based on colour, but it was the constituencies with large white populations that were better represented, such as Harbour Island about half of whose population was white. New Providence's population was, of course, still growing and it now

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<sup>92</sup>Alan Burns, History of West Indies (London: Allen and Unwin, 1954), 685.

<sup>93</sup>Philip D. Curtin, Two Jamaicas: The Role of Ideas in a Tropical Colony 1830-1865 (New York: Atheneum, 1970), 181.

<sup>94</sup>Ibid., 186.

<sup>95</sup>Ibid., 188 and 189.

<sup>96</sup>H. McD. Beckles, A History of Barbados, From Amerindian Settlement to Nation-State (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 120.

numbered 10, 914 inhabitants. Each of the four Nassau districts had two members, but the number of voters in the City District, the predominantly white area, was far less than the other three.

Table 6. Number of Representatives and Voters in Each District in 1896.

District	No. of Members	No. of Registered Electors in 1896	No. of Votes Cast in 1896
City District	2	217	143
Southern District	2	543	306
Eastern District	2	722	423
Western District	2	591	414
Abaco	3	947	359
Andros	2	1033	259
Grand Bahama	1	355	No Contest
Crooked Island	1	498	No Contest
Eleuthera	3	945	No Contest
Exuma	2	514	No Contest
Harbour Island	3	590	427
Inagua	1	135	No Contest
Long Island	2	709	453
Watlings Island & Rum Cay	1	300	137
San Salvador (Cat Island)	2	1004	345

Source: Blue Book (1901-2), L 2-3.

It was the widespread bribery and corruption, made possible by an open voting system, and the fact that the lower classes failed to organise themselves politically which particularly facilitated white political dominance. Powles stated: "Bribery, corruption, and intimidation are carried on in the most unblushing manner, under the very noses of the officers presiding over the polling-booths".<sup>97</sup> Some of the bribery was probably no more than treating. Father Matthews recalled: "At one election, I recollect, one settlement refused to a man to vote, because there was no feasting provided, as in former times".<sup>98</sup> Some bribery involved more, depending on the amount of opposition. Hesketh Bell, Receiver-General, had been elected in a by-election in Harbour Island in 1895; the next year there was a general election and his diary gives an authentic account of the goings-on at election

<sup>97</sup>Powles, Pink Pearl, 41.

<sup>98</sup>Matthews, San Salvador Described, 14.

times and the expectations of voters. He recorded that he heard good accounts of his prospects but “my constituents are a darned nuisance all the same. There is a lot of bribery going on by my two opponents, and I am certainly not going to do anything in that line”. In the end there were six candidates, all Nassau merchants except Bell. He became more pessimistic as to his chances: “I don’t believe I shall get in as I have done no jobs for the Harbour Islanders”. Harcourt Malcolm, son of Ormond Malcolm, the Chief Justice, accompanied him to his constituency. He wrote: “Evidently in enemy country. Not a soul came to meet us save four nigger electors from the Bluff who came on board for drinks”. Only fifteen turned up at his meeting and “the atmosphere [was] distinctly unfriendly”. W. C. B. Johnson and his supporters had sent people round to count orange trees, telling them Receiver General Bell was going to put a tax on them. In another place they did the same with pigs. Bell heard in one village Johnson had distributed over forty pairs of boots. Voters became friendlier towards Bell but told him “in view of the ‘presents’ made everywhere by other people, I haven’t got the ghost of a chance”.<sup>99</sup>

Besides the use of bribery, many electors were in debt to Nassau merchants so, in an open voting system, were unlikely to vote against an approved candidate. This was noted by Governor Colebrooke as early as the 1834 election: “In closer communities a commercial interest had grown up by the dependence of the poorer classes on the Merchants for their necessary supplies, and the debts they had thus generally contracted”.<sup>100</sup> As Powles observed: “The coloured people have not yet learned the art of political organisation” so “they are powerless to defend themselves”.<sup>101</sup>

The Out Islands were represented by Nassauvians as Out Islanders could not afford to stay in Nassau during the three month long session, there being no payment for members of the Assembly. Colebrooke in his reference to the 1834 elections stated: “The condition of the Inhabitants of the Out Islands [did not enable] them at that time to become candidates, [so that] the Elections had been in a great degree nominal. The Merchant resident at Nassau for the most part sought and acquired the seats and some who were unknown to the Constituencies were thus nominated in Extensive and thinly populated districts where but

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<sup>99</sup>Bell, *Diaries*, 94-96. Johnson & his two allies were elected. Bell was fifth in the polls.

<sup>100</sup>William Colebrooke to Lord Glenelg, no. 10, 3 February 1836, CO23/96 quoted in Johnson, *From Slavery to Servitude*, 99.

<sup>101</sup>Powles, *Pink Pearl*, 41.

few Electors could attend.”<sup>102</sup> Governor Mathew recorded the same situation fifteen years later: “Excepting the case of the Turks Island - there is no instance of an ‘out-island’ representative being a resident of that island. In most cases the out-island representative is sought by petty dealers at Nassau, who have never seen the island they desire to represent, and whose sole object is to secure by this bond the little trade from and supplies to that island”.<sup>103</sup> Nothing had changed by the end of the century: “At present every one of the Out Island members is recruited from Nassau, and it is hardly to be expected that the same interest can be manifested by such a representative as by a member who is resident in the place concerned”.<sup>104</sup> Lucas of the Colonial Office commented: “This despatch shows that a popular Legislature in the Bahamas is if possible a greater fraud than elsewhere in the West Indies. The Out Islands have no representatives in the true sense.”<sup>105</sup> Powles made a similar conclusion: “This mockery of representation is the greatest farce in the world”.<sup>106</sup>

What is more, in the context of the intermarriage of the white upper class, many of the House members were related either by blood or marriage. A letter to *The Freeman*, a newspaper of the coloured middle classes, complained: “It appears to me that there are ties of relationship between a majority of its members. It is either uncle, or cousin, or nephew, or brother-in-law” – “a private caucus”. The author supposed that this family would soon claim to legislate for The Bahamas as a natural right and “even now”, he noted, “they are offended if anyone attempts to oppose them”.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>102</sup>William Colebrooke to Lord Glenelg, No.10, 3 February 1836, CO23/96.

<sup>103</sup>George Mathew to Earl Grey, private, 11 July 1847, CO23/124/200-206.

<sup>104</sup>George Carter to Joseph Chamberlain, No.123, 23 Dec. 1899, CO23/253/247-61. The specific complaint of this Governor was that necessary public works for Out Islands were frequently removed from Annual Estimates. He felt more might be done if the House was more sympathetic.

<sup>105</sup>Colonial Office memo, no. 1962, 18 Jan 1900, CO23/253/245-246.

<sup>106</sup>Powles, *Pink Pearl*, 41. He asserted The Bahamas was an example where “free and independent representative institutions” had failed and “the African race...are ground down and oppressed in a manner which is a disgrace to British rule” (ibid., v).

<sup>107</sup>Letter from Equal Rights, *The Freeman*, 17 May 1887. This was the era of the Sawyer faction, see page 177.

## The Composition of the House of Assembly and Pursuit of Elite Interests

Table 7. The House of Assembly, 1845.

District	Member	Occupation	Colour	Since
Town	Stephen Dillet	Tailor	Coloured	1834
	Thomas Minns	Businessman	Black	1834
	Robert Bell	Merchant	White	1839
	John F. Cooke	Militia	White	1838
Eastern	George C. Anderson	Attorney General	White	1834
	Gilbert O. Smith	Clerk in Treasury	White	1836
Western	John G. Meadows	Merchant	White	1834
	James Jarratt	?	White	1844
Harbour Is.	William Weech	Merchant	White	1839
	John Saunders	Merchant	White	1834
	Thomas Moore	Merchant	White	1845
Eleuthera	C. S. Adderley	Merchant	White	1838
	John J. Burnside	Surveyor General	White	1839
	Lieut. W. Hamilton	Receiver of Duties	White	1841
Exuma	Edward P. Laroda	Businessman	Coloured	1836
	John Richardson	Militia	White	1839
	H.E. Cartwright	Stipendiary Magistrate	White	1842
Abaco	G. Bannister	Clerk in Treasury	White	1834
	Henry Saunders	Merchant	White	1836
	Henry Adderley	Merchant	White	1834
Crooked Is.	William Munnings	Provost Marshall	White	1834
Rum Cay	John G. Anderson	Receiver General	White	1845
Turks Island	Francis Eve	Medical Officer	White	1839
	Francis Tuza	Proprietor?	White	1844
	James Misick	Turks Is. Resident	White	1845
Andros	Samuel Minns	Attorney	Coloured	1834
	W. Bethel	Clerk in Customs	White	1844
Long Island	James Farrington	Merchant	White	1837
San Salvador	William Marshall	Merchant	White	1843

*Source:* For members of the House, Blue Book (1845), 68-69. For date of election, Election Book: 1808-1868.

The 1845 House comprised 29 members, the Turks and Caicos Islands still forming a part of The Bahamas. Table 7 shows its composition. Several of these representatives, including three non-white members, had sat since the first House elected after Emancipation.<sup>108</sup> There were already a number of Nassau merchants, but the office holders

<sup>108</sup>See Chapter Five.

(civil and military) balanced these. Opposition to the Government was muted by the 1840s; no issue excited much controversy.<sup>109</sup>

Seven of these members were still sitting in the House of 1857 and C. R. Nesbitt, first elected in 1832, was back in the Assembly (see Table 8).<sup>110</sup> The Turks and Caicos Islands had been separated from The Bahamas; Inagua was represented and Long Island had gained another seat. Nassau merchants could now command a majority in the House, although some of these, such as Henry Adderley, John Meadows and Henry Stevenson, were generally Government supporters. There were seven public service officers and five (out of seven) members of the Executive Council also sat in the House.<sup>111</sup> The Governor could consider he had a strong body of support to express the Government viewpoint.

Up to 1868 the notion of 'party' was non-existent, except in the vague sense of 'Government' and 'Opposition'. This contrasts with the situation in Jamaica after 1838 when there were two clear political parties, the Planters' Party or Country Party, narrowly interested in agriculture, and the Town Party or Colored Party, mildly humanitarian, more supportive of the Governor and with more diverse interests.<sup>112</sup> In The Bahamas merchant and planter were subsumed into the agro-commercial bourgeoisie, so there were no conflicting interests to contain, and the coloured representatives never numbered above four so could not constitute their own party. It was during the June 1868 election that the two parties, the Disendowment or Reform Party and the Church or Conservative Party were formed.<sup>113</sup> Denominational adherence was the grouping factor but the Presbyterians were unlikely to permanently link up with the Wesleyans over other issues.

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<sup>109</sup>See page 92 for Governor Francis Cockburn's comment.

<sup>110</sup>C. R. Nesbitt frequently had to administer the Colony in the absence of the Governor. At these points he usually relinquished his seat.

<sup>111</sup>Nesbitt; Anderson; Mathews; Doyle; Adderley.

<sup>112</sup>Curtin, *Two Jamaicas*, 182.

<sup>113</sup>See pages 120 – 127.

Table 8. The House of Assembly, 1857.

District	Name	Occupation	Colour
Town	T. M. Mathews	Attorney	Coloured
	Robert Bell	Merchant	White
	Fred Duncombe	Doctor	White
	Stephen Dillet	Police Inspector/ Post Master	Coloured
Eastern	G.C. Anderson	Attorney General	White
	Henry Adderley	Merchant	White
Western	John G. Meadows	Merchant	White
	Robert Rigby	Merchant	White
Harbour Island	Thomas K. Moore	Merchant	White
	Henry R. Saunders	Merchant	White
	Robert H. Whitehead	Planter/Merchant	White
Eleuthera	Abraham T. Holmes	Merchant	White
	Anthony Eneas	Planter/Merchant	White
	George D. Harris	Merchant	White
Exuma	Robert W.H. Weech	Merchant	White
	Daniel S. Farrington	Merchant	White
	Alexander Johnson	Collector of Revenue	White
Abaco	William D. Albury	Merchant	White
	John S. George	Merchant	White
	Jacob H. Webb	School Inspector	White
Andros	W.H. Doyle	Attorney	White
	Henry Stevenson	Merchant	Coloured
Long Island	C.R. Nesbitt	Colonial Secretary	White
	Vacant (William Marshall)	(Merchant)	(White)
San Salvador	Robert N. Musgrove	Merchant	White
Crooked Island	John S. Grant	Assistant Justice	White
Rum Cay & Watlings	Felix MacCarthy	Police Magistrate	White
Inagua	John W. Albury	Merchant	White

*Source:* Members of the Assembly from Bahamas Almanac and Register for the Year 1857 (Nassau: Nassau Guardian, 1857), 52-53.

The numbers in each denominational grouping by 1869 were 10 Episcopalians, 11 Wesleyans and 7 Presbyterians.<sup>114</sup> How far were these religious affiliations in the House of Assembly in line with national affiliations? The Blue Book for 1871 numbered 3,388

<sup>114</sup>See Table 5. R. H. Sawyer (W) had replaced T. Williams (C); H. Adderley (C) had resigned his seat and Dr. G. Kemp (W) been elected in his place; S.O. Johnson (W) and G. C. Anderson (C) had been appointed to the Legislative Council and Dr. J. B. Albury (W) and R. Sweeting (W) elected; John Thomson (C) and R. Butler (C) had resigned and H. Stevenson (P) and G.C. Strahan (C), Colonial Secretary, elected.

Anglicans, 7,370 Wesleyans, 6,610 Baptists and 300 Presbyterians.<sup>115</sup> Thus, Presbyterians were vastly over-represented in the House and Legislative Council and Baptists, with no representative of their own denomination, could feel that nobody expressed their views. The number of Anglican representatives was also out of proportion to their congregation in The Bahamas. Controversy over incense, ceremony and doctrine continued to dog the Anglican Church in The Bahamas until the end of the century. Conversely, as the whites left the Established Church the non-whites joined it. This was partly because the Anglican Church had taken up the missionary crusade after mid-century; partly because non-whites were excluded from positions of authority in the Methodist Church and partly because the black Bahamians approved of the elaborate ceremonials of the High Church.<sup>116</sup> Notably, the Anglican Church was the chosen denomination of the coloured middle class.

Just as significant as religious affiliation was occupation. By 1869 there were nineteen merchants or retailers, five colonial officer holders (including two doctors, one attorney and two Britons), two doctors and two attorneys (one of whom was the Speaker).<sup>117</sup> The dominance of the commercial interest was bound to have repercussions as far as legislative measures were concerned. Governor William Robinson asserted in 1877 that “five sixths of the Traders and others in the House have hitherto represented only their own interests”.<sup>118</sup> As Governor Blake observed: “Any attempt to introduce a measure opposed to the interests of the few merchants and shopkeepers would, I have no doubt, produce a repetition of the strain [between Governor and Assembly]”.<sup>119</sup> He went on to state that if he tried to deal with the truck system, there would be most bitter opposition. Thus, successive

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<sup>115</sup>Blue Book (1871).

<sup>116</sup>Captain Stuart, Deputy Inspector of Lighthouses, recounted to Governor Rawson that he left the Methodist Church and joined the Anglican Church because he was excluded from all positions on account of his colour (Rawson to Duke of Buckingham & Chandos, 4 May 1868, CO23/191/434-439). St. Agnes Church was almost exclusively black and said to have “out-Romed Rome” by one Methodist minister (Michael Craton & Gail Saunders, Islanders in the Stream: A History of the Bahamian People, vol. 2: From the Ending of Slavery to the Twenty-First Century (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1998), 93).

<sup>117</sup>Cf. Jamaican Assembly in 1865 which had 26 landholders; 9 merchants; 3 journalists; 7 in legal profession; 3 in medical profession; 1 ex-banker; 1 Crown surveyor & 1 civil engineer (some are counted twice as fall into two categories). There were 37 white and 10 coloured members. compared to 25 white and 3 coloured (two passing for white) in the Bahamian Assembly. See Curtin, Two Jamaicas, note 5, 263.

<sup>118</sup>William Robinson to Earl of Carnarvon, confidential, 8 May 1877, CO23/217/248-257.

<sup>119</sup>Henry Blake to Earl of Derby, 10 May 1884, CO23/224/208-212.

governors failed to deal with the credit and truck systems and the inadequate and unequal taxation system.

In the late 1860s The Bahamas was near bankruptcy and the salaries of public officials had been unpaid for five months. The Retrenchment Act of 1869 reduced payment to officers but the House made no move to increase revenue. It rejected a bill to impose stamp duties and Governor Walker expected his proposal to levy a direct tax on property to meet the same fate.<sup>120</sup> An indication of the obduracy of House members came in the form of a deputation to the Governor informing him they had no intention of passing a Supply Bill for the present. The House lengthened its adjournment, intending to put an end to the session.<sup>121</sup> The Executive Council unanimously agreed this act on the part of the House was an infringement of the rights of the Crown to whom alone belonged the power to terminate the session. The Governor resolved not to dissolve and go to the electors, as he detected a climate when “a little cheekiness to the governor would have been rather a popular platform”.<sup>122</sup> He prorogued the House and then summoned it to meet at an early date in order to defeat its purpose of avoiding further discussion on the need for additional revenue.

The British Government was somewhat irate at the action, or inaction, of the Bahamian Legislature. The Secretary of State suggested that the right of the Bahamian House of Assembly to initiate money bills, this “vicious practice” of the self-governing “responsible” colonies, be terminated. He suggested pressing a Constitutional change, first in a conciliatory way and then, if that failed, more firmly.<sup>123</sup> Governor Walker duly recommended in his speech at the opening of the Legislature that the House “dispense with

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<sup>120</sup>The 1869 Act amalgamated, abolished and reduced salaries of a number of offices as vacancies occurred. It limited and fixed the Education grant; reduced the police force; raised the age at which a public officer could claim superannuation and ordered a regular audit. James Walker to Lord Granville, no.325, 25 February 1870, CO23/201/217-223.

<sup>121</sup>James Walker to Lord Granville, no.358, 13 April 1870, CO23/201/430-435.

<sup>122</sup>James Walker to Lord Granville, no. 385, 11 May 1870, CO23/201/553-558. It was chiefly among wreckers and Cuban sympathizers that he detected an anti-Governor sentiment. The Neutrality Laws were unpopular in The Bahamas. Wrecking and smuggling were particularly profitable activities in Ragged Island. It was a base for Cuban revolutionaries (the Ten Years' War had started in 1868) and was the centre of an incident in 1869. The Governor had attempted to intercept a ship carrying stores for the insurgents but had failed. He earned the wrath of the Bahamians for trying to stop their business and the Secretary of State for mismanaging the affair. Patrice Williams, “Race, Politics, Territorial Rights and Breaches of International Law: Foreign Relations Issues in the Mid-Nineteenth Century 1850-1869”, *Journal of the Bahamas Historical Society* 10 (1988): 20-21.

<sup>123</sup>Note from Secretary of State for the Colonies to Herbert and Rogers, no. 11788. CO23/202/403.

the power of initiating grants of money, to vest in the Executive the responsibility in future of regulating expenses...and to confine [itself] to the constitutional practice of controlling and checking the financial proposals of the Executive".<sup>124</sup> The Bill to enact the proposal was rejected, only four members in favour. The House asserted it was "much better able to manage their own pecuniary affairs than the Government".<sup>125</sup> The response is not surprising. The Reform Party had been most critical of Government extravagance in the 1868 campaign and the mercantile elite would fear introduction of progressive taxes. Acting Governor George Strahan reasoned: "...in a small colony like this, where private and petty interests too often influence the consideration of legislative measures of public utility, the more the management of its affairs is concentrated in the hands of the Governor the better it is for the welfare of the people".<sup>126</sup> But the British Government did not pursue the change, probably because by mid-1870 the financial position of the Colony had markedly improved.<sup>127</sup>

Governor Walker remarked that the bitterness arising out of the Disestablishment controversy had subsided but had left behind "a feeling of separation from the Government which marks all the proceedings of the House, and is particularly distinguishable in the majority through whose activity the disendowment measure was promoted and carried".<sup>128</sup> Members who opposed the enforcement of the Neutrality Laws concerning the Cuban insurrection demanded the proceeds from the sale of the *Lilian* and her cargo, a ship detained for illicit trading, should go to the colonial treasury rather than Crown funds. "The whole transaction is strongly symbolic of the spirit and manner in which the proceedings of the House of Assembly are conducted".<sup>129</sup> The House became obstructive again in 1873

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<sup>124</sup>Opening Speech to the Legislature, 7 February 1871, CO23/204/112.

<sup>125</sup>James Walker to Lord Kimberley, no.551, 10 March 1871, CO23/204/211-214.

<sup>126</sup>George Strahan to Lord Kimberley, 28 May 1872, CO23/206/437-441.

<sup>127</sup>Colonial Office Minute Paper, CO23/202/400-401. All arrears of salaries had been paid up and there was a total reduction of over seven thousand pounds in the debt, which had stood at 11,632 pounds at the end of 1869. There had been a small addition to import duties and large reductions in expenditure, but it was mainly due to "the wealth which was thrown into the Colony by wrecks in the months of March and April, assisted by the proceeds of several vessels condemned for violation of Customs Laws" (James Walker to Lord Kimberley, no. 489, 30 November 1870, CO23/202/474-501).

<sup>128</sup>James Walker to Lord Kimberley, no. 489, 30 November 1870, CO23/202/474-501.

<sup>129</sup>James Walker to Lord Kimberley, no. 559, 22 March 1871, CO23/204/256-257.

when it refused to pay debentures of 10,920 pounds issued by the Bahamian Government in 1868, a loan negotiated by Governor Rawson and approved by the Executive Council. Strahan condemned the action of the House as “unworthy of a Body vested with legislative powers” and the Law Officers of the Crown upheld the debentures’ validity.<sup>130</sup>

Relations between Executive and Legislature eased under Governor John Pope-Hennessey, a former Member of Parliament himself.<sup>131</sup> He blamed lack of cooperation between the two bodies for the financial difficulties: “It would be difficult to expect a healthy development of your resources, or a sound exchequer, with the want of confidence which, for five or six years past has existed between you and the local Government”.<sup>132</sup> He set out to woo the Opposition members: “But it will be an attempt based on the frank recognition of your Constitutional rights and on the conviction that you are competent judges of your affairs”. Pope-Hennessey was in tune with the sentiments of most Bahamians. He managed to get the House to vote additional taxes for the telegraphic communication with England and the insular mail services. In return, he requested the Secretary of State not to press the Assembly to defray the cost of maintaining the military barracks in Nassau.<sup>133</sup> In 1874 the Assembly took the “somewhat unusual” course of passing every vote proposed by the Government.<sup>134</sup> When Pope-Hennessey left the *Nassau Guardian* declared: “No Executive officer ever took his departure from our shores with greater and more universal respect than Governor Hennessey”.<sup>135</sup> His successor would have a hard time to compete with such popularity, particularly since he had to clear up the financial mismanagement. It was soon back to “an humiliating struggle between the Government and the Assembly, the former insisting on taxation and the latter rejecting every

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<sup>130</sup>George Strahan to Lord Kimberley, no.43, 11 April 1873, CO23/209/236-247.

<sup>131</sup>His grandson speculates that it was his House of Commons experience that partly led to his selection for The Bahamas’ post. Another reason was the idea that he could balance the books, which proved quite mistaken. James Pope-Hennessey, Verandah: Some Episodes in the Crown Colonies 1867-1889 (London: Allen & Unwin, 1964), 149.

<sup>132</sup>Speech of Governor on the Opening of the Legislature, 2 July 1873, CO23/210/60-61.

<sup>133</sup>John Pope-Hennessey to Lord Kimberley, 16 October 1873, CO23/210/223-224.

<sup>134</sup>John Pope-Hennessey to Earl of Carnarvon, no.204, 27 April 1874, CO23/212/158-160. Meade of the Colonial Office dubbed him “an effective wire-puller”, Pope-Hennessey, Verandah, 151. He also secured some prison reforms, including the abolition of the shaving of women’s heads, and he got a grant to refurbish Government House.

<sup>135</sup>Pope-Hennessey, Verandah, 152.

measure”<sup>136</sup> With the help of a veiled threat to the House if it refused his financial programme, the Governor managed to carry a property tax and stamp duties and negotiated a mail contract. Governor Robinson reported a “diminishing opposition” with successive by-elections and optimism prevailed by the end of his administration.

Table 9. The House of Assembly, 1879.

District	Name (Denomination)	Occupation	Colour
Town	R.H. Sawyer (W)	Merchant	White
	B.L. Burnside (E)	Attorney General	White
	T.W. Williams (E)	Merchant	White
	J.W.B. Nicholls (E)	?	White
Eastern	Dr. G.T.R. Kemp (W)	Doctor	White
	Joseph E. Dupuch (P)	Builder/Contractor	Coloured
Western	A.C. Lowe (E)	Receiver General	White
	G.A. McGregor (E)	Resident Justice	Coloured
Inagua	T. Darling (P)	Merchant	White
Harbour Island	J.S. Darling (P)	Merchant	White
	H.E. Moseley (E)	Government Officer	White
	J.A. Culbert (E)	Clerk in Treasury	Coloured
Abaco	J.S. Johnson (W)	Merchant	White
	R. Sweeting (W)	Importer/Retailer	White
	W.J. Menendez (W)	Importer/Retailer	White
Bimini	J.H. Young (P)	Merchant	White
Andros	R.W.D. Albury (E)	Retailer	White
San Salvador	W.E. Armbrister (E)	Importer/Retailer	Coloured
Eleuthera	O.D. Malcolm (P)	Attorney	White
	C.T. Sands (P)	Merchant	White
	James W. Culmer (W)	Importer/Retailer	White
Long Cay	R.W. Farrington (E)	Merchant	White
Long Island	G.B. Adderley (E)	Merchant	White
	D.A. Brice (E)	Merchant	White
Exuma	Dr. W.M. Maclure (P)	Doctor	White
	T.P. Moore (W)	Importer/Retailer	White
	Francis Bullard (E)	Importer/Retailer	White
Rum Cay	E.B.A. Taylor (E)	Colonial Secretary	White

*Source: An Almanack for 1879, with a Guide to the Bahamas, Nassau Directory etc. (Nassau: Nassau Guardian, 1879), 27-28.*

<sup>136</sup>William Robinson to Earl of Carnarvon, 8 May 1877, CO23/217/248-257.

The composition of the 1879 Assembly in terms of denominational affiliation looks very different from 1868/9 and might have given hopes of a better relationship between Executive and Legislature (see Table 9). The Anglican adherents now numbered fourteen; the Wesleyans had seven members and the Presbyterians seven. This was a considerable shift in the distribution of power from the Opposition to the Government. Harbour Island, normally a centre of Wesleyan support, returned two Anglicans and a Presbyterian. Seemingly, the poorer classes had exacted their revenge on the Wesleyan merchant class, who had refused them credit after a disastrous harvest. In 1879 there were seventeen merchants or retailers, all based in Nassau; six colonial officials; one building contractor; one attorney and two doctors. (One's occupation is unknown.) This is a very similar occupational make-up to that of 1869. Several representatives were profiting from the credit and truck system. The pineapple industry, for example, employed this system; J.S. Johnson (Abaco and canning factories in New Providence and Eleuthera), C. Tyldesley Sands (Cat Island), J.W. Culmer (Eleuthera) and W.E. Armbrister (Cat Island) were all major producers of pineapples.

There was another general election in 1882, which resulted in the return of nine Government officers. The unsuccessful candidates in Andros complained that Henry Moseley, a clerk in the Colonial Secretary's Office, and Joseph Brown, a merchant, styled themselves 'the Queen's men' and exhorted the electors to vote for the Queen. They also maintained that squatters, of which there were many in Andros, were given to understand that they would be evicted if they did not vote for the Queen's men. Moreover, they alleged the Resident Justice at Fresh Creek used his influence in favour of Moseley and Brown. Badges used by Moseley displayed the Royal Arms.<sup>137</sup> These were the types of complaints heard in the 1868 election, although the Police Magistrate reported no foundation to the charges.<sup>138</sup> In fact, some of the 'Queen's Men' began to take an independent line. Governor Lees stated that their "defiant attitude has for the moment discredited the Government" and is not "guided by conscientious scruples of any kind". He decided: "They are probably tools

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<sup>137</sup>Charles Cameron Lees to Earl of Kimberley, no.93, 20 July 1882. CO23/222/263-267.

<sup>138</sup>Report of Police Magistrate, CO23/222/307-308. The Opposition had used the union jack on their badges. It seems 'the Queen's Men' was synonymous with supporters of the Government (Moseley to C. Lees, CO23/222/273-80).

of a mistaken section who wish to free public offices in the Assembly from their allegiances to the Government, than desirous of initiating a factious opposition”.<sup>139</sup>

In 1877 the Acting Attorney General issued a report concerning the state of the franchise. He maintained that in 1806 the majority of freeholders were “men of wealth and political influence” but now many freeholders owned “almost infinitesimal allotments”, “it being an actual and no very remote occurrence that an acre of almost valueless land was divided into freeholds sufficient to enfranchise one hundred voters”. As for housekeepers, he maintained that few people did not claim to be tenants of some dwelling. He continued: “The condition of things have so changed that now persons wholly illiterate, many of them natives of Africa, scarcely able to speak the English language, and occupying dwellings which can scarcely be dignified by the title of house, with little or no appreciation of the value of the franchise, have come to be registered as ‘housekeepers’ and to exercise a very important numerical influence over elections”. One can detect here the bias of one from the class of Bahamians who wanted a more restricted franchise, but he was correct to say that “the right to vote for the most part has come to be regarded as a mere saleable commodity to be monopolized by the candidate who will pay most liberally in flour, rum, sugar, or tobacco”.<sup>140</sup> To make matters worse a consolidating Act was passed in 1882, which, in error, omitted the words that specified the tax-paying qualification for a ‘housekeeper’. The effect was to extend the franchise to all male adult inhabitants, as long as they fulfilled the six months’ residency stipulation. A Select Committee was appointed the following year to review the laws relating to elections. It proposed not to revive the old tax-paying qualification but to cut down the old freehold franchise by making “bona fide ownership in fee simple of land to the actual value of L120 or upwards” the qualification. The household franchise would now be the occupation of any house of which the annual rental is no less than two pounds eight shillings. Thus this was a disfranchising measure. Governor Blake felt Government candidates would be the victims, as the black population could be depended upon, “if free to follow their own desires”, to vote for them. The Bill passed and became law

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<sup>139</sup>Charles Cameron Lees to Earl of Derby, no.54, 18 April 1883, CO23/223/177-180.

<sup>140</sup>Report of Attorney General on State of the Franchise, 25 June 1877, CO23/214/193-201. The author, I believe, is Bruce Burnside.

in 1886.<sup>141</sup> The elite had acted to safeguard its political dominance, although there was no sign of the black majority using its numerical superiority against the interests of the whites.

Table 10. The House of Assembly, 1894.

District	Member	Occupation	Colour
Town	R. H. Sawyer	Merchant	White
	H. Jackson	Colonial Secretary	White
	Harry C. Lightbourne	Merchant	White
	Vacant		
Eastern	R. W. Sawyer	Merchant	White
	J. H. Brown	Merchant	White
Western	James C. Smith	Post Master	Coloured
	George A. McGregor	Resident Justice	Coloured
Inagua	Alfred E. Moseley	Newspaper proprietor	White
Harbour Island	John S. Darling	Merchant	White
	Joseph S. Johnson	Merchant	White
	Gilbert A. Albury	Resident Justice	White
	Thomas Russell	Merchant	White
Abaco	Samuel P. Saunders	Cashier, Bank of Nassau	White
	Thomas P. Moore	Retailer	White
	James H. Young	Merchant	White
Grand Bahama	H. T. Rahming	Merchant	White
	George R. Evans	Carpenter	Black
	Josiah W. Deveaux	Landowner	Coloured
Andros	James W. Culmer	Planter	White
	W.C.B. Johnson	Manufacturer	White
	Vacant		
	Francis Holmes	Doctor	White
Crooked Island	George B. Adderley	Merchant	White
	David A. Brice	Merchant	White
	Francis Bullard	Merchant	White
Exuma	George H. Brown	Merchant	White
	Thomas A. Thompson	Stipendiary Magistrate	White
Watlings Island			

*Source: An Almanack for 1894 with a Guide to the Bahamas Customs Tariff etc. (Nassau: Nassau Guardian, 1894).*

The House of 1894 showed a consolidation of power by the Nassau mercantile elite (Table 10). The financial affairs of the Colony were again of concern. The House requested that Crown Lands and Funds be transferred to the Colony since the Assembly had had extra

<sup>141</sup>Colonial Office minute no. 8697, 26 May 1884, CO23/224/169-174; Henry Blake to Earl of Derby, 10 May 1884, CO23/224/208-212; Colonial Office minute no. 19497, 12 November 1885, CO23/227/48-49.

expenditure on transportation (roads, the telegraphic cable between Nassau and Florida and inter-insular services) and on a larger Police Force.<sup>142</sup> The idea was not even considered and instead the Colonial Office laid the cause of distress as “the stupid manner in which the local control of the finances is used” and the development of the truck system.<sup>143</sup> Officers there discussed whether to give an Imperial Grant, provided the Assembly surrendered the whole or part of its powers, or was reconstituted with a majority of official members. But, as Sydney Olivier wrote: “There is no likelihood of the gang that controls the Assembly surrendering their position for the benefit of the population whom they exploit.” There was also no chance that the British Government would force them to do this.

Hesketh Bell reported in his diary that the proposals of the Governor (Haynes-Smith), whether good or bad, were meeting strong antagonism from House members.<sup>144</sup> The Government was defeated by one vote over the Agricultural Bill. (“Never heard such drivel in my life in some of the speeches”.) The Fisheries Bill was defeated by twelve votes to six. (“Hopeless from the first although the measure is an excellent one.”) The Leprosy Bill was defeated. (“I often feel like loosing my temper with some of these silly people.”) But the House passed the Abutment Act. (“A monstrous piece of jobbery by Sawyer and friends.”)

Another clash came in 1898. Governor Gilbert Carter turned down a subsidy to the steamer, *Antillia*, on the grounds the Government already subsidised the Flagler winter service to and from Florida and the Ward Line to and from New York and this steamer would not carry mail. R. H. Sawyer was Chairman of the Steamship Company, J. H. Young the largest stockholder and other Assemblymen and Councillors had an interest. The House of Assembly added a five hundred pounds subsidy to the Appropriations Bill. The Governor saw this as a direct challenge to the Government, an attempt to provoke a conflict between the Executive and the Legislature. House members knew the Legislative Council would be reluctant to vote against an Appropriations Bill. The Governor tried to act in a conciliatory manner by getting Hesketh Bell to request the Speaker and other active members to

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<sup>142</sup>Governor Ambrose Shea to Marquis of Ripon, no.54, 2 April 1894, CO23/239/193-194.

<sup>143</sup>Colonial Office memo no.25212, 24 November 1897, CO23/248/65-67.

<sup>144</sup>Bell, Diaries, 89-91. Haynes-Smith was not very popular it seems. On his departure, Bell noted that when he announced his departure to the Executive Council: “I could see that everybody was pleased. Nobody congratulated him [on his appointment as High Commissioner for Cyprus]...I felt quite sorry for him. I don't exactly know why we don't like him” (135). He did appreciate his energy and foresight, but he was tactless and mistrustful (141).

withdraw the subsidy from the Appropriations Bill. Meanwhile he prepared a bill to provide a sum of no more than five hundred pounds to the *Antillia* under certain contingencies. This was accepted.<sup>145</sup> The Colonial Office felt this kind of behaviour by the House opened the door to jobbery. They were concerned about this “unrestrained power” to prepare money bills without the authority of the Governor. However, although they agreed the move to Crown Colony status was desirable, they felt it was not possible until the Bahamian Government “disgraced itself”. There were other possibilities, like the Barbadian scheme where the Executive Committee, consisting of some members of the Legislative Council and the Assembly, alone had the right to initiate money votes.<sup>146</sup> But again no reform was forthcoming.

In 1900, in view of the very large deficit, the Secretary of State suggested eliminating certain items from the Appropriations Bill, putting them on hold until things improved. The House’s response could have been predicted; it had “the sole right of granting and limiting the expenditure of the Public monies of the Colony”.<sup>147</sup> Joseph Chamberlain would admit no such infringement of their privileges had occurred, but he did not press the point since the finances were in better shape than expected.

When the House of Assembly and the Legislative Council disputed an item in the Appropriations Bill in 1903, the House stated that the Council should only consent or reject, not initiate, discuss or interfere, and it had the sole right to grant public money and decide where to spend it. The Governor again advocated a Crown Colony type of arrangement for The Bahamas. “I do not hesitate to say that the form of Government in these islands is unsuited to present conditions, and if it could be amended in the direction of less popular control, I am sure it would work to the advantage not only of the Government but to the general community”.<sup>148</sup> But the House realised threats made against them were largely empty; as Governor Grey-Wilson put it in 1905: “The House has upon more than one occasion delighted to flaunt the Secretary of State, in the belief that retaliation was

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<sup>145</sup>Gilbert Carter to Joseph Chamberlain, secret, 29 May 1898, CO23/250/41-50.

<sup>146</sup>Colonial Office memo no. 13575, 17 July 1898. CO23/250/36-40.

<sup>147</sup>Gilbert Carter to Joseph Chamberlain, no.34, 23 April 1900. CO23/254/202-204. Resolution of the House, CO23/254/214.

<sup>148</sup>Gilbert Carter to Joseph Chamberlain, no.34, 11 May 1903, CO23/258/117-120.

impossible, a belief fostered by experience.”<sup>149</sup> The white elite retained political and constitutional control, aided by the British policy of non-interference as long as colonies were self-sufficient and conflict free. Ironically, the black population’s dependency (selling of votes and indebtedness to Nassau merchant politicians) aided the maintenance of the white oligarchy.

### The Councils and Office Holders

Besides their stranglehold on the electoral process, the white Bahamians also monopolised the non-official seats on the Councils. The Executive Council soon proved that it could be an irritant to the Governor; non-official members, who could hold seats in the House, would not necessarily support Government measures there. This Council was a potential power base for prominent Bahamians. The Legislative Council, whose unofficial members were generally at the twilight of their political career, was liable to be more obstructive to the House’s initiatives than to the Governor.

In 1844 the Executive Councils already had a majority of Bahamians but these were for the most part office-holders (see Table 11). The Legislative Council was mainly composed of British colonial officials. The main British administrators on the Councils were John C. Lees, the Chief Justice, and Charles R. Nesbitt, the Colonial Secretary, while George Campbell Anderson, the Attorney General, and John G. Anderson, the Receiver General and Treasurer, were Bahamian. George Campbell Anderson had held the post of Attorney General since 1837 and combined this with Speaker of the House.<sup>150</sup> It was extremely useful to have a Government supporter and Council member in the Speakership since he controlled appointment to the House Committees. John G. Anderson was the brother of George C. Anderson and the Attorney General’s influence had helped to get his appointment as Receiver General on his retirement from the military.<sup>151</sup> (John Anderson’s

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<sup>149</sup>W. Grey-Wilson to Alfred Lyttleton, 25 July 1905, CO23/260/335-341.

<sup>150</sup>Despite having rose to the bar in The Bahamas, he was made Acting Chief Justice of Ceylon in 1875 and then in 1877 Chief Justice of the Leeward Islands.

<sup>151</sup>Francis Cockburn to Lord John Russell, no. 24, 11 April 1840, CO23/107/89. John Anderson had been a major in the Second West Indian Regiment, stationed in Jamaica. He had gained experience of the administration of government in Honduras while serving with his regiment and he seems to have been a competent and respected Treasurer.

wife was the daughter of another Council member.) Charles Rogers Nesbitt, the Colonial Secretary, was occasionally referred to as a native, but he was born in Britain in 1799, in 1814 joining his father, who had been Secretary of the Bahamas since 1812. He became a clerk in his father's office and, from 1818 to 1838, was Deputy Colonial Secretary, acting in place of his father during his frequent absences. Samuel Nesbitt took an unlimited leave of absence in 1831 and died in 1838, his son then officially succeeding him.<sup>152</sup> Charles Nesbitt was to serve as Colonial Secretary until his retirement in 1867 and he acted as Administrator, in the absence of the Governor, on seven occasions, holding a commission as Lieutenant-Governor. From 1831 he was the Government spokesman in the House.<sup>153</sup> C.R. Nesbitt appears to have been well trusted and respected by both local Bahamians and successive Governors. His knowledge of local affairs and personalities must have been indispensable to the latter. Chief Justice John C. Lees was also a long time resident of the Colony, having been appointed in 1822.<sup>154</sup> William Webb, a member of both Councils, had served in the Customs Department since 1800 and was the son of another long serving British Government official. The Webb family, like the Nesbitts, was comfortably settled in Nassau and family members sought employment in the public service here. Although George Wood was British, he held considerable property in The Bahamas. Thus, the principal British officials were unusual in that they were fairly settled in the Colony and had little inclination to leave.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>152</sup>See Trainor, "Charles Rogers Nesbitt", 3-12.

<sup>153</sup>See note 23, page 87.

<sup>154</sup>His Bahamian born son, Charles Cameron Lees, was to become Governor of The Bahamas from 1882 to 1884.

<sup>155</sup>In 1860 Nesbitt did apply for promotion, temporarily moving to St. Vincent to become Administrator there, but the Colonial Office probably considered him too set in the ways of the one colony to permanently appoint him elsewhere at this stage of his career.

Table 11. The Councils in The Bahamas, 1844.

Council	Member	Occupation	Nationality
<u>Executive</u>	C. R. Nesbitt	Colonial Secretary	British
	Patrick Brown	Planter	Bahamian
	William Webb	Collector of Customs	British
	William Hield	Stipendiary Magistrate	British
	G.C. Anderson	Attorney General	Bahamian
	J.G. Meadows	Merchant	Bahamian
	George P. Wood	Advocate General	British
	John Storr	Merchant	Bahamian
	J. G. Anderson	Receiver General	Bahamian
	<u>Legislative</u>	Patrick Brown	Planter
Bishop of Jamaica		Bishop	British
John C. Lees		Chief Justice	British
William Webb		Collector of Customs	British
Robert Sandilands		Assistant Justice	British
William Hield		Stipendiary Magistrate	British
John Trew		Archdeacon	British
Hugh Kerr		Merchant	British
John Storr		Merchant	Bahamian
Robert Duncombe		Police Magistrate	Bahamian
John Pinder	Police Inspector	Bahamian	

*Source:* Blue Book (1844), 64 and 66.

One rather surprising appointment to the Executive Council was John Meadows, who had been such an implacable opponent of the Government during his political career.<sup>156</sup> Governor Mathew had appointed him in 1844 because he wanted men outside Government service on the Councils. Once on the Executive Council, Meadows proved supportive to successive Governors, although candid when expressing his views.<sup>157</sup> Mathew appointed Hugh Kerr, President of the Chamber of Commerce, for similar reasons. John Pinder and Robert Duncombe had both served many years in the House and had given active and cordial support to the Governor. Their rewards were Government posts and elevation to the Upper House.

<sup>156</sup>See page 90.

<sup>157</sup>He resigned in 1850, during the Burial Grounds issue, being the leader of the Presbyterians in the House and not approving of Governor Gregory's compromise.

By 1857 there were more Bahamians with seats on the Councils (see Table 12). There had been a number of deaths since 1844: Brown, Hield, Storr, Wood, R. G. Anderson. John Trew, Hugh Kerr, J.G. Meadows and Robert Sandilands had resigned.

Table 12. The Councils in The Bahamas, 1857

Council	Member	Occupation	Nationality
<u>Executive</u>	C. R. Nesbitt	Colonial Secretary	British
	William Webb	Retired	British
	G. C. Anderson	Attorney General	Bahamian
	Robert Thomson	Merchant	Bahamian
	T. M. Mathews	Attorney	Bahamian
	W. H. Doyle	Assistant Justice	Bahamian
	Henry Adderley	Merchant	Bahamian
<u>Legislative</u>	J. C. Lees	Chief Justice	British
	Bishop of Jamaica	Bishop	British
	William Webb	Retired	British
	Robert Thompson	Merchant	Bahamian
	John Pinder	Provost Marshal	Bahamian
	John F. Cooke	Militia	British
	John J. Burnside	Surveyor General	Bahamian
	William Kirkwood	Physician (Dispensary)	Irish/ Canadian
	Horatio N. Chipman	Physician (Asylum)	Bahamian

*Source:* Bahamian Almanac and Register for the Year 1857 (Nassau: Nassau Guardian, 1857), 37-40.

Appointed to the Executive Council in 1849 and the Legislative Council in 1850, Robert Alexander Thomson had been a member of the Assembly and of two public Boards. His father had also been a member of the Council. What particularly induced Governor Gregory to invite him to join the Councils was the fact he was not aligned to a 'party'. This was of importance while the Burial Grounds issue was being disputed in the House and both Councils. John Gregory was attempting to negotiate a compromise and Thomson was the type of man he needed to help him in Council. William H. Doyle had held various provisional offices since 1850 and he and Thomas M. Mathews, both appointed to the Executive Council, were attorneys. Mathews and Thomson were Anglicans and "tho' highly

liberal in their views, are firm supporters of her [the Church's] rights & Privileges.”<sup>158</sup> Thomas Mathews was coloured, but probably ‘passing’ as white. He held various provisional judicial posts in The Bahamas and was appointed Clerk of Courts and Keeper of Records in British Honduras in 1871. Henry Adderley was a prominent Bay Street merchant and ship-owner and had been a member of the House for many years. He was first appointed to the Executive Council in 1847 but had resigned in 1851 after a disagreement over the education grant.<sup>159</sup> He was re-appointed in 1855 by Governor Alexander Bannerman. William Kirkwood, appointed to the Legislative Council in 1850, and Horatio Nelson Chipman, appointed to the same body in 1852, were doctors. Dr. Kirkwood, a Presbyterian, had been a member of the House for some years. He was not considered a good speaker but his opinions carried weight. John J. Burnside (from a family of British Loyalists) had been Surveyor General for twenty-six years and had been a member of the Assembly. He was appointed to the Legislative Council in 1849. John F. Cooke, also a former House member, was a major in the Artillery and held property in New Providence.

Thomas Mathews, Henry Adderley and Robert Thomson resigned from the Executive Council in 1858, clashing with Governor Bayley over the amount of independence a Councillor should have. Bayley considered unofficial members should support bills in the House, whose drafts were discussed in Council and were desired by the Government. Adderley had resigned over the same issue in 1851. Mathews argued that he should “be allowed to exercise the fullest freedom of thought, and of action, in reference to measures brought forward either, in the Council, or in the popular branch of the Legislature”. He considered the unofficial members “the confidential advisors of the Governor” and not “members of a responsible Government”.<sup>160</sup> The Colonial Office felt the

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<sup>158</sup>John Gregory to Earl Grey, no.48, 30 May 1850, CO23/135/249-251.

<sup>159</sup>Adderley had been a member of the Board of Education and the House of Assembly when the Government had tried to persuade the latter to increase the annual educational grant by three hundred pounds. It failed to persuade the House and Governor Gregory felt the defeat was mainly attributable to Adderley, who spoke vehemently against the increase. The Governor complained he had shown no dissent earlier and, although he had been absent for the last two meetings of the Board when the report and application had been drawn up, he had been present when the expenditure, which exceeded the present grant, had been decided. Adderley decided to resign from both the Council and the Board.

<sup>160</sup>T. M. Mathews to Charles Bayley, March 1858, CO23/156/193-197. The dispute had arisen when Adderley opposed a Bill (concerning sureties for the Treasurer) in the House. Bayley tackled him over his action and drew up a minute explaining his view. Whereupon Adderley, Mathews and Thomson resigned their membership of the Council.

Governor was walking on dangerous ground in talking about abstract principles in a situation where there was not responsible Government.<sup>161</sup>

Table 13. The Councils in The Bahamas, 1869

Council	Member	Occupation	Nationality
<u>Executive</u>	George Strahan	Colonial Secretary	British
	G. C. Anderson	Attorney General	Bahamian
	John Dumaresq	Receiver General	British
	Fred Duncombe	Medical Inspector	Bahamian
	T. Darling	Merchant	Bahamian/ American
	W. Kirkwood	Medical Officer	Irish/Canadian
	B. L. Burnside	Attorney	Bahamian
	E. B. A. Taylor	Police Magistrate	Bahamian
	R. H. Sawyer	Merchant	Bahamian
	<u>Legislative</u>	G. C. Anderson	Attorney General
W. Kirkwood		Medical Officer	Irish/Canadian
B. L. Burnside		Attorney	Bahamian
W. H. Doyle		Chief Justice	Bahamian
H. N. Chipman		Physician (Asylum)	Bahamian
John S. Grant		Assistant Justice	British
T. Williams		Merchant	British
S. O. Johnson		Merchant	Bahamian
A. T. Holmes		Merchant	Bahamian

Source: Blue Book (1869), 84-85.

By 1869 Charles Nesbitt had retired as Colonial Secretary and been replaced by George Strahan. The Secretary of State, applying to the Secretary of War for the release of Strahan from military duties, stated that he wished to appoint a gentleman of ability unconnected with The Bahamas as Colonial Secretary.<sup>162</sup> This was probably not a reflection of any disservice by Nesbitt, but rather a need to balance the ratio of British to Bahamian

<sup>161</sup>Lord Stanley to Charles Bayley, no. 3771, 15 May 1858 and Colonial Office Memo, CO23/156/188-190.

<sup>162</sup>Duke of Buckingham & Chandos to Sir J. Packington, no. 9951, 13 October 1868, CO23/192/231-232. Lieutenant Strahan of the Royal Artillery was a former aide-de-camp to William Gladstone and Acting Colonial Secretary in Malta. Strahan proved an able administrator. He became Acting Governor in April 1871 and continued in this capacity right up until Sir John Pope-Hennessy eventually arrived in May 1873. The Bahamas Friendly Society had actually petitioned that Strahan be appointed Governor as he "had administered the Government in so satisfactory a manner as materially to promote and increase the general prosperity and welfare of the Colony" (Petition from the Bahama Friendly Society, 11 December 1871, CO23/206/133-141). He was appointed Administrator of Lagos in 1873.

administrators over all and the realization that the Colonial Secretary was liable to take over as the Administrator of the Colony on many occasions. Bahamian William Doyle had been promoted to Chief Justice in 1865, after Lees' retirement. Already a member of the Executive Council, he had replaced Webb on the Legislative Council in 1859, having been recognised as "a very active, useful, and enlightened member of the House of Assembly".<sup>163</sup>

The most surprising appointment was that of prominent local Wesleyan and House member Robert Sawyer, in a bid to win him to the Government side (much like Meadows had been). Governor James Walker sought to conciliate the House, after the bitter struggles over Disestablishment, by transferring its leader to the Executive Council. Samuel Otis Johnson, Thomas Williams, Timothy Darling and Abraham Holmes were, like Sawyer and Adderley, prominent Bay Street merchants.<sup>164</sup> Thomas Williams had been appointed to the Legislative Council in 1868, Abraham T. Holmes and Samuel O. Johnson in 1869. Williams was an Englishman and wholesale merchant, who had arrived in The Bahamas as a young clerk for a Liverpool firm in 1847. His particular virtue was political moderation, as well as a friendly disposition to the Government. This was an important consideration during the Disendowment crisis and discussion of Retrenchment measures. Moreover, he had lost his House seat to R.H. Sawyer following an investigation into the June 1868 contest. Bruce Burnside had also lost his Harbour Island seat in the turbulent 1868 election. Burnside, Holmes and Johnson were appointed at the same time to the Legislative Council. Burnside had shown himself to be a loyal Church Party man; Holmes was a Wesleyan and Johnson a Presbyterian, so the appointments were another maneuver by Governor James Walker to suit all parties during the religious controversy. Holmes had also been a leading Government opponent in the House; as far as back as 1846 Governor Mathew had complained to Gladstone that "Mr. Holmes and his immediate family connexions are among the most

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<sup>163</sup>Charles Bayley to Duke of Newcastle, no.86, 15 December 1859. CO23/160/214-215. Doyle proved an able Justice. Governor Robinson pointed out there had been no successful appeal against his decision for 10 years. "His judicial career has been marked by great ability and unswerving impartiality" (William Robinson to Earl of Carnarvon, no.40, 4 March 1875, CO23/213/117-118). He was rewarded with the post of Chief Justice of Antigua in 1875.

<sup>164</sup>Henry Adderley returned to the Legislative Council in 1865 but had left The Bahamas soon after the end of the American Civil War, having been made a wealthy man from the profits that blockade running brought to some Nassau merchants.

constant and unscrupulous opponents of Government”.<sup>165</sup> His transfer to the Council, like Sawyer’s, was an attempt to quell that opposition.

Bruce Burnside, appointed to the Executive Council in 1864, was the son of the late Surveyor-General and a barrister (both English and Bahamian Bar), who had been Solicitor – General during the American Civil War, but had resigned his post.<sup>166</sup> Governor Walker came to regard Burnside with suspicion: “He is said to have talent but he is a man of narrow views, and is animated by feelings of anything but loyalty to the British Government”. This seems to have been occasioned by Burnside’s private legal business, defending those taking part in the Cuban insurrection and thus breaking British laws. The Secretary of State was moved to note in 1869: “It is evidently most objectionable that the confidential adviser of the insurrectionary agents as a member of the Executive Council deliberates upon measures to prevent his clients from carrying on their operations”.<sup>167</sup>

Timothy Darling was appointed to the Executive Council in 1862. Born in Canada in 1810, he had moved to Maine at an early age and come to Nassau in 1830, after being shipwrecked off the Berry Islands. He and five other Nassau merchants had formed the Heneagua Salt Pond Company in 1849 and he became Inagua’s representative in 1859. Governor Bayley commented that Darling “always seemed to me to have more liberal and comprehensive views of the Colony’s best interests than the majority of the Colonists themselves”.<sup>168</sup> Darling’s daughter married Samuel Johnson, fellow member of the Executive Council and his business partner.

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<sup>165</sup>George Mathew to William Gladstone, no.43, 11 June 1846, CO23/122/262-265.

<sup>166</sup>Burns was defending certain persons in a crown prosecution of a delicate nature and this was likely to be censured by the United States Government. He resigned quite amicably and maintained harmonious relations with the Governor.

<sup>167</sup>James Walker to Lord Kimberley, 18 February 1871, CO23/204/124-128 and Colonial Office minute no. 8578, 18 August 1870, CO23/202/199-200. The Colonial Office offered him the post of Attorney General of the Leeward Islands in order to remove him from The Bahamas. He turned it down as he had a large private practice and the salary, although three times as much as that of The Bahamas, would not compensate.

<sup>168</sup>Charles Bayley to Duke of Newcastle, no. 117, 11 October 1862, CO23/169/309-311. Darling was the first Bahamian citizen to be made a Companion of the Most Distinguished Order of St. Michael and St. George. “To a powerful intellect he added the charm of gentle manners and a most generous disposition... He was a trusty friend, an affectionate husband and father, a public-spirited citizen, and a true Christian gentleman” (Obituary, *Nassau Guardian*, 30 October 1880).

Another family connection was that of Edward Taylor, appointed in 1867, to George Anderson. His father was a Scot, but he was born in Nassau in 1827. His first wife was the daughter of Henry Adderley, although she had died in 1857. He was educated at the King's College School and the University of Pennsylvania and called to the Bahamas bar in 1847, which would limit his colonial career to the Colony. Still he became Colonial Secretary in 1879 and would administer the Colony eleven times before his retirement in 1890. He followed the practice, begun by Charles Nesbitt, of leading Government business in the House.<sup>169</sup>

Table 14. The Councils in The Bahamas, 1879.

Council	Member	Occupation	Nationality
<u>Executive</u>	E. B. A. Taylor	Colonial Secretary	Bahamian
	B. L. Burnside	Attorney General	Bahamian
	A. C. Lowe	Receiver General	British
	Capt. Wilson	Militia	British
	T. Darling	Merchant	Bahamian/ American
	R. H. Sawyer	Merchant	Bahamian
	S. O. Johnson	Merchant	Bahamian
	W. E. Armbrister	Merchant	Bahamian
	G. T. R. Kemp	Doctor	Bahamian
	<u>Legislative</u>	S. O. Johnson	Merchant
Fred Duncombe		Physician (Asylum)	Bahamian
J. Nibbs Brown		Retired Justice	British Subject
J. H. Webb		Registrar	British
T. M. Mathews		Attorney	Bahamian
J. S. George		Merchant	British/Bahamian
A. J. Thompson		Provost Marshal	Bahamian
W. H. Hall		Cashier, Public Bank	Bahamian

*Source: An Almanack for 1879, with a Guide to the Bahamas, Nassau Directory etc. (Nassau: Nassau Guardian, 1879), 27.*

By 1879 the office of Chief Justice was no longer in Bahamian hands, but the Chief Justice no longer sat in the Legislative Council. Bruce Burnside was now Attorney General (no harm had come from his Civil War business dealings) and, although remaining in the

<sup>169</sup>Obituary of E. B. A. Taylor, *Nassau Guardian*, 27 April 1904. He died in Ealing, London, on 7 April 1904.

Executive Council, had given up his seat in the Legislative Council to return to the House (elected for Town in 1872).

Like T. M. Mathews, W. E. Armbrister was coloured, but considered 'white' by the Nassau elite and allowed into their circles. He was probably introduced to the Executive Council in 1875 by Governor William Robinson to counter the obstructionist views of R. H. Sawyer and Dr. G. T. R. Kemp. Also, he added another Anglican voice to the Executive Council, Sawyer, Kemp, Darling, and Johnson being Dissenters. J. Nibbs Brown, appointed to the Legislative Council in 1874, was also coloured. He had been a Resident Justice, who had come to The Bahamas from the Windward Islands in 1860.<sup>170</sup> He was to continue in his office in Inagua, taking his six weeks' annual leave to attend the Council sessions in Nassau. Pope-Hennessey appointed him partly to give representation to the Out Islands: "The Out-Island interest, and especially Inagua, is well entitled to some sort of representation in the Upper House".<sup>171</sup>

Important changes in the composition of the Councils had taken place in the period 1840-1880. The Governor had to take advice and get consent from the Executive Council before taking action. This gave members of that Council, the majority of them white Bahamians, some control over the Governor. Moreover, there was generally an unofficial majority on the Executive Council and most of these unofficial members were also representatives in the House or sat on the Legislative Council. In this way the Legislature gained influence over the Executive.

Governor Gregory summed up the ideal situation: "Every Member of the Executive Council knows very well, that he is at perfect liberty to speak & vote upon any question before the Legislature, just as he chooses, provided that he has not spoken & advised the Governor in a contrary manner during the previous discussion of the matter in Council."<sup>172</sup> A number of Governors found the position of non-office holders problematic; Henry Adderley came to clash with Governors more than once over the ambiguous definition of 'freedom of speech and voting'. The Secretary of State sought to clarify the position to

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<sup>170</sup>He had already served in the Executive Council of Grenada (from 1835).

<sup>171</sup>John Pope-Hennessey to Earl of Kimberley, no. 183, 24 January 1874, Governors' Dispatches 1873-1883, 117-118. He was already 67 years old in 1874 and retired in 1877.

<sup>172</sup>John Gregory to Earl Grey, no.17, 14 March 1851, CO23/138/61-66.

Governor Rawson in 1868 at the time of the Disendowment controversy when Dissenting members of the Councils found themselves in awkward positions. He wrote:-

I consider that the Executive Council should consist of persons who can act with the Governor and of them only – If therefore an Executive Councillor finds it necessary to oppose Government in the Legislative Council or Assembly continually or on questions of serious importance, the Governor should first remonstrate with him, then ask, in writing, the Councillor to resign, and then refer the correspondence to the Secretary of State – the Councillor being made aware that this would be done.

In the case of a paid official it should be intimated that systematic opposition or refusal of support on any measure regarded by Government as very important is incompatible with retention of such a paid office.

This course of proceedings should be avoided and is inadvisable in the case of a person who holds a trifling post.<sup>173</sup>

Governor William Robinson found Robert Sawyer and Dr. Kemp, Wesleyan members of the House and the Executive Council, “decidedly antagonistic to the Governors having a strong party in the Assembly”.<sup>174</sup> He wrote that “a struggle commenced whereby it was sought to make the power which had thus found admission to the Board paramount to the Board itself”. The Colonial Office response was not as forthright as the Secretary of State’s had been to Rawson. The consensus of Colonial Office opinion was not to have non-office holders or to make their positions renewable each year.<sup>175</sup> Sir J. Pauncefote thought the remedy could be not to appoint unofficial members without them pledging themselves to “a more consistent course”. Such advice did not help Robinson since the Secretary of State admitted it was difficult to take action and Pauncefote realised the Bahamians would find this type of change objectionable. In fact, in 1877, Robinson was again complaining to the Secretary of State that three members of the Executive Council voted against the Government in the House and carried an undesired amendment to the Stamp Duties Act by one or two votes.<sup>176</sup> It was an impossible situation for Governors, who often found it advisable to bring on to the Executive Council prominent Bahamians, particularly House members, in the hope that they would then aid Government measures. If they failed to do this, invariably a fuss would be made but they knew they would seldom be asked to resign.

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<sup>173</sup>Duke of Buckingham & Chandos to Rawson Rawson, no. 4053, 6 May 1868, CO23/192/158-161. His opinion differed from that given to Charles Bayley in 1858.

<sup>174</sup>William Robinson to Earl of Carnarvon, 8 October 1875, CO23/214/409-417.

<sup>175</sup>Colonial Office memo no. 8106, CO23/214/145-148.

<sup>176</sup>William Robinson to Earl of Carnarvon, no. 91, 25 June 1877, CO23/217/339-340.

By 1898 the two Councils looked like this (with the date of appointment in brackets):-

Executive Council

Colonial Secretary  
 Attorney-General  
 Receiver-General  
 R. H. Sawyer (1869)  
 Dr. G.T.R. Kemp (1874)  
 W. E. Armbrister (1875)  
 Joseph Brown (1887)  
 J. H. Young (1891)

Legislative Council

Dr. W. M. G. Maclure (1880)  
 Pres. Dr. G. T. R. Kemp (1885)  
 W. E. Armbrister (1887)  
 Joseph Brown (1889)  
 Dr. J. Albury (1890)  
 C. A. Fraser (1895)  
 H. A. Brook (1895)

The Executive Council was one that the white elite could look on with favour. There was no one here who would impede a conservative policy. Ormond Malcolm was appointed Attorney General in 1882, giving a Bahamian one of the ex-officio seats. The Colonial Secretary was consistently an English importation after the retirement of Edward Taylor. Hesketh Bell held the Receiver Generalship at this point in time, but this office fluctuated between Bahamian and British holders. Joining his relative, Robert Sawyer, was Joseph Brown, a considerable property owner, sponge merchant and jeweller. Governor Henry Blake recognised him as a man of influence, even though he took an independent line and had not always been supportive of the Government in the House.<sup>177</sup> James Young, another merchant, was appointed in 1891. Governor Shea acknowledged that this lessened the number of officer holders on the Council, but he felt the Government needed support in the Assembly. He was also confident of the good will felt towards him by the Bahamian elite and reminded the Colonial Office there had been no friction between him and the Executive Council in his four years of administration. "There is, here, a settled spirit of desire to harmonise with the policy of Her Majesty's Government."<sup>178</sup> Shea had a very cosy relationship with the Bahamian elite; hence the mutual satisfaction with the composition of the Council.

Dr. G. T. R. Kemp, leading Wesleyan member of the white Nassau elite, was made president of the Legislative Council in 1891. Governor Shea remarked on his usefulness as

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<sup>177</sup>Henry Blake to Viscount Stanhope, no. 113, 30 November 1886, CO23/228/388-389.

<sup>178</sup>Ambrose Shea to Lord Kimberley, no. 14, 20 January 1892, CO23/234/26-29.

he stood “deservedly high in the community”.<sup>179</sup> W. E. Armbrister retired from the House and joined the Legislative Council in 1887, having always been a warm supporter of the Government. Joseph Brown was invited into the Legislative Council after losing his seat on a technicality after the 1889 election. Dr. Albury, complainant in 1882 about the conduct of the ‘Queen’s Men’ in the Andros election and instigator of a petition against Governor Blake’s appointments to the Councils, was deemed worthy of a place on the Legislative Council by Ambrose Shea. The Commandant of Police, C. A. Fraser, and H. A. Brook, Registrar of Records, replaced two members who had died in 1894.

The white elite took most of the locally filled posts in the civil service and the judiciary. A memorial from some non-white Bahamians, organised by the Friendly Societies, complained that openings in the administration of justice and the civil service were filled from the same classes – the relatives, immediate friends and favourites of the principal Executive officers.<sup>180</sup> *The Freeman* had this to say:

The *native officials* of this Colony [except for teachers, out-door customs clerks, policemen and jailers], are drawn almost exclusively from that element which represents the *minority* of the population.... There are many circumstances which have operated and which still operate (among them the re-appearance, by a species of mental atavism, of prejudices which were supposed to have been dead and buried two generations ago) making the interests of the *dominant minority* so hostile to the interests of the *governed majority* that nothing less than *proportional participation* in the actual Government of the Colony can be *relied upon* as sufficient to safeguard the life, liberty, property and character of the majority of the people of this Colony.<sup>181</sup>

The whites complained too that their applicants for colonial posts were being overlooked in favour of British appointments. Joseph Brown, supported by the other unofficial members of the Executive Council, claimed in 1896 deserving young Bahamians were being passed over for promotion in the colonial service. A resolution was passed in the House backing the Council.<sup>182</sup> At the end of the year the matter re-emerged. The Governor wished to appoint G. A. Albury to the post of Resident Justice of Harbour Island as a quid

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<sup>179</sup>Ambrose Shea to Lord Kimberley, no. 34, 23 March 1891, CO23/233/122-124.

<sup>180</sup>Memorial from “Certain Coloured Inhabitants of New Providence”. June 1886, CO23/249-252, enclosed in E. B. A. Taylor to Earl Granville, no.76, 24 June 1886, CO23/228/233-245.

<sup>181</sup>*The Freeman*, 17 May 1887.

<sup>182</sup>Executive Council statement of 31 January 1896, CO23/243/266-267 enclosed in Haynes-Smith to Joseph Chamberlain, no. 41, 30 April 1896, CO23/243/264-265. Resolution of the House of Assembly, 6 April 1896, CO23/243/268-270.

pro quo for resigning his seat in the Assembly so that the Receiver General, Bell, could be elected to the House. Albury had, moreover, used his considerable influence to get the desired result. The Colonial Office approved four appointments but not Albury's, as a suitable post was required for a Briton, H. E. W. Grant, previously serving in the West Indies and West Africa, and now called to the bar in England. The Colonial Office memo made the comment: "An occasional appointment from outside does good rather than harm to the colony".<sup>183</sup> For some time non-natives had not been appointed Resident Justices, so protests were loud at the treatment of Albury. R. H. Sawyer declared that if the Colony was under the United States they would not have been treated so.<sup>184</sup> This appointment hardly seemed worth fighting over but the majority in London considered a principle was at stake: the office of Resident Magistrate was not confined to a Bahamian. "We must stick to our guns, but with a civil reply appreciating the sentiments & pointing out reasons for decisions."<sup>185</sup> A resolution of the House again recorded their dissatisfaction about appointments, but Chamberlain asked the Governor to point out that T. A. Thompson was recently appointed Judge in the Falkland Islands (1893) and Robert Menendez District Commissioner in Lagos (1894).<sup>186</sup> He could have added that W. A. Thompson had been appointed to the Gold Coast in 1894. All these men had family connections with R. H. Sawyer. Ten years later, in 1905, Governor Grey-Wilson remarked that the "most fruitful" source of trouble was the "foreign official". Quite rightly, he noted the object of the House was to assign a salary that would discourage importation of officials. He also commented on the fact the House had failed to note the large number of Bahamians serving in the Empire (eleven in 1905).<sup>187</sup> Serving overseas did not serve the elite's desire to control the

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<sup>183</sup>Colonial Office memo no. 25268, 9 December 1896, CO23/245/93-95 and Joseph Chamberlain to Haynes-Smith, 30 December 1896, CO23/245/93-95. It was realised that complaints from "insiders" were inevitable. Joseph Chamberlain totally agreed with the arrangement and the reasoning behind it.

<sup>184</sup>Haynes-Smith to Joseph Chamberlain, 30 January 1897, CO23/246/33-35. White Bahamians frequently aired opinions favouring the transference of The Bahamas to the United States. This was natural since much trade was transacted between the two and American tariffs adversely affected this trade.

<sup>185</sup>Colonial Office memo no. 3701, 18 February 1897, CO23/246/132.

<sup>186</sup>Resolution of the House of Assembly, 10 May 1897, CO23/246/243-246. Joseph Chamberlain to Haynes-Smith, 19 June 1897, CO23/246/247-248.

<sup>187</sup>Grey-Wilson to Alfred Lyttleton, 25 July 1905, CO23/260/335-341. Table of Bahamians serving in other parts of the Empire, 25 July 1905, CO23/260/342: M. Menendez (Nigeria); C. Moseley (Lagos); F. Maxwell (Honduras); T. Thompson (Trinidad); W. Thompson (Falklands); W. Duncombe (Lagos); H.

administration, but there were a number of Bahamians working in high positions in the local public service (for instance, Percy Armbrister; Thomas Mathew; James Rae; G. A. McGregor; Charles Anderson) to serve the purpose.

### The Political Faction of Robert Henry Sawyer

In 1893 Roger Yelverton, Chief Justice of The Bahamas, in correspondence with the Secretary of State, identified the supporters of a resolution against himself as the associates of R.H. Sawyer, who had enough power to create a “state of terrorism at Nassau”.<sup>188</sup> Just how exaggerated was this claim?

Robert Henry Sawyer was born in 1832 and educated at the King’s College School in Nassau.<sup>189</sup> He went into business on his own account in Market Street in 1849, and then with his brother-in-law, Ramon Menendez, who retired in 1872. Both merchants became wealthy from the profits to be made in Nassau during the American Civil War. Sawyer was instrumental in establishing the Bank of Nassau of which he was elected the first President, a position he held until his death. He was also President of Nassau Fire and Marine Insurance Company and of the Bahamas Steamship Company. He was elected representative for Harbour Island in 1858 and from 1866 he held the Town District of Nassau. He was appointed to the Executive Council in 1869 (see page 169) and the *Nassau Guardian* asserted: “His influence in that chamber steadily grew until he gained the absolute confidence of all members and came to be regarded as their safest guide in matters affecting the welfare of the Colony”.<sup>190</sup> He was one of the leaders of the Opposition representatives from his early years in the House, but it was during the Disendowment dispute that he came to the forefront of politics in the Colony, introducing the Disendowment bill in 1867. It was seen that Governor James Walker decided to invite Sawyer to join the Executive Council in

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Duncombe (Lagos); W. Rattray (Gold Coast); P. Thompson (Lagos); J. Smith (Sierra Leone); F. Moseley (West Australia).

<sup>188</sup>Roger Yelverton to Marquis of Ripon, 17 March 1893, CO23/238/488-489.

<sup>189</sup>His father, Robert W. Sawyer, had been the House member for Abaco from 1836 to 1839. He seemed to have had humble beginnings; an advert in the *Royal Gazette* of 6 January 1827 indicates he was selling lime from a cart.

<sup>190</sup>Sawyer’s obituary in *Nassau Guardian*, 19 April 1905.

1869 in order to bring the Opposition leader into the Council chamber. The Governor asserted: "He seems to be a man of more moderate views than many of his followers".<sup>191</sup> Others may have disagreed with this assessment but beyond doubt was the fact he had considerable influence in the Legislature.

Subsequently, Governor William Robinson, who considered Governor Walker had made a grave error of judgement in appointing Sawyer to the Executive Council, made complaints against Sawyer's behaviour. Not only did Sawyer obstruct the Governor in the Council, he also voiced his opposition to Government measures in the House. In the 1875 election Sawyer spoke on the hustings against two Government candidates. Governor Robinson accused Sawyer of saying, "every vote given for a Government candidate for the House of Assembly would prove another nail in the coffin of the Colony".<sup>192</sup> The Governor complained: "Fealty to the Government is lost sight of in the exigencies of supporting a party whose existence is necessary to individual power in the Council". The Governor clearly considered that Robert Sawyer was bent on establishing a power base both in the House and in the Executive Council (and consequently on the Boards too). That power was dependent on organising a following centred in the so-called Reform Party. This faction frequently opposed the Government, but more importantly, it increasingly became obstructionist and conservative. Any efforts towards improving the lot of the lower classes were generally opposed, as the white mercantile elite thought such measures undesirable.

What was Sawyer's character like? He was described by Rev. H. Bleby, Superintendent of the Methodist Church, as "a man of intelligence, with no education but what is gained in the poor schools of Nassau, and somewhat consequential as one of the petty politicians of the colony".<sup>193</sup> He went on to say that, "though not without some good qualities, he has neither piety nor the amiable disposition of Mr. Holmes, upon whom I fear his influence is not good. He has always been known as of a cantankerous disposition, so that his half-brother, Mr. Moore, ... gave him the designation of 'Spitfire'". Sawyer seemed to like to get his own way and it was not just Governors who felt the effect of incurring his enmity. Any type of opposition to his sway was liable to attract an intractable hostility,

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<sup>191</sup>James Walker to Earl Granville, no. 120, 9 June 1869, CO23/196/44-45

<sup>192</sup>William Robinson to Earl of Carnarvon, no. 91, 25 June 1877, CO23/217/339-340.

<sup>193</sup>Rev. H. Bleby, Nassau, to Rev. W. Boyce, WMS, 18 September 1871; Box 221, no. 41; West Indian Correspondence: Bahamas, Fiche Box no. 29, sheet 1400.

whether it was from the realms of Government, from the radical coloured class (such as James Carmichael Smith) or even from the Wesleyan Church.

R. H. Sawyer's role in Opposition was very much connected with membership of the Methodist Church. James Carmichael Smith considered Sawyer, S. P. Saunders, Dr. F. Holmes, Dr. G. Kemp and W. Johnson "ran" the Methodist Church in The Bahamas.<sup>194</sup> Under the superintendence of the Rev. H. Cheeseborough, Sawyer and Holmes had been able to exercise the government of the circuit, as he had tended to be delinquent in his duties and lazy. He allowed them to "act as if everything pertaining to Methodism here was subject to their dictation".<sup>195</sup> They desired the Superintendent of the circuit to be a cipher. Thus when an active superintendent, the Reverend H. Bleby, came along and their influence in Chapel matters was diminished, they began a campaign against him. This interpretation of attitudes and events was not just the one offered by the victim, Bleby; Rev. Elijah Sumner agreed that what was happening was "the harvest of our late Chairman's sowing", along with "a disappointed lust for power" on the part of the Bahamian politicians.<sup>196</sup> From 1871, Sawyer, Holmes and Kemp were frequently complaining to the Wesleyan Missionary Society in London.<sup>197</sup> Ironically, they also sought to diminish the minister's role in other spheres. When a bill came before the House to place four ministers of religion on the Board of Education, it was rejected. The suggestion was that Sawyer and his allies did not want the ministers meddling.

Sawyer and Kemp proceeded to hold "indignation meetings" and the Reverend H. Bleby had to hope that Mission House would uphold his authority against "the factious proceedings of the troublesome men who have assailed it". As far as Bleby was concerned they were unscrupulous men, with no sense of honour or religion. He was adamant that "the

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<sup>194</sup>James Carmichael Smith to Roger Yelverton, 26 February 1893, CO23/238/492-499.

<sup>195</sup>Rev. H. Bleby, Nassau, to Rev. W. Boyce, WMS, 16 October 1871 and 18 March 1872; Box 221, no. 14; West Indian Correspondence: Bahamas, Fiche Box no. 29, sheet 1400 and 1405. Certainly Rev. H. Bleby regarded Sawyer as a mixed blessing. The minister considered he belonged to "a class of men that have always done Methodism more harm than good all over the West Indies." (Bleby to Rev. W. Boyce, WMS, 18 September 1871; Box no. 221, no. 41; West Indian Correspondence: Bahamas, Fiche Box no. 29, sheet 1400.

<sup>196</sup>Rev. E. Sumner, Nassau, to Rev. W. Boyce, WMS, 26 March 1872; Box 221, no. 17; West Indian Correspondence: Bahamas, Fiche Box no. 29, sheet 1406.

<sup>197</sup>Petition to Rev. John J. James, President of the Methodist Conference, from Holmes, Menendez and Sawyer, 30 March 1872; Box 221, no. 18 and 20; West Indian Correspondence: Bahamas, Fiche Box no. 29, sheet 1406. Another petition, with Kemp's name added, was also sent.

loss of these men, and the few they prevail on to go with them, would be gain to our cause here both spiritually and financially". In his experience of them, he asserted, they had not performed one liberal act: "they are impracticable, unreasonable and tricky men". Bleby was particularly angry that they had done all they could to spread "the poison of their own spirit".<sup>198</sup>

Rev. Elijah Sumner, who backed his Superintendent's assessment, felt the complainants did not have every member's support: "I am thankful to say that I find many of our people here opposed to the factious proceedings set on foot of late by some who ought to act differently".<sup>199</sup> Ebenezer Chapel, in the east of Nassau, remained aloof and most at Trinity Chapel, he believed, were at "one with their minister". (Ebenezer Chapel had more coloured Bahamians.) Sumner, like Bleby, considered all would be alright if "two or three did not continue to agitate the minds of others and make all the mischief possible". The object of these "moving spirits", he stated, was to get rid of Bleby by disturbing the Church, sowing the idea that everything was going to ruin and blaming Bleby. Interestingly, a fellow Assemblyman, Dr. J. B. Albury, who was Circuit Steward, did not appear to support their scheme. He, reportedly, told Bleby that Sawyer and Holmes ignored him and the other Trustees and did just as they pleased in the Chapel.<sup>200</sup> Another Trustee and Society Steward, Charles Stephens, wrote to the General Secretaries himself "with reference to the unkind, unbecoming, unmerited, undeserving feeling that is being manifested towards our Superintendent [*sic*]"<sup>201</sup>

Such internal disputations must have been harmful in such a small community as Nassau. The Reverend E. Sumner informed the Society: "Methodism proper ignored. Secret & party meetings called. Vile slanders sedulously circulated. Anonymous

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<sup>198</sup>Rev. H. Bleby, Nassau, to Rev. W. Boyce, WMS, 18 March 1872; Box no. 221, no. 14; West Indian Correspondence: Bahamas, Fiche Box no. 29, sheet 1405.

<sup>199</sup>Rev. E. Sumner, Nassau, to Rev. W. Boyce, WMS, 26 March 1872; Box no. 221, no. 17; West Indian Correspondence: Bahamas, Fiche Box no. 29, sheet 1406. Rev. R. W. Jordan of Harbour Island also wrote in support of Bleby on 26 July 1872; Box no. 221, no. 39; FBN 29, sheet 1408.

<sup>200</sup>Rev. H. Bleby, Nassau, to Rev. W. Boyce, WMS, 1 April 1872; Box no. 221, no. 19; West Indian Correspondence: Bahamas, Fiche Box no. 29, sheet 1406.

<sup>201</sup>Charles Stephen to General Secretaries, WMS, 26 March 1872; Box no. 221, no. 20; Fiche Box no. 29, sheet 1406. Stephens professed to be shocked and ashamed by their behaviour and assured the General Secretaries that he, a member for forty-three years, had been satisfied with all ministers sent by them, but with none more than Bleby and he believed his feelings were in tune with the congregations.

communication sent etc.”<sup>202</sup> In this endeavour, Sawyer and his friends failed; they did not drive out Rev. H. Bleby. But by 1875 the minister felt the ill feeling had subsided: “I am given to understand that the parties are pretty well ashamed of their doings. They all treat me, as I treat them, with courtesy and brotherly kindness.”<sup>203</sup> Once Rev. Francis Moon was appointed Superintendent of the circuit things became much more to the liking of R. H. Sawyer. He was much more easily manipulated and a minister not averse to stirring up denominational passions and political intrigue.

Robert Sawyer’s son, R.W. Sawyer, also a member of the House, attended the Anglican Church. The practice of the younger members of the Sawyer family was commented upon by James Carmichael Smith, who acidly commented: “[They] are endeavouring to run that Church also”. He added that with the Moseley/Darling alliance in the Presbyterian Church, that church was also being brought into line. As Smith so accurately reflected: “The religious idea must not be lost sight of if we are to understand the trend of affairs in this colony”.<sup>204</sup>

Influence with the Governor was equally significant. Under Governor William Robinson the relationship was hostile, but after his administration things quietened down somewhat. Sir Henry Blake did not desire any increase in the power of the Nassau merchant class, but he capitulated to Methodist pressure over the Powles issue.<sup>205</sup> With the appointment of Governor Shea to the Governorship in 1888 Robert Sawyer’s grip on the affairs of The Bahamas tightened. He had a close relationship with the Governor, so much so that James Carmichael Smith described the Sawyer family “at the elbows of the Governor”.<sup>206</sup> “To-day the Sawyers have it their own way; Everything is sent down to the

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<sup>202</sup>Rev. E. Sumner, Nassau, to Rev. W. Boyce, WMS, 30 August 1872; Box no. 221, no. 41; West Indian Correspondence: Bahamas, Fiche Box no. 29, sheet 1417.

<sup>203</sup>Rev. H. Bleby, Nassau, to Rev. W. Boyce, WMS, 20 February 1875; Box 221, no. 7; West Indian Correspondence: Bahamas, Fiche Box no. 29, sheet 1417. Nevertheless, a letter of the same year indicates that Sawyer and Kemp were still trying to interfere with appointments to the Nassau circuit (R. H. Sawyer and Dr. G. Kemp to General Secretaries, London, 9 April 1875; Box 221, no. 17; FBN 29, sheet 1418).

<sup>204</sup>James Carmichael Smith to Roger Yelverton, 26 February 1893, CO23/238/492-499.

<sup>205</sup>See page 190.

<sup>206</sup>Ibid.

House cut and dried.” Smith certainly believed he was a victim of the Sawyer family’s intrigues.

Just who was in the Sawyer family circle? Chief Justice Roger Yelverton mentioned these members of the House of the 1890s as part of the ‘clan’: R.H. Sawyer; his son, R.W. Sawyer; his nephew, Dr. F. Holmes; his cousins, C. Sands, J. Culmer and W. Johnson and Joseph Brown, who was related through marriage.<sup>207</sup> Another associate was Thomas A. Thompson, the nephew of Sawyer’s brother-in-law. The Sawyers were also related to the Saunders family of Abaco, through Robert Sawyer’s mother. *The Freeman* gave its verdict on the rule of the Sawyer faction: “Since the assumption to power of the *clique* who beguiled and befuddled the people with such glittering and delusive promises, twenty years ago, the public policy of this Colony has degenerated into a mean and narrow spirit and party aggrandisement and nepotism”.<sup>208</sup>

The influence of Sawyer, of course, stretched beyond the House. Austin J. Thompson was Sawyer’s brother-in-law and lived in the same house.<sup>209</sup> He was the brother of Alexander Thompson, the former Provost Marshall. As well as holding the post of Resident Justice of Harbour Island, he owned a dry goods store. His nephews, T. A. and W. A. Thompson, were also employed by the Colonial Government. R.H. Sawyer tried to get Austin J. Thompson designated Auditor-General, in which post he had been acting, and his idea was to get the Auditor-General a seat in the Executive Council. (He failed to achieve this and an expatriate, W. Hunt, was appointed.) Similarly, Thomas A. Thompson applied for the Colonial Secretaryship in 1893. If R.H. Sawyer had succeeded in these plans, Smith rightly stated “Sawyer would have had the Government of this colony in his pocket”.<sup>210</sup>

James C. Smith considered R.H. Sawyer had more than one motive for getting his family members appointed to these colonial Government posts. Obviously, it widened his power base, but Smith believed there was pecuniary interest too. According to Smith, income from his business was not sufficient for the number of family members who had to live off it. Powles reported the same financial need in view of the many mortgages the

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<sup>207</sup>Roger Yelverton to the Marquis of Ripon, 17 March 1893, CO23/238/488-489.

<sup>208</sup>*The Freeman*, 10 April 1888.

<sup>209</sup>James Carmichael Smith to Roger Yelverton, 26 February 1893, CO23/238/492-499.

<sup>210</sup>*Ibid.*

Sawyers held.<sup>211</sup> Entry into public service would augment that income. From the generally held view regarding the lack of substantial wealth of the white elite, this could well have been a consideration. However, the primary motive was surely to gain more influence.

Relationship to R.H. Sawyer had its advantages in Nassau society but it could also be a liability. The Colonial Office memoranda increasingly show that their officers were well aware of Nassau family connections and the resulting power that was attached to membership. It was obvious that they did not approve and would not aid its further expansion. Edward Wingfield of the Colonial Office wrote that he would like to see T. A. Thompson promoted to another colony. He considered him “an excellent officer but his family connexions in the Bahamas makes it undesirable that he should be a magistrate there”.<sup>212</sup> The other Colonial Office officials penned their agreement to that sentiment. It was noted: “It would show we were in earnest in regard to the ‘family ring’ in the Bahamas”.

Sawyer attempted to use his position in the House and Council to his business advantage. The Bank of Nassau needed more capital; the Receiver General, Hesketh Bell, strongly opposed investment of any Government money, “thereby making Sawyer and his friends very angry”.<sup>213</sup> Sawyer’s efforts to get a subsidy for his own steamship, despite it not fulfilling Government regulations for such a subsidy, have already been noted.

At the turn of the century, Governor Gilbert Carter stated the “factors of the situation” were R. H. Sawyer, J. H. Young, J. Culmer, and Harcourt Malcolm, son of Ormond Malcolm. Sawyer had given up the Speakership in 1898 on account of ill health and his kinsman, Dr. Francis A. Holmes, had succeeded him. The Governor did emphasise that Sawyer himself, as a member of the Executive Council, now supported the Government in the House. However, his failing health had led his son, R. W. Sawyer, “a very active member”, to take the lead and he was by no means a supporter of Government. “The Sawyer interest in the Assembly, which is considerable, although controlled by a member

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<sup>211</sup>Ibid. and an enclosure in L. D. Powles to Marquis of Ripon, 29 October 1892, CO23/235/277-278.

<sup>212</sup>Colonial Office memo no. 19886, 27 November 1893, CO23/237/325. In fact T. A. Thompson wanted to get away himself, and applied for the Falklands Islands, not a promotion but a side-step, “to escape the unpleasantness of my work in this Colony” (T. A. Thompson to Ambrose Shea, 18 December 1893, CO23/237/359-360). The unpleasantness was the Yelverton dispute and the decrease in public respect for the administration of justice.

<sup>213</sup>Bell, Diaries, 126.

who can be relied on to speak and to vote in favour of Government measures, yet it is notorious that the components of this faction follow the lead of the son rather than that of the father”.<sup>214</sup> The new guard was coming to the fore, but just how different would they be?

### Law and Order

A House composed largely of the Nassau merchants passed laws that suited them. On the other hand, social reforms, favoured by some Governors, faced obstacles. The elite dictated the application of the law and the structure of policing the colony. High property qualifications meant that not many non-whites could serve on the juries. Service on the Grand Jury was reserved to those worth one thousand pounds and that on petty juries to those owning property worth at least one hundred pounds. Just after Emancipation, only 225 persons qualified for jury service in New Providence and sixty-one for the Grand Jury.<sup>215</sup> However, the Stipendiary Magistrates stayed on after 1838, although within a few decades there were more local Justices administering the law in the Out Islands.

Access to justice was, according to the non-whites, biased in favour of the white Bahamians. In one petition “certain coloured inhabitant of New Providence” complained: “Crimes when committed by the white man, who has friends & means...are to be overlooked & condoned, but crimes when committed by the poor friendless black or coloured man...are to be detected & be punished with the full severity of the Law”.<sup>216</sup> They were particularly referring to the collapse of the Public Bank in 1885 when Governor Henry Blake suppressed investigation of any allegations of mismanagement. The manager, W. H. Hall, was on the Legislative Council and closely related to several members of the elite. Ormond Malcolm was Hall’s attorney and there were rumours that he had hindered creditors from gaining certain assets. At this time Malcolm was also Attorney General and he held this post alongside running the largest private practice in Nassau.

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<sup>214</sup>Gilbert Carter to Under Secretary, Colonial Office, 10 October 1904, CO23/259/627-629.

<sup>215</sup>Craton, History of Bahamas, 201.

<sup>216</sup>Memorial (with over 300 signatures), CO23/228/249/252, enclosed in E. B. A. Taylor to Earl Granville, no.76, 24 June 1886, CO23/228/233-245.

Governors acknowledged the need for reforming the administration of justice in the Out Islands. The local Resident Justices and their Assistants were ill qualified and lacked the respect and confidence of the local inhabitants. Several were reprimanded or suspended from office for misdemeanours. There was no check upon possible injustice or default of duty by the Justices. The right of appeal did exist but appeals could only be heard in Nassau, making it too expensive for most islanders, who had to depend on justice from the official on the spot. A scheme to improve the judicial system was approved by the Assembly in 1886 (48 Vic. c.16). Two Stipendiary Magistrates with legal qualifications would be appointed, one of whom would visit every island quarterly, while the other performed the duties in Nassau previously performed by the Police Magistrate and the Judge of Common Pleas. Magistrates would take the home and circuit duty in alternate quarters. The Magistrate on circuit would hear certain cases entered for his decision, but would also hear ‘on the spot’ appeals from the decisions of the Resident Justices. From the start Governor Blake sought an Englishman for one of the posts, in an effort to restore faith in the administration of justice, especially by the non-whites. L. D. Powles was appointed in July 1886.<sup>217</sup>

#### Louis Diston Powles

Powles’ tenure of the Magistracy lasted one year. Blake commented that within a few months Powles had “done mischief that it will take years to undo”.<sup>218</sup> The Colonial Office decided “he must be more than half mad”.<sup>219</sup> A question concerning him was asked in the House of Commons and a headline in the *New York Herald* read ‘SLAVERY IN FREEDOM: An English Judge Run Out of the Bahamas for Protecting the Blacks’.<sup>220</sup> This was his offence.

Powles believed he had put some noses out of joint by the mere fact of his appointment. The positions of Police Magistrate and Judge of Common Pleas were to be abolished; holders of both these posts were “members of *the family*”, as Powles referred to

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<sup>217</sup>Secretary of State to L. D. Powles, No. 5256, 17 July 1886. Powles was educated at Harrow and Oxford and had been a member of the Inner Temple for twenty-one years. Lord Coleridge had personally recommended him to Lord Granville, Domestic Minute no. 8804, 5 May 1887, CO23/229/541.

<sup>218</sup>Henry Blake to Henry Holland, no. 75, 25 June 1887, CO23/229/236-237.

<sup>219</sup>Colonial Office minute no. 13724, 11 July 1887, CO23/229/239.

<sup>220</sup>Domestic Minute no. 8804, 5 May 1887, CO23/229/541 and cutting CO23/229/363-364.

the ruling whites.<sup>221</sup> A. J. Thompson, the Police Magistrate, took one of the new offices, but two Bahamians had applied for the other post, including Camplejohn, the Judge of Common Pleas. Blake found a way round the problem. Camplejohn suffered ill health so the Assembly made the Act 'prospective' as far as the Judge was concerned, so he could still draw his salary. One of the stipulations for the new post, with a salary of five hundred pounds less expenses, was that the incumbent was not allowed to practise on his own account. Thompson would have to give up his private practice so the House "stepped in and did a job for its relative", giving him an additional allowance of one hundred pounds.<sup>222</sup>

Powles soon found out that "even-handed justice between blacks and whites is all but unknown in the Bahamas".<sup>223</sup> One example he related concerned five black men who entered the Methodist Chapel in Harbour Island by the main doorway, strictly forbidden in the segregated Church. The service was discontinued and they were turned out. The next day they were prosecuted by the Resident Magistrate, who convicted them of brawling and fined them each twenty shillings. Powles reported the case of a white Bahamian acquitted of shooting a black policeman. He wrote that the whites' attitude was that he "was only a nigger". An American standing around the court area at the time remarked to Powles: "No-one who saw that crowd could doubt there was an undercurrent of race-hatred with which the white conch will have to reckon sooner or later".<sup>224</sup> He learnt that a "coloured" girl, Rosa Poitier, charged at the Police Court that her employer, R. H. Sawyer, had assaulted her and turned her out without wages for wearing a piece of green ribbon, the recognised badge of the Government party. Powles made inquiries which made him conclude that "it was still the practice with many of the white Bahamians to strike their coloured female servants without compunction, when they were impertinent, as though they were still slaves".<sup>225</sup>

On first of January, 1887, Powles announced in the Nassau Police Court he would send all persons convicted by him of striking a woman to prison without the option of a fine,

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<sup>221</sup>Powles. Pink Pearl, 44.

<sup>222</sup>Ibid., 45.

<sup>223</sup>Ibid., 109. In his book he recounted examples known to him when blacks did not get justice, *ibid.*, 110-115.

<sup>224</sup>Ibid. 113 and 115. Powles did not quarrel with the acquittal as he said Sands was undoubtedly mad.

<sup>225</sup>Petition from Powles, 25 June 1887, CO23/229/313-320.

except in “very extenuating circumstances”.<sup>226</sup> With this resolve he sentenced three black men to various terms of imprisonment with hard labour.<sup>227</sup> On 7 February 1887 Powles sentenced James Lightbourn, a white Bahamian and small businessman, to one month’s imprisonment for common assault on his black female servant, Susan Hopkins.<sup>228</sup> Three “respectable and quite disinterested” black people witnessed the assault, whereas, for the defence, there was only the uncorroborated denial on oath of the accused.<sup>229</sup> Powles claimed the blacks were delighted at the “justice [that] had come to them at last from England”, while the whites were up in arms. A “prominent white citizen” asserted that if the appeal had been to a jury “we could have made it alright”. Another said: “Coloured women were only women in a limited sense”. And another: “The Lightbourn case touches us all. Why, I have twice kicked a coloured girl from the top of the house to the bottom myself”. The whites complained that their servants, “almost intolerable as it was”, would now be worse.<sup>230</sup>

Lightbourn’s counsel appealed, so he had to be released on bail, much to Powles’ annoyance as he was convinced he had “committed wilful and deliberate perjury”.<sup>231</sup> Lightbourn’s brother-in-law, Rev. Elijah H. Sumner, posted his bail money. Lightbourn was also a Wesleyan. Governor Blake advised Powles not to discuss the case, but Powles did not follow this advice and said on more than one occasion that he would not believe a Methodist on oath. He claimed these were private utterances, made to friends, but later he repeated his words when asked what he had said about Methodists.<sup>232</sup> Governor Blake termed these conversations “singularly indiscreet garrulity”.<sup>233</sup>

On 16 March there were two anonymous letters in the *Nassau Times* concerning Powles. “Mr. John Golightly” wrote in the course of the correspondence: “Having given us

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<sup>226</sup>Ibid. and Powles, *Pink Pearl*, 307.

<sup>227</sup>Including one Moses Wright, who was sentenced to six months’ hard labour for common assault of a Miss Kemp, a white woman. The sentence was much approved by white Bahamians.

<sup>228</sup>Petition from Powles, 25 June 1887, CO23/229/313-320.

<sup>229</sup>Powles, *Pink Pearl*, 308.

<sup>230</sup>Ibid., 309-310.

<sup>231</sup>Ibid., 309. His counsel was Clutson, the other Bahamian applicant for the Magistracy.

<sup>232</sup>L. D. Powles to E. B. A. Taylor, 7 April 1887, CO23/229/243-246 and Powles’ Statement, CO23/229/275-284.

<sup>233</sup>Henry Blake to Henry Holland, no. 45, 22 April 1887, CO23/229/108-109.

Mr. Powles surely we could not ask the Home Government to give us anything more". The other letter posed several questions about an unnamed expatriate official, who had written to a previous edition of the newspaper. Powles acknowledged he was the official. "Don't you think that he receives out of the Treasury of these islands a great deal more than he is worth, either intellectually, socially, or morally? Don't you think it would have been a great advantage to us had he never been thrown upon our shores? Don't you think him exceedingly lucky to find himself occupant of the fat sinecure he now holds? Don't you think it would be wise policy, on the part of the Government, to pay his passage back to the rich pastures he left behind?"<sup>234</sup>

An editorial article in the *Nassau Times* of 2 April exhorted Methodists to press for Powles' dismissal.

Mr. Powles has acknowledged that he was trained to hate Dissenters, and it will be seen further on, that he is doing credit to that training, and has become an efficient graduate of his school...He has freely stated that he loathes and hates the Methodists. And this is not all; he also stated to more than one person that he would not believe a Methodist on oath; and, to be more emphatic, to show that he means what he says, he has further said he would not believe a damned Methodist on oath...The effect of Mr. Powles' intolerance is really to deprive Methodists of their civil rights; to proscribe them because of their religious name and doctrine, and to shut them out of every court over which he may preside...There can be but one feeling in this matter, and that is to unite in endeavouring to bring to an end, and that as speedily as possible, a state of things so discreditable to our age and country, and so harmful to the people of the colony.

The article considered the only course for the Wesleyans was to press for Powles' dismissal.<sup>235</sup> Powles' statements regarding Methodists were, of course, prejudiced and unprofessional. He never denied making such statements, but did try to explain further what he meant. Powles believed Lightbourn to have committed perjury, but he always maintained that he did not realise at the time of the trial that Lightbourn was a Methodist so this had no bearing on that judgement. He found out after the trial that Lightbourn was a Wesleyan, when the bail was posted. Powles claimed he first made the offending remarks a day or two after the Lightbourn case. Lightbourn had said: "He hoped God would strike him dead" and "He hoped God would serve him as he did Ananias and Sapphira if he struck the girl Susan

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<sup>234</sup>*Nassau Times*, 16 March 1887.

<sup>235</sup>*Nassau Times*, 2 April 1887. The *Nassau Times* was not exactly a disinterested reporter of the news. R.H. Sawyer and Dr. G.T.R. Kemp were its proprietors. Powles was a Roman Catholic.

Hopkins". Because Powles believed Lightbourn to be lying, he stated he would not believe a Methodist's oath, meaning, he maintained, this "class of oath" used by religionists to cover a lie. He stated he did not mean that when sitting as a magistrate he would doubt the evidence of a witness, who had taken the oath, merely because he happened to be a Methodist.<sup>236</sup> This sounds very much like an explanation for a remark that the speaker now regretted. Powles would have been annoyed that Lightbourn, whom he believed guilty of a criminal act and a perjurer, appeared to have a good chance of getting away unpunished. This immediately dented his avowed intention of administering equal justice in The Bahamas. It would be highly likely that in private he might make some remarks about the individual that were injudicious. However, having made these statements twice to persons he considered friends, would not alarm bells ring in Powles' ears when others came to ask him about his remarks? And would not a more wary person have hesitated to repeat them to others on demand, particularly as the remarks were obviously unprofessional and prejudiced and as this case was controversial? Mr. Powles was either naive or head-strong and self-opinionated.

Immediately following this editorial of 2 April was an article giving advice to members of the House of Assembly concerning the payment of passage money to Powles, which was then under discussion. Two interesting points were made:-

Two evils are to be guarded against and these are: first, the encouragement that such grants would give...towards the filling of public offices to the exclusion of deserving and efficient natives of the Colony, and, next, the increase in our public expenditure consequent upon such appointments being made with increasing frequencies.

Thus, non-payment of passage money would be a way to punish Powles, and it would not encourage future Englishmen to take up posts in The Bahamas.

The *Nassau Times* of 9 April announced the sending of the petition by the Ministers and Lay Officials of the Methodist Church.<sup>237</sup> The letters and petition sent to the Colonial Government were printed in the *Nassau Times* of 23 April in its report on the meeting at Trinity Methodist Chapel, addressed by the Chairman of the District, the Reverend Francis

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<sup>236</sup>Powles' Statement, CO23/229/275-284.

<sup>237</sup>*Nassau Times*, 9 April 1887. The charges of the Methodists, 13 May 1887, CO23/229/253-25. Letter from Methodists, CO23/229/242.

Moon, “an address marked by its calm and moderate yet delightful tone”.<sup>238</sup>

The Select Committee discussing Powles’ passage money, with the exception of R.W. Farrington, who recommended granting half of the claim, reported against and the House, on a division, struck the grant from the Appropriations Act. The Governor attributed the Assembly’s move to the unpopularity of Powles among the white inhabitants of Nassau and felt that under different circumstances the money would have been paid.<sup>239</sup>

In June Powles was granted three months’ leave of absence on half pay as his medical certificate stated he required an immediate change of climate. Dr. W.M. Maclure believed he was suffering from nervous exhaustion.<sup>240</sup> Powles sent in his resignation to take effect at the expiration of the three months. Why did Powles resign? When Powles returned from his second circuit, he was told there would have to be an investigation before the Executive Council regarding the complaints of the Methodists. He considered he would not get a fair hearing from this white Bahamian body, dominated by R.H. Sawyer. Governor Blake was satisfied with the resignation and admitted he had “strained a point” to facilitate his departure. The Governor told the Colonial Office that he believed it was difficult for Powles to continue to hold office here “with advantage to the public service” because of his “singular indiscretion”. His continued presence “would probably have developed a colour question much to be deprecated”.<sup>241</sup>

Powles had reckoned that he had tried to do his duty as a judge conscientiously, adhering to his oath to administer justice “fearlessly and impartially to all Her Majesty’s subjects, regardless of creed, colour or any other consideration”.<sup>242</sup> This was his downfall. Powles had also denounced the truck system “in the most uncompromising manner both in

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<sup>238</sup>*Nassau Times*, 23 April 1887. This description does not ring true of the Francis Moon who had regaled his audiences with sectarian and furious speeches and sermons in the past. In the *Nassau Times* of 26 March Moon had made a furious attack upon Roman Catholics insinuating their disloyalty to the Queen, and upon the Pope, calling him “the man of sin”.

<sup>239</sup>Henry Blake to Henry Holland, no. 45, 22 April 1887, CO23/229/108-109.

<sup>240</sup>Henry Blake to Henry Holland, no.75, 25 June 1887, CO23/229/236-237 and Medical Certificate, 6 June 1887, CO23/23/229/238.

<sup>241</sup>Henry Blake to Henry Holland, no. 76, 25 June 1887, CO23/229/240-241 and Henry Blake to E. B. A. Taylor, 11 April 1887, CO23/229/247.

<sup>242</sup>L. D. Powles to E. B. A. Taylor, 7 April 1887, CO23/229/243-246.

public and private, on the Bench and off it”<sup>243</sup> This was also unwise in a Colony where the main practitioners of the system sat in the House.

Powles considered, probably correctly, that he had become persona non grata to the white Bahamians. He had expressed the opinion that The Bahamas would be better off as a Crown Colony, or at least as many higher officials as possible should be brought from England, “in order to break up forever the government of the Country by a small class or rather a large family”.<sup>244</sup> Thus, Powles believed the white Nassauvians wanted to ‘worry’ him out of the country in the hope that no other English magistrate would want to repeat the experience. Hence, the campaign against him organised through the *Nassau Times*.

Powles had support from the black and coloured population, who petitioned in his favour. “[Powles] has ever since his arrival in this Colony, shown himself a fearless and impartial magistrate, one who is most careful in sifting evidence and one at whose hands all classes of Citizens have received, and may always expect to receive, equal justice, regardless of race, creed or social position”.<sup>245</sup> Unfortunately for him, they had no political clout.

And what of James Lightbourn, the cause of Powles’ downfall? The Chief Justice, Henry Austin, reversed Powles’ decision. Lightbourn’s counsel, Clutsom, argued prejudgement of the case against his client’s interest, bias and lack of discretion. The Chief Justice chose not to hear the witnesses and merely reviewed the case. He chose to disbelieve Hopkins and two of the three witnesses in her favour, while he considered Lightbourn’s evidence believable. The conviction was quashed.<sup>246</sup>

#### Ormond Malcolm<sup>247</sup>

The unequal application of the law and the doubtful ethics of the attorney with the largest practice serving as Attorney General, Council member and Speaker of the House are illustrated in the career of Ormond Malcolm, one of the “Upper Upper Ten”.

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<sup>243</sup>Ibid.

<sup>244</sup>Ibid.

<sup>245</sup>Petition, CO23/229/288-291. Another petition was sent on behalf of Powles in November 1887, CO23/230/406-408.

<sup>246</sup>James Lightbourn to Henry Blake, 28 May 1887, CO23/229/260-265.

<sup>247</sup>Ormond Drimmie Malcolm was the great grandson of Scot Michael Malcolm, founder of St. Andrew’s Kirk. Hesketh Bell found him “a very superior man” with “great ability and tact and of handsome appearance”. He thought he made “a most admirable Speaker” (Bell, Diaries, 53, 58-59 and 92).

Ormond Malcolm had been one of the leaders of the Reform Party and had composed the Disendowment Bill of 1867. His elevation to Speaker of the House of Assembly came at this point. Once Malcolm was appointed to the Executive Council in 1881 the Governor would have hoped he would use that power to aid Government measures. This would have been even more the case after his appointment as Attorney General in 1882. This did not always happen. Governor Blake complained in 1886: "I cannot help feeling that his influence has not been exercised in the direction approved of by the majority of my Council".<sup>248</sup> Since Malcolm persisted in acting against the Government in the House, Blake thought it was undesirable that he should continue to act as Speaker. The Secretary of State, Earl Granville, instructed Blake to inform Malcolm that he disapproved of his actions. If found voting against the Government again he was warned that he would be called upon to resign either his office as Attorney General or his seat in the Assembly.<sup>249</sup>

As Attorney General the Governors seemed satisfied with his performance, but successive Chief Justices, both expatriate, brought up the question of his impartiality. Chief Justice Henry Austin (1880-1890) frequently disagreed with Malcolm, and freely admitted, when Governor Blake was trying to settle a dispute between them in 1887, that they were not on speaking terms.<sup>250</sup> One early difference was over fees from the Admiralty Court, which Austin stopped Malcolm from receiving (backed by the Admiralty in England). One incident led to a controversy between them in 1889 that ultimately led to Austin's resignation and return to Canada. Sands, a white Bahamian and Nassau 'family member', was part of a gang who killed a black fisherman named Gray by stabbing him with a razor.<sup>251</sup> One gang member, De Pain, was charged with murder but the Attorney General decided to merely indict four of the other assailants for taking part in an affray. He conducted the prosecution himself. During the trial of the four the Chief Justice Austin

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<sup>248</sup>Henry Blake to Earl Granville, 22 May 1886, CO23/228/148-156.

<sup>249</sup>Earl Granville to Henry Blake, no. 10622, 5 July 1886, CO23/228/166-167.

<sup>250</sup>Enclosure in Henry Blake to Henry Holland, no. 49, 30 April 1887, CO23/229/119-129.

<sup>251</sup>According to the Chief Justice, he was the nephew of Richard Farrington of the Executive Council. Austin recorded his grievances in *Ten Years Chief Justice of the Bahamas, 1880-1890*, a pamphlet he sent to the Colonial Office, CO23/235/168-227. According to Chief Justice Yelverton, Sands was the nephew of Malcolm's wife, enclosure in Ambrose Shea to Lord Knutsford, no. 92, 9 June 1892, CO23/235/325-329. This was denied by T. A. Thompson, Thompson to Colonial Secretary, 30 December 1892. CO23/236/5-11. Malcolm's wife was the daughter of W. R. B. Sands.

remarked on the prisoners being tried for so minor an offence. The prisoners (three white) were acquitted.<sup>252</sup> At the murder trial Malcolm took the opportunity, when opening the case, to vindicate his course of action in the trial of the others for a lesser offence by citing the authorities which had guided him. Austin, instead of putting a stop to the irrelevancies, himself effused on the duties of the Attorney General, and by implication Malcolm's neglect of these. He cited a great number of cases to prove why, in his opinion, the four should have been tried for manslaughter or murder. After this trial Malcolm requested the Governor to call upon Austin to formulate the charges he made against him, so that it, along with the Attorney General's defence, might be sent to the Secretary of State for his decision. The Chief Justice wrote a rambling letter in reply, basically maintaining his opinion, suggesting that Malcolm had suppressed evidence and stating he did not desire to formulate the charges as the case had already caused considerable excitement and the question of race prejudice had been raised.<sup>253</sup>

E. Wingfield's opinion was that the Attorney General was right in not indicting the four men for aiding and abetting a murder, but the Chief Justice in expressing an opinion could not be censured by the Executive or punished. The expression of his judicial opinion by the Judge did not necessarily impute grave dereliction of duty by the Attorney General. All that was shown was that they arrived at different conclusions from the disclosures in the dispositions. However, the Chief Justice should have directed the prisoners be prosecuted for murder if that was his opinion. It was regrettable that the Attorney General insisted that the Chief Justice formulate a charge against him, but it was also regrettable that the Governor should comply with it. Wingfield could not give an opinion on suppression of evidence as it was just one person's word against another.

The Chief Justice withdrew his allegations, although not unreservedly. But it seems that Governor Shea had his own agenda. Without awaiting a reply from the Colonial Office, he decided to hold an enquiry before the Executive Council. At the inquiry the Governor claimed that the Chief Justice failed to establish his charges and he was severely censured.<sup>254</sup>

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<sup>252</sup>Summarised from E. Wingfield's Minute, Despatch no. 5716, 19 March 1889, CO23/112-116.

<sup>253</sup>Enclosed in Ambrose Shea to Lord Knutsford, confidential, 4 March 1889, CO23/231/117-122. The Colonial Office and the Secretary of State were quick to point out that the Chief Justice's deafness might be a reason for early retirement.

<sup>254</sup>Ambrose Shea to Lord Knutsford, 20 July 1889, CO23/231/399-406.

Austin called the enquiry “a sham” and the result a foregone conclusion.<sup>255</sup> He pointed out he was unlikely to get a fair hearing, considering his relationship with the persons concerned. E. B. A. Taylor, he said, was an open enemy and they had not spoken for two years. Dr. Kemp was a connection of Malcolm and R. H. Sawyer “a bosom friend” and supporter. He claimed that Sawyer was not fond of him as he disallowed him sixty percent payment on salvage of mahogany logs. Richard Farrington was the uncle of Sands. Austin considered only Major Ellis of the First West India Regiment was independent and impartial. Joseph Brown was absent for most of the hearings but the Governor ordered a postponement so that he could hear the Attorney General’s defence. Brown then voted with the Governor, who had named him to the Legislative Council the previous day. The clerk of the Council, engaged to be married to the niece of the Attorney General, had no experience of taking down evidence in proceedings of this kind and wrote the minutes “under the dictation and control of the Governor and of Mr. Rae, acting as Attorney General”. Austin also complained that his witnesses were frequently interrupted and insulted by the Governor. Evidence was excluded and questions disallowed by Shea in a peremptory manner. The Governor told Austin that the decision was unanimous, but he knew this to be untrue as Major Ellis dissented and sent him his dissent and notes.

It seems that the Chief Justice had supporters. The Reverend George O’Keefe, Roman Catholic priest and friend of the Attorney General, warned Austin that Lady Shea was his enemy and a dangerous woman. *The Freeman* showed some concern. Austin was summoned by an act (52 Vic. c.7) that had been rushed through the Assembly in May, giving the Governor power to administer oaths and to issue summonses requiring attendance of any person before Council. Failure to attend or refusal to take the oath or give evidence was punishable by imprisonment. *The Freeman* of 7 May 1889 wrote: “Is it to be a Star Chamber? Knowing the temper of the Oligarchy who control the machine here, we deem it a matter to cause a little apprehension to the people when such powers are surreptitiously conferred by the Legislature upon Her Majesty’s Representative and an irresponsible Council”.<sup>256</sup> On Austin’s departure the Archdeacon, Charles Wakefield, sent him a letter of sympathy and farewell, on behalf of the Anglican congregations. He asserted that they saw

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<sup>255</sup>Henry W. Austin, Montreal, to Marquis of Ripon, 10 October 1892, CO23/235/164-167.

<sup>256</sup>*The Freeman*, 7 May 1889.

his departure as a public misfortune “for I hazard the assertion that outside a certain circle of a few bound by blood and marriage, it is impossible to find in this Colony a dozen persons who speak otherwise than with respect and confidence of one who is styled by the masses ‘the righteous judge’”.<sup>257</sup> A number of letters, with signatures, were sent to him, among others, from ministers of religion and from Louis N. Duty and T. M. Mathews, prominent coloured Bahamians. All discussed his impartiality and conscientiousness and expressed their disapproval of proceedings. Another letter from Archdeacon Wakefield informed Austin that the editor of the *Nassau Guardian* refused to print the address of the clergy. He also expressed his disgust at an article of 24 May 1890, “the most unchristian, ungentlemanly human production I have ever seen in a public newspaper”.<sup>258</sup> The *Nassau Times* also refused to print the address.

In 1892, when Chief Justice Yelverton resurrected the treatment of Austin in furtherance of his own case, two comments from the British Government are telling: Austin “was a hopelessly incompetent judge” and “I wish Malcolm would resign”.<sup>259</sup> Chief Justice Roger Yelverton was also critical of Malcolm’s impartiality: “It is not uncommon in cases where the Attorney General prosecutes to find a relation or connexion of the Attorney General in the dock or witness box and others in the jury box”.<sup>260</sup>

Ormond Malcolm had always been ambitious, regularly applying for judicial posts in the Empire, although always specifying the salary range he was prepared to accept. Inevitably he eventually began to apply for Chief Justice of The Bahamas. There had been a Bahamian Chief Justice previously (William Doyle), who had served alongside a Bahamian Attorney General (George Anderson). He had been highly thought of by both Governors and the Colonial Office and his decisions had never been called into question. But the Colonial Office considered Malcolm a different kettle of fish, not due to any lack of skill or intellect, but because of family connections. Wingfield's opinion was: “It would not be advisable to appoint Mr. Malcolm Chief Justice of the Bahamas where he is related by blood or marriage to so many of the small community – but it would be a good thing to get him

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<sup>257</sup>Archdeacon Charles Wakefield to Henry Austin, 21 May 1890, CO23/235/224.

<sup>258</sup>Archdeacon Charles Wakefield to Henry Austin, May 1890, CO23/235/226.

<sup>259</sup>Domestic Minute no. 20581, 21 October 1892, CO23/235/163.

<sup>260</sup>Enclosed in Ambrose Shea to Lord Knutsford, no. 92, CO23/235/325-329.

away and introduce an Attorney-General from outside.”<sup>261</sup> Malcolm found support, though, from Governor Haynes-Smith, who considered him an “upright and conscientious gentleman”, but he suggested appointing a non-Bahamian as Attorney General. The Colonial Office did follow this path in 1897.<sup>262</sup>

The salary of the Chief Justice had been reduced in 1895 to eight hundred pounds per annum in one of the House’s retrenchment measures, designed to thwart appointment of outsiders. In May 1899 the House proposed to raise it to one thousand pounds. The Colonial Office was aghast: “This is a most impudent maneuver. The Assembly reduce the salary of the Chief Justice in 95 against the advice of the Secretary of State; in 97 a local man is appointed & the Assembly in 99 wishes to raise the salary contrary to the spirit if not the letter of their own standing order”.<sup>263</sup> Joseph Chamberlain added that he was “inclined to remind the Assembly of their previous actions & to say that having yielded on that occasion to their arguments I see no reason now for departing from the decision then arrived at...In fact I consider that the Assembly should be bound by the precedents which it has itself caused.” Thus the House was obstructed in its ploy. In October Malcolm appealed to have an increase in salary. Governor Gilbert Carter was caught between two views; the salary was not adequate but Malcolm had accepted the position on those terms.<sup>264</sup> This time Chamberlain gave in and granted the increase.

Bahamian magistrate James Rae applied for the Attorney Generalship. It was considered quite out of the question to appoint him: “He is a second rate local man with many family connections”.<sup>265</sup> W. Rees Davies, educated at Eton and Trinity Hall, Cambridge, called to the Bar at the Inner Temple in 1887, Member of Parliament 1892-1898, was appointed Attorney General in 1897.

Ormond Malcolm’s position as Attorney General and then Chief Justice was significant in the power that it gave the Nassau family in the 1880s and 1890s. As a

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<sup>261</sup>Edward Wingfield, Colonial Office memo no. 20682, 11 November 1895, CO23/242/317.

<sup>262</sup>Haynes-Smith to Joseph Chamberlain, no. 130, 25 November 1895, CO23/242/330-331 and no. 124, 28 September 1897, CO23/247/405-406.

<sup>263</sup>Colonial Office memo no. 11750, 11 May 1899, CO23/252/184.

<sup>264</sup>Gilbert Carter to Joseph Chamberlain, no. 108, 23 October 1899, CO23/253/180-183.

<sup>265</sup>Colonial Office memo no. 25213, 24 November 1897, CO23/248/75.

Presbyterian he had been 'reforming' in regards to Disestablishment, but afterwards was as conservative as all the "Upper Ten" of Nassau society.<sup>266</sup>

#### The Yelverton Issue

Roger D. Yelverton was appointed Chief Justice of The Bahamas in 1890. In 1892 he was involved in a dispute with the local white elite that revealed with what antagonism a foreign colonial officer could be regarded by the Bahamian elite, who sought these positions for themselves.

On 4 May 1892 the *Nassau Guardian* published a letter from Chief Justice Yelverton, regarding the storage of coal on the Board of Trade premises in Bay Street, which he considered a health hazard. He followed this up with another letter on 11 May, connecting the hazard specifically to yellow fever.<sup>267</sup> Three days later a letter from "Colonist" appeared in the newspaper. It began in sarcastic vein: "What is the good of increasing the salary of the Chief Justice if his mind is to be disquieted and alarmed through fear of fever? For our additional three hundred pounds a year, we have all that our souls yearned for, viz. an English Barrister, and we should do all that lies in our power to preserve the health and life of this luminary of the English bar".<sup>268</sup> Reference was being made here to the increase in salary (to 1,000 pounds per annum) accorded to the Chief Justice in 1890 (46 Vic. c.17). As usual the Bahamian elite grudged paying a decent salary when posts were occupied by non-Bahamians. But there was a more personal reason here; Yelverton was not well liked locally. Moreover, he had already taken several weeks' leave to return to England, which induced a warning from the writers that "a great many people of this city" were saying that "he should risk his valuable life and attend to the duties of his office in summer as well as winter". "They contend that the day of non-resident officialdom is over, and that a man should reside in the Colony that pays him his salary." After the sarcasm, the letter writers emphasised the hostility felt by local Bahamians to the imported office holders. "Fever is regarded by the native as a merciful provision of Providence to clear the atmosphere of the Civil Service of some officials who are exhaled and emanate from

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<sup>266</sup>Bromhead Matthews to Lord Lucas, private, 29 March 1907, CO23/262/683. The newly arrived Attorney General, Bromhead Matthews, wrote that the Chief Justice was "getting on in years and opposed to most of the reforming legislation the Governor wishes to pass."

<sup>267</sup>*Nassau Guardian*, 11 May 1892.

<sup>268</sup>*Nassau Guardian*, 14 May 1892.

Downing Street.” They reckoned the people should insist that the Government erect, above the coal, offices to be occupied by officials costing the Colony more than they are worth.<sup>269</sup>

The Chief Justice regarded the letter a contempt of court.<sup>270</sup> He demanded the editor of the *Nassau Guardian*, Alfred Edwin Moseley, reveal the name(s) of the writer. He refused, so the Justice inflicted a fine of sixty-five pounds plus costs (forty pounds for publishing the letter and twenty-five pounds for refusing to give up the name) and committed Moseley to prison during the Chief Justice’s pleasure and until such time as the fine was paid. Yelverton considered the article scurrilous, pouring scorn and ridicule on the judge. He accused Moseley of being “the agent for publication of men who belong to a small and malevolent clique in this colony”. Yelverton mentioned an unpopular recent court decision that he had made (that it was illegal to summon men before a magistrate from one island to another for a small offence). He accused them of trying to hound out the Chief Justice in order to get a more amenable officer. The writers of the letter were later identified by James Carmichael Smith as Austin J. Thompson and Dr. Francis Holmes, both related to Robert Sawyer.<sup>271</sup> Sawyer was also involved in the recent unpopular court decision.

A deputation at once petitioned Governor Ambrose Shea to release Moseley. He was unsure as to his powers, so he sent a telegram to the Colonial Office for legal advice. On receiving their reply, he informed the Chief Justice he intended to free the editor.<sup>272</sup> Yelverton then forbade the gaoler to release Moseley without his express authority. This order was disregarded and the editor left prison at 6 ‘o’ clock on the evening of 18 May, after about thirty hours in gaol.

The *Nassau Times* of 20 May described the reception of Moseley after he left prison:

At 6 ‘o’ clock therefore the gates were thrown open, and Mr. Moseley, accompanied by his wife, appeared. This was the signal for deafening cheers from the assembled multitude. The horses were taken away, and the carriage in which Mr. and Mrs. Moseley, the Rev. Mr. Bailey and other friends were seated, was drawn in triumph through the principal streets of the city, accompanied by over three thousand people, some on foot,

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<sup>269</sup>Ibid.

<sup>270</sup>Judgement of Chief Justice Yelverton on the Moseley case. enclosed in Ambrose Shea to Lord Knutsford, no. 78, 21 May 1892, CO23/234/258-261.

<sup>271</sup>James Carmichael Smith to Roger D. Yelverton, 26 February 1893, CO23/238/492-499.

<sup>272</sup>Ambrose Shea to Lord Knutsford, no. 78, 21 May 1892, CO23/234/258-261 and Colonial Office memo no. 9966, 18 May 1892, CO23/234/249. The Colonial Office meanwhile referred the case to the Royal Court of Justice.

and others in carriages...Windows and verandas along the route were filled with sympathizing and applauding spectators; bunting was displayed from the staffs, and flags were hung across the streets in honour of the event.<sup>273</sup>

The procession passed through Government House grounds, halted while the National Anthem was played by the band and then went on to Moseley's house on East Hill Street. He made a short speech, mentioning that "victory was secured for the freedom of the press and of the people". The Rev. Bailey, Chairman of the Citizen's Committee, formed to give Moseley support, then spoke too. Those present, for the most part, comprised key elements of the Opposition: Rev. Bailey (Presbyterian); Rev. Francis Moon (Wesleyan); Charles Rae; Abraham T. Holmes; R. W. Weech; John Alfred; William Johnson; Dr. F. A. Holmes; F. M. Menendez; W. C. B. Johnson; J. P. Sands; John S. Darling; R. W. Sawyer; Joseph Roker; W. J. Henry; J. Roxborough; W. G. Rattray; N. Elliot; William Lightbourne; Anthony Roberts (Friendly Society); Samuel T. Smith (Friendly Society).

Business was virtually suspended for two days in Nassau. A display of fireworks at the harbour on the night of 19 May ended the celebrations. How did the Colonial Office view the event?<sup>274</sup> C. A. H. Hales believed that Yelverton should not have written undignified letters to the newspaper. He considered the letter in reply was offensive and probably calculated to bring the Chief Justice in contempt, but it was doubtful whether it was within the definition of contempt of court. Overall, "Yelverton comes badly out of the matter". E. W. Wingfield also believed it was not a contempt of court and the Governor was justified in exercising his prerogative. However, he felt Governor Shea could have avoided the spectacle by negotiating with both parties. He made the telling observation: "I am afraid it is not unlikely to be true that Sir. A. Shea is too much influenced by the white natives".<sup>275</sup>

Yelverton was incensed at the course the events had taken and in June showed his simmering discontent during a levee in honour of the Queen's birthday. He was not actually

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<sup>273</sup>*Nassau Times*, 20 May 1892.

<sup>274</sup>Colonial Office no. 11410, 6 July 1892, CO23/234/255-257.

<sup>275</sup>In June when there was a difference of opinion between the Chief Justice and the Attorney General (after a disturbance at Hatchett Bay), it was clear that the Governor was against Yelverton, whom he accused of taking on the role of the "protector of the rights of the coloured population", Ambrose Shea to Lord Knutsford, no. 92, 9 June 1892, CO23/234/325-329. Later the same month Shea wrote: "The race question is pregnant with trouble and, if urged into activity, the issues would be calamitous" (Shea to Knutsford, no. 94, 20 June 1892, CO23/234/363-370). He hoped there would be no malign influences; clearly, he believed the Chief Justice to be one.

invited as he had sent an offensive letter to Shea and he had already refused the invitation to the evening reception. The Governor proffered his hand but the Chief Justice rudely turned aside. He then took a seat immediately to the right of the Governor, much to the latter's surprise. Lord Knutsford admonished him for this unbecoming behaviour.<sup>276</sup> Of course, the Chief Justice was digging his own grave with this petulance. He was given time to cool off, the Governor granting him leave of absence for six weeks.

The verdict of the Royal Courts of Justice came out in July. In their opinion neither the publication of the letter nor the refusal to give up the names of the writer amounted to a contempt of court. In the circumstances it was within the prerogative of the Crown to pardon for the alleged offence and thus the prerogative was rightly exercised.<sup>277</sup>

The Bahamas was blessed with two consecutive egotistical and obstinate judges, neither of whom got on with the white elite. Henry Austin, as was seen from some letters of support, had his defenders among the non-white classes and Anglican clergy. It is not so certain that Yelverton had such defenders, although an anonymous letter to L. D. Powles contended that if the Home Government did not back Yelverton it would be a blow for respect for the law. The writer implied that "the Clan" was afraid of Yelverton. "They boast that if ever they get against any official he must go. And they will name them to you, beginning with Lempriere, the Colonial Secretary of 1868, De Ricci, yourself and Austin, and now they say that Yelverton must go too." He also noted that "our old friend Moon, and others of the old Methodist Clan" were awaiting Moseley's arrest, presumably meaning an opportune moment to act. He suggested that the words of the Chief Justice were being twisted to impute all sorts of allegations, such as he threatened to imprison the Governor. "In Yelverton we have a fearless and impartial Judge, and if he is lost to the Colony for anything growing out of the Moseley case, it will be a triumph for mob rule, from the effects of which we shall not recover for a very long time."<sup>278</sup>

On the other hand, Joseph Chamberlain, out of office at this time, chose to write to Buxton of the Home Office to let him know his son's version of events. Chamberlain

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<sup>276</sup>Ambrose Shea to Lord Knutsford, no. 87, 6 June 1892, CO23/234/305-307. E. Wingfield to Yelverton no. 124382. CO23/234/308.

<sup>277</sup>Verdict of Royal Courts of Justice, sent to Lord Knutsford, 30 July 1892, CO23/235/43-49.

<sup>278</sup>Private letter to L.D. Powles, unsigned and undated, enclosed in L.D. Powles, London, to Marquis of Ripon, 29 October 1892, CO23/235/279-285. (De Ricci was an earlier Chief Justice who frequently clashed with members of the local elite.)

considered that the Colony had been “cursed” with Roger Yelverton, a man “eaten up by a morbid vanity and self-conceit”. He had made himself look ridiculous and was unpopular. Chamberlain called the ‘Colonist’s’ letter “a very innocent small joke”. He accused Yelverton of trying to stir up race animosity where the races had “for the last twenty years at least lived in perfect harmony”. Since he had heard that there was a possibility that the Chief Justice might return, he warned of trouble ahead. At the least the Assembly would strongly protest, but possibly it would demand annexation to the United States. “It is after all only a storm in a teapot, but to Bahamians the matter appears very serious indeed.”<sup>279</sup>

There were, indeed, moves in The Bahamas to prevent Yelverton’s return from leave. A memorial was sent to London from the Citizens Defence Committee (“to convince the Secretary of State of the evil that would be inflicted on the administration of justice if the Chief Justice should return”).<sup>280</sup> Meanwhile Yelverton was stirring things up in England by publishing an article in *Truth* on 18 August regarding the dishonesty and maladministration in the government of The Bahamas. The Colonial Secretary, Henry Jackson, duly sent a telegram to the Secretary of State urging that this article, in conjunction with what had happened here, made him unfit to return as Chief Justice. The Executive Council also sent a resolution to the Colonial Office.<sup>281</sup> There was so much correspondence coming from The Bahamas that an official from the Colonial Office wrote: “If the Bahamas are to be continued to be blessed with Governor Sheas and Chief Justice Yelvertons, we shall have to set up a special department for this colony.”<sup>282</sup>

Roger Yelverton was in correspondence with both Henry Austin and L. D. Powles and they wrote to the Secretary of State in his support. Neither of these would cut much ice with the personnel of the Colonial Office. Austin compared himself to Yelverton: “I was the victim of an illegal combination in the Colony, to oust me from office...It is plain that I [was] sacrificed on the ground of expediency and not in the interest of the Colony, but to satisfy and gratify the dominant Clique in the Colony, a family compact and a cabal against

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<sup>279</sup>Joseph Chamberlain to Buxton, 3 September 1892, CO23/234/461-462. He owned a sisal plantation on Andros, managed by his son, Neville.

<sup>280</sup>Memorial of Citizens Defence Committee, 26 August 1892, CO23/234/465-466.

<sup>281</sup>Henry Jackson to Marquis of Ripon, telegram, 17 September 1892, CO23/234/477. Resolution from Executive Council, CO23/234/508.

<sup>282</sup>Colonial Office memo no. 20018, 12 October 1892, CO23/234/514.

the administration of Justice, which has again so recently, exhibited its power and disposition, in attacking my successor in office, Chief Justice Yelverton".<sup>283</sup> The elite prevailed and Yelverton did not return.

Reconstruction of the Police Force in the 1890s.<sup>284</sup>

The policing of The Bahamas was of the utmost concern to the white elite. In the face of numerical inferiority, the white population had always felt the need for protection from the black lower classes. The West Indian garrison had provided the necessary security, but in 1885 the Secretary of State had announced the intention to withdraw these troops. The upper classes at once protested that they would be unprotected from both external enemies and internal revolt. They would be powerless to prevent breaches of neutrality or international law and their police force, as it was then constituted, would be "worthless" for any purposes requiring an armed body. Governor Henry Blake got to the crux of their fears: "The fact remains that there is a strong feeling on the part of the black and coloured people against the white population of Nassau".<sup>285</sup> Major George Clarke, secretary of the Colonial Defence Committee, pointed out that imperial troops could not be used to police colonies in peacetime. He also commented that it was ironic that the white community relied on a handful of black troops, pleading for their retention. "I cannot see why a 'black man' called a soldier is a better safeguard against disorder than his brother a little differently dressed and called a policeman."<sup>286</sup> Of course the key for the white Bahamian was not that the soldier was black, but that he was West Indian; the whites only feared armed black personnel with local sympathies. Governor Shea, who always seemed to see the white Bahamians' side of things, worried about the occasions when the black population's "race prejudices were excited" and the fact that the better trained police force might "be found in the time of trial on the wrong side". "The feeling is universal among the white population that if left to a

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<sup>283</sup>Henry W. Austin to Marquis of Ripon, 10 October 1892, CO23/235/164-167.

<sup>284</sup>For discussion of policing the colony see Johnson, *From Slavery to Servitude*, 119-130.

<sup>285</sup>Henry Blake to Colonel Frederick Stanley, 8 August 1885, CO23/227/10-15 and 19 September 1885, CO23/227/167-169. Memorial from House of Assembly to reconsider the withdrawal of troops, CO23/227/171-175.

<sup>286</sup>Colonial Office memo no. 24541, 11 December 1887, CO23/230/419-420.

black Police Force with local sympathies & connections, property & life would be safe only as long as there was no special incitement to a violation of the Law, and the most dangerous element would then be found in the Police Body itself.”<sup>287</sup> Major Clarke did appreciate this and suggested getting policemen from the same sources as the troops if local sympathies were feared. Policing bodies made up of non-native recruits had been an element of imperial control in many parts of the Empire.

The Bahamas had to face up to the inevitable, although not without protest. A Select Committee inquired into the working of the police force and the House adopted its recommendations in an Act of 1889 (52 Vic. C.21). It created a sub-inspectorship and increased the police force by eight men. But this would not be adequate to meet the needs of the colony, as perceived by its ruling class. Those needs involved protection of property, lives and liberty and this force, comprised of black Bahamians, could not, in the view of the whites, be trusted to enforce them. Governor Shea did seem to believe the white Bahamians might be over anxious: “There has been a traditional sense of apprehension amongst the white population as to the removal of the troops [but] the coloured race are not turbulent, and are easily made amenable to the law. I do not see that any cause is likely to arise to excite race prejudice or passion in so favoured a community and where the whites are not wanting in justice or acts of kindness to the coloured race”.<sup>288</sup>

The removal of the garrison was to originally take place on 1 April 1891 or soon thereafter (although eventually it happened in November). By the end of 1890 the Governor began to take steps to create a new police force. In 1891 another act was passed to organise a new Constabulary Force (54 Vic. c.14). Captain Henry Jackson, Commissioner of Turks Island, was appointed to put this into effect. He was experienced in police organisation and control and had been Inspector General of Police in Sierra Leone and Trinidad. The new force was to comprise an inspector, a sergeant, two corporals and forty men, recruited from Barbados. Barbadians were employed in such a capacity in other areas and the Bahamian government had been informed that they had performed very well in a similar capacity in British Honduras.<sup>289</sup> The Colonial Office suggested that the net might be widened to recruit

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<sup>287</sup> Ambrose Shea to Lord Kimberley, confidential, 22 November 1888, CO23/230/421-425.

<sup>288</sup> Ambrose Shea to Lord Kimberley, no. 6, 8 January 1891, CO23/233/12-15.

<sup>289</sup> Colonial Office minute no. 23269, 1 December 1890, CO23/232/627-628.

from other areas as well. Governor Shea thought that Sikhs might be potential recruits, although this was dismissed by the Colonial Office as it would have been expensive; they might not be willing to travel so far from home and it was not known how they would get on with West Indians. General Goodenough suggested using men from other West Indian islands as well, but the Inspector General of Jamaica thought the rate of pay was not high enough to attract recruits. Also Henry Jackson had believed it best to confine himself to one place of recruitment as it would take too much time to enlist, train and supply men in different places. Besides if they were from one place they would have ties of nationality and be used to working together after their three months' probationary training in the country of recruitment. Thus, the new Bahamian police force came to be exclusively made up of Barbadians. The sergeant was to be recruited from the West Indian regiment. The Inspector was to be an ex-military man too, under forty years of age and with experience of a tropical climate and the "negro race". The new force would initially number forty men, but could be increased to seventy-five. It was to be kept separate from the existing police force, which would be eventually absorbed into the new force, through retirement and limited enlistment into the new body. It would be kept physically separate too, isolated in barracks on the outskirts of town. The old force would only be used for civil duties, but the new one would be "especially trained and disciplined, and kept in hand for any emergency". Thus it had a military character and was modelled on that of British Honduras and Sierra Leone.<sup>290</sup>

It was not long before the new police force was put to the test. In April of 1893 there was a serious disturbance in Grant's Town. An urgent telegram was sent by the Governor to England requesting a gunboat to restore order. It began on the night of Saturday, 15 April when three policemen were stoned; a prisoner was rescued from police custody and the police station was attacked and wrecked. A riot ensued, public lamps being smashed. Inspector Learmouth was sent for but he was attacked and badly injured and it was decided that the situation was too dangerous for any attempt to arrest perpetrators. The next day three policemen went to Grant's Town in the ordinary course of duty, but were compelled to return. Again the Commandant felt that to send a superior force to arrest ringleaders would lead to loss of life. On Monday a truculent mood prevailed but there were no overt acts of lawlessness until the afternoon. In broad daylight on 17 April a constable, the Governor's orderly, was brutally set upon and seriously injured in the town. On being taken to the

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<sup>290</sup>Henry Jackson to Lord Knutsford, no. 81, July 1891, CO23/233/214-225. Enacted in 54 Vic. c.14.

barracks, his enraged comrades rushed out, fully armed, to avenge the attack. The policemen refused to obey orders and Captain Jackson, with assistance from other colonial officers and civilians, had to intervene to get them to return to barracks. However, the men complained that some comrades were on the beat on Bay Street unsupported and in danger. A picket, under a sergeant, was sent out to collect these men. The Commandant followed but the men marched a few yards, then became unmanageable. The Governor was sent for and successfully got them back to barracks. Over the next few days, the Governor waited anxiously for the gunboat to arrive, but there were few breaches of the peace. H.M.S. Partridge arrived on the 24<sup>th</sup>. A meeting of the principal officers was held at Government House; summonses and warrants issued; a review of the police force and the incident ordered. The Governor realised that the Constabulary force had proved inadequate to deal with the emergency and there was certainly displayed a lack of discipline. He thought about creating special constables but he realised “well-disposed” blacks would not join and “thus the race distinctions would become sharply defined, which it is all important to guard against in our mixed community”.<sup>291</sup>

The Committee of Inquiry consisted of the Attorney-General Ormond Malcolm, Robert Sawyer and Joseph Brown. Captain Henry Jackson added his thoughts on the matter, particularly astute as to causes of the trouble.<sup>292</sup> The principal cause of the hostility was the fact the locals of Grant’s Town disliked the Barbadians. They considered the new policemen were aggressive and unnecessarily rough with prisoners. Jealousy had also been aroused among the young Bahamian men, as this was a force of young able bodied men, well dressed and with plenty of money to spare, rivals for the affections of the local women. Spurring on this dislike of the interlopers were members of the old police force, who felt they were looked on as inferior and dispensable. These feelings were long-standing, but probably fanned by various “evil disposed” persons, particularly Louis N. Duty. (He was a coloured, former magistrate, forced to resign, now a rum seller.) The disturbance itself was unpremeditated and the Committee felt it was confined to the “lawless classes”. Jackson believed, though, the feelings of hostility in the community were much wider.

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<sup>291</sup>Telegram, 19 April 1893, CO23/236/251-252 and Ambrose Shea to Marquis of Ripon, no. 58, 1 May 1893, CO23/236/407-417.

<sup>292</sup>Henry Jackson to Marquis of Ripon, no. 94, 8 July 1893, CO23/237/98-106; Report of Committee of Inquiry, CO23/237/107-132; Memo from Jackson, CO23/237/133-138.

The members of the Committee considered it could have been controlled at the outset, but the Commandant was not energetic enough and suffered an error of judgment by not arresting the ringleader. The officers in charge generally showed lack of responsibility and supervision in allowing the men to obtain ammunition. The Constabulary, they decided, was showing indiscipline. Changes were thus recommended. The old local police force should be retained and combined with the new force, but as a separate division. It would be given charge of the Out Islands and the suburbs of Nassau and the new force would be left to police the City District. In charge would be an Inspector and Assistant Inspector; there would be two sergeant majors, who would reside in the barracks.

The question of policing the Colony was important for the white Bahamians. They had to be assured that there was a well disciplined force available to protect them and their property from any criminal or insurrectionary attack. This was managed, with the aid of the Governor, Colonial Secretary and Colonial Office, by the organisation of the new Constabulary by the Act of 1891 and the subsequent adjustment. This was a paramilitary force, staffed by West Indians, and thus with no local sympathies. It exactly fulfilled requirements and meant both law enforcement and law making were in safe hands.

In The Bahamas the white elite utilised political, social, economic and judicial control mechanisms to ensure its continued dominance. The constitutional framework within which The Bahamas functioned within the Empire facilitated this. There was a representative structure in the Colony, but the nature of the electoral system meant that, for the most part, the white Nassau elite dominated the House of Assembly. The dominance of the Councils by the same group further enhanced its political power. Although the Colonial Office and some Governors might 'huff and puff', the Home Government did not have the will to alter the Constitution. While The Bahamas maintained stability and a degree of financial steadiness, the Imperial Government was not willing to interfere and certainly not to impose Crown Colony status. Thus the structures of dominance remained unchanged and virtually unchallenged until the end of the nineteenth century.

The law was biased against the black population and few non-whites qualified to serve on juries, while local Justices were predominantly white, with a few coloureds (G. A. McGregor, L. N. Duty and J. Nibbs Brown), but no blacks. A letter to the *Bahama Herald* from the Bahamas Friendly Society made this point in 1858:

Has the law any favourites? Is it partial to anyone? Does it treat all men alike that fall within its reach? Is such the case in our day? Are all men punished alike according to their crimes? No, sir, as it stands now, it bears heavily upon the coloured and black man.<sup>293</sup>

Laws essentially protected property and enhanced social control. Moreover, “it was (as in Jamaica) the intimidatory aspect of the law which stood out most sharply in an ethnically divided society”.<sup>294</sup> Similarly the House was willing to finance instruments of social control and protection of property, but not social reform or welfare.<sup>295</sup>

The exercise of power in such a small community tended to be on a personal basis. Thus Robert Sawyer and Ormond Malcolm could use family connections and associates to wield substantial power. The Nassau ‘family circle’ was based on mutual interest and common outlook. The racist ideology behind it was prevalent in the British Empire and British administrators shared enough of the philosophy to allow a white elite to continue to hold on to the reins of power in post-Emancipation society. There were recurrent, but essentially limited, tensions between the Imperial officials and the white elite. The few British administrators who questioned the dominance of the family network or tried to lessen the inequalities in The Bahamas received short shift both from the Bahamian elite and the Imperial Government.

The voices of the real sufferers from the system in The Bahamas are seldom heard. Short-term gains were frequently readily accepted, such as a bribe for a vote. The fact that the lower classes did not organise themselves politically allowed white dominance to continue unchallenged. Lack of leadership and the conservatism of the few leaders that did emerge in the nineteenth century go a long way to explain why this was so. Gilbert Carter made the comment that as long as the native whites held the dominating influence in the

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<sup>293</sup>*Bahama Herald*, 24 December 1858.

<sup>294</sup>Bryan, *Jamaican People*, 22.

<sup>295</sup>In 1839 the total Government expenditure was 21,020 pounds, of which 5,607 pounds went to the Judicial Department; 2,127 pounds to the Ecclesiastical Dept.; 1,276 pounds for education and 147 pounds for paupers (*Blue Book* (1840), S35-6 and 149). In 1859 total expenditure was 34,870 pounds of which 2,909 pounds went to the Ecclesiastical Dept., 7,255 pounds to the Judicial Dept., 1,741 pounds to the Education Board and 1,520 pounds to paupers (*Blue Book* (1860), 45, 56-7 and 261-2). (The House also gave one thousand pounds to the Hospital and Asylum.) In 1879 6,174 pounds went to the Judicial Dept., 1,440 pounds to prisons, 2,539 pounds to the Ecclesiastical Dept., 2,516 pounds to the Board of Education, 100 pounds to agriculture, 57 pounds to Health Board, 1,647 to hospitals and paupers, 88 pounds to medicines and 580 pounds to the Out Islands (*Blue Book* (1880), 53 and 62-63).

House there was little hope for the coloured and black Bahamians.<sup>296</sup>

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<sup>296</sup>Gilbert Carter, Charing Cross, to Under Secretary at Colonial Office, 10 October 1904, CO23/259/627-629.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE COLOURED AND BLACK MIDDLE CLASSES

It might be supposed that the coloured middle class might have begun to challenge Bay Street, at least by the later nineteenth century, but it was not to be. The middle classes in The Bahamas were an intermediate group between the white elite and the labouring and under classes. As Raymond Smith points out, after 1838, “classes seemed to be defined in terms of race”.<sup>1</sup> Thus the term ‘coloured middle class’ is the commonly used term, even though the class contained some blacks and whites, as well as those of mixed racial origin. Whites in The Bahamas, who would fall into the category of ‘middle class’, tended to set themselves apart from the non-whites of this group on account of their colour. In this chapter ‘middle class’ is defined in terms of occupations and values and outlook and discussion excludes whites since they only identified with other whites. The middle class is taken to include those in the professional occupations and public service, craftsmen, small businessmen, printers and journalists, managers and supervisors and senior clerical workers. The middle classes emulated the elitist values of the white Bahamians and, if anything, assumed mores of stricter morality and respectability.<sup>2</sup> The mulatto exhibited no pride in his African blood and identified with the European side of his ancestry.<sup>3</sup> Generally a positive

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<sup>1</sup>Raymond T. Smith, Kinship and Class in the West Indies: A Genealogical Study of Jamaica and Guyana (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 93.

<sup>2</sup>See page 138-9.

<sup>3</sup>Bridget Brereton considers this assumption needs some modification in the case of Trinidad where race pride and race consciousness is apparent in letters, addresses and editorials in the late nineteenth century (Bridget Brereton, “The Development of an Identity: the Black Middle Class of Trinidad in the later Nineteenth Century” in Hilary Beckles and Verene Shepherd ed., Caribbean Freedom: Society and Economy from Emancipation to the Present (Kingston: Ian Randle, 1993), 274-283). I believe this was probably the case in the later part of the century and in the twentieth century in The Bahamas as well among a few coloured Bahamians. Gail Saunders, through interviews with Basil North, recounts examples where coloureds joined in

black identity found it difficult to take root as white bias was accompanied by devaluation of self among those of African descent.<sup>4</sup> In The Bahamas, though, there was not the flexibility between classes found in other parts of the West Indies; neither was there the rigidity found in the United States. The situation in The Bahamas was somewhere between the two, although, if anything, it became more like the southern states of America in the twentieth century.

The coloured middle classes of Nassau had to accommodate themselves to the socioracial dividing lines that existed in the town. They lived predominantly in Delancy Town, as did the most successful blacks.<sup>5</sup> The Established Church was the preference of most coloureds, probably an indication of identification with British culture and tradition. Many worshipped at Christ Church, the church of the British colonial officials and Low Church in ritual.<sup>6</sup> They were generally assigned to the side aisles. St. Matthew's congregation in the eastern suburbs was fairly mixed, but St. Mary's in Delancy Town was predominantly middle class and followed High Church rituals. Coloured Methodists usually worshipped at Ebenezer Chapel in the eastern suburbs. Some coloured boys were able to get a secondary education at the Boys Central School or the Anglican Nassau Grammar School, but coloured girls did not fare so well until admitted to the Anglican St. Hilda's after 1900. Further education was uncommon unless parents were wealthy enough to send their sons abroad (but this was true for whites too). Whites, naturally, found more opportunity for clerkships with Bay Street merchants and law firms. However, some coloureds overcame barriers: G. A. McGregor, L. N. Duty, C. O. Anderson and J. C. Smith found opportunities in the colonial service and all, except Duty, had long and fruitful careers; Leon Dupuch was employed by A. E. Moseley on the *Nassau Guardian* and went on to found his own newspaper; Thomas Matthews and Thomas Dillet were successful lawyers. The Imperial

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African-inspired cultural activities and relates that they became spontaneous participants in Junkanoo (Gail Saunders, *Bahamian Society after Emancipation* (Kingston: Ian Randle, 1990), 3).

<sup>4</sup>See Colin A. Palmer, "Identity, Race and Black Power in Independent Jamaica" in Franklin Knight and Colin Palmer eds., *The Modern Caribbean* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1989).

<sup>5</sup>The Adderleys had a substantial property there. David Patton, a wealthy black livery stable owner, had property in Hospital Walk.

<sup>6</sup>William Armbrister was a Vestryman for over fifty years, the first commissioner for Christ Church and a representative in the Synod from its formation up to 1904 (*Report of the Proceedings of the 13<sup>th</sup> Synod of the Church in the Diocese of Nassau* (1888), 6 and *Nassau Guardian*, 22 June, 1907). Thomas Mathews was also a very prominent member of Christ Church.

Lighthouse Service and the Board of Education employed many coloureds and blacks. Some crafts (tailoring, masonry, shoemaking and cabinet making) were almost monopolised by coloureds. Some members of the middle classes did become very successful businessmen. William Armbrister owned a dry goods store and cultivated pineapples and sisal in Cat Island; Joseph Dupuch was successful in the sponge and building industries; William Parliament Adderley was a grower, buyer and exporter of fruits and vegetables, a building contractor and the owner of a grocery and dry goods store<sup>7</sup>; William North was a grocer and an outfitter in the sponge industry.

The people of mixed ancestry had been subjected to a number of laws and practices during the slave era designed to keep them from rising to the ruling class. Their political and civil rights had been severely circumscribed for most of that period. Despite this some had gained wealth and education and pressured the Government for removal of these restrictions, eventually granted when the white ruling class decided to make concessions in order to separate the coloureds from the black lower classes.<sup>8</sup> Governor Carmichael Smyth had assisted them in their endeavours and intervened to make theoretical rights a reality.<sup>9</sup> These changes had provoked a hostile reaction from the poor whites. The Governor reported in 1832: "Such are the intemperate and injudicious proceedings of the greater number of the White Inhabitants towards the free coloured People that it requires firmness on my part to prevent a collision". There had already been a disturbance in Nassau caused by the "lower order of White Inhabitants encouraged by some factious and designing Persons".<sup>10</sup> A petition from the free coloureds in support of the Governor expressed their thoughts about the ruling whites:

That oppressive and degrading as is the condition of that class of Your Majesty's subjects, of which our Petitioners form a part, in point of civil and political disabilities, they

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<sup>7</sup>"The Big Store", on the corner of George and King Streets. He also owned the Holborn Candy Store on Marlborough Street (Benson McDermott, "A. F. Adderley – giant strides across the Bahamian stage", *Bahamas Handbook and Businessman's Annual* (Nassau: The Tribune, 1980): 25).

<sup>8</sup>See page 37.

<sup>9</sup>In 1832 Smyth had to interfere with the duty of the Provost Marshal as he had excluded coloured people from the Grand Jury "without reference to character, respectability, information or prosperity" and had only summoned "a very trifling number as petit Jurors" (Carmichael Smyth to Viscount Goderich, no. 135, 3 February 1832, CO23/86/13-16).

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*

have little to hope from the stubborn prejudicial, refractory, and inconsiderate conduct of the Members of the late Assembly.<sup>11</sup>

The 1807 Act (47 Geo. 3 c.1) had specified that the right to vote was restricted to white males, although a few coloureds were privileged with the franchise by special Bill. An Act of 1830 (10 Geo. IV c.10) gave coloured and black freemen the vote, provided they had been born free and were not African. But they could not stand for election to the Assembly and still suffered from civil disabilities. It was the passing of an Act to relieve His Majesty's Free Coloured and Black Subjects of the Bahama Islands from all Civil Disabilities (4 Wm. IV c.1) in 1833 that gave full rights, even to those born slaves. This was reinforced the next year by another Act (5 Wm. IV c.9), which declared coloured and black citizens were "to have and enjoy all the rights, privileges and immunities whatsoever, to which they would have been entitled, if born of, and descended from, white ancestors".<sup>12</sup>

Social discrimination would, however, continue long after Emancipation. Whites worked with and sometimes showed respect to coloureds, but did not invite them to their homes. The coloureds thus became quite a closely-knit group. There were exceptions to this social prejudice. W. E. Armbrister was evidently accepted by white society and was one of the "Ins", invited to Government House. But he passed for white and, when widowed, married the daughter of the late Byron Bode, white Bay Street merchant and member of the House. J. A. Culbert, Customs Officer, kept a bachelor's "hall" and was known for his hospitality. An American journalist "found him one of the most pleasant and graceful gentlemen I have ever met" and commented he occupied "an enviable position in Nassau, both socially and officially".<sup>13</sup> What is remarkable is that he was "a man of dark colour but very popular with all classes".<sup>14</sup> T. W. H. Dillet, lawyer son of Stephen Dillet, also "by his urbanity and tact has surmounted the prejudice of colour and associates freely with the elite

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<sup>11</sup>Petition, 6 April 1832, CO23/86/147-160. The first signatures were those of John Boyd and Samuel Minns. Others of note were John Dean, Stephen Dillet, John Goodman (brother of Dillet), Henry Stevenson, Edward Laroda and Thomas Minns.

<sup>12</sup>Laws of The Bahamas, 1843.

<sup>13</sup>William Drysdale, "In Sunny Lands: Out-Door Life in Nassau and Cuba", Harper's Weekly, 18 Sept. 1885, 18.

<sup>14</sup>Hesketh Bell, Diaries 1890-1899, 56, Royal Commonwealth Library, University of Cambridge. He might have been popular among merchants for the favours he appears to have been doing them (see page 142).

of this place”.<sup>15</sup> But these were the exceptions and how far the latter two really were accepted into white society is debatable. Powles describes a racially conscious society where Culbert and Dillet would only have been tolerated to a certain degree:

Let a man who is admittedly coloured, presume to address a lady belonging to one of these *so-called* white families, on anything like equal terms, and he will soon find himself looked down upon from a pinnacle only attainable by a light coloured person, when dealing with one the stream of whose coloured blood is somewhat thicker than his own....In Nassau, any one who passes for white, though he may be unable to converse intelligently on any rational topic outside his business, is considered fit to sit down to table with any lady, whilst his next-door neighbour, well read, intelligent, and agreeable companion, is tabooed because he is considered to belong to the coloured race. Yet the latter is often scarcely a shade darker than the former, and the former's black ancestor is well remembered by many persons still alive.<sup>16</sup>

Powles also refutes the assertion by an American journalist that a high official, “a full-blooded African”, was received everywhere. (Was this Culbert?) Powles wrote:

How little did he know the true position held by this gentleman in Nassau society! As long as he is content to confine his acquaintance with the white ladies to a salute when he happens to meet them in the street, and a very occasional morning call; as long as he is content to go to Government House on state occasions and hang about the anteroom and piazza, without presuming to attempt to dance, the white Conch gentlemen are willing to use his pleasant piazza as a sort of club and the ladies are willing to say with a patronizing air, “Oh, yes, Mr. \_\_\_ is certainly a gentleman; he knows his place so well.” Yet he is one of the best fellows I ever met, be his colour what it may.<sup>17</sup>

The practice adopted by most coloureds was to accept their position in the social hierarchy and earn respect from the white elite. Most of the coloured middle classes tended to take white attitudes towards marriage, illegitimacy, education and, indeed, colour. The ideal of the coloured classes was to ‘marry up’ to produce offspring of a lighter complexion and they treated anyone a shade darker than themselves with the same prejudices that they experienced from the whites. Since the coloureds usually spurned their African heritage,

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<sup>15</sup>C. R. Nesbitt to Edward Cardwell, no.3, 8 June 1864, CO23/175/10-11.

<sup>16</sup>L. D. Powles, Land of the Pink Pearl or Recollections of Life in the Bahamas (London: Sampson, Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1888) 122-3.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid. Powles states the coloured man in question is compared to another who “does not know his place”. He once went to Government House and asked the Governor's sister to dance. “For this awful act of insolence he is denounced in most compromising terms.” This was probably James Carmichael Smith.

blacks often distrusted them and turned more to the few blacks that made it to middle class positions.

### Coloured and Black Members of the House

After the passing of the Acts granting political and civil equality, some non-whites immediately stood for election to the House. In December of 1833 Stephen Dillet was returned as one of the members for the Town District of Nassau and John Dean and Thomas Minns for the Western District. Samuel Minns was returned for Andros in August of the next year and Edward Laroda joined them in 1836 as the representative of Exuma.<sup>18</sup>

Stephen Dillet was the son of Etienne Dillet, a French officer, and Mary Catherine Esther Argo, a Haitian. Fleeing from Haiti in 1802, he and his mother were seized by a British privateer and brought to The Bahamas, where Stephen became a successful tailor.<sup>19</sup> He owned a small number of slaves between the early 1820s and 1834 and was buying from and selling to prominent white Bahamians. He took an active part in politics during the Governorship of the Abolitionist Sir James Carmichael Smyth and, presumably, Dillet developed a taste for politics, taking the first opportunity to stand for election to the Assembly.<sup>20</sup> For Dillet and his fellow coloured members to have been elected so soon after the removal of restrictions indicates their social prominence and some degree of prosperity. Edward Laroda was Stephen Dillet's brother. John Patrick Dean was a coloured butcher and he also owned slaves, ten by 1831. Samuel Minns was an attorney. Thomas Minns was black and had been an owner of slaves (7 in 1825).<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>Election Book: 1808-1868

<sup>19</sup>Baptism Register of Christ Church 1802-1828, 169; Returns of Registrations of Slaves, 1822-1834. Dillet's wife was also coloured; one of their sons was Thomas Dillet. Stephen also had a number of illegitimate children, including Stephen Albert, who was much darker than his half brother.

<sup>20</sup>*Nassau Guardian*, 9 October 1880.

<sup>21</sup>Edward Laroda: Baptism Register of Christ Church 1802-1828, 6. John Dean: *ibid.*, 176 and Returns of Registration of Slaves, 1822-1834. His wife was also coloured and Stephen Dillet was one of the witnesses to their marriage (Marriage Register of Christ Church 1805-1828, 110). Samuel Minns: Bahamas Almanac and Register (1857), 42 and Marriage Register of Christ Church, 114; his wife was coloured. Thomas Minns: Register of Slaves in the Bahamas, 1825, no. 1072. Presumably Minns was in business, but I have found no evidence of his trade.

The newly elected coloured members were well regarded by Charles R. Nesbitt, then the Deputy Colonial Secretary of The Bahamas, who commented in 1834 on their “decorous and gentlemanly behaviour, practical usefulness, and high-minded sense of duty.” He added: “No rational person will now question the competency of free persons of colour to exercise their inalienable rights as British subjects, on account of the colour of their skin, or of their servile origin”.<sup>22</sup> These members were generally supportive of the Government during the period when opposition to measures to reconstruct society after Emancipation was causing William Colebrooke much difficulty.<sup>23</sup>

Stephen Dillet’s loyalty was recognised by appointment to various Government offices. In 1839 he was appointed Captain in the New Providence Militia, in 1840 Coroner of New Providence, in 1846 Postmaster and in 1850 Police Inspector.<sup>24</sup> Governor George Mathew described Dillet as “one of the most respectable persons of color in this colony” and stated he “bears the highest character”.<sup>25</sup> On his appointment as Police Inspector Governor John Gregory described him as “one of our very best public servants” and he commented the appointment had “given universal satisfaction to the community, by whom he is held in great respect”.<sup>26</sup> Dillet also served as a Justice of the Peace and Director of the Public Bank.<sup>27</sup> He was obviously an exceptional man and the *Nassau Guardian* paid tribute to him after his death in 1880 as “a gentleman of polished manners” who “united with urbanity a strict integrity. Painstaking and honorable in business transactions, whatever he undertook was done well, and he felt a pride in doing his duty.”<sup>28</sup> Dillet had a long Legislative career, lasting until 1859.

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<sup>22</sup>Charles R. Nesbitt, preface to The Vision and Other Poems. in Blank Verse, by John Boyd (London: Longman and Company, 1834), vi-vii.

<sup>23</sup>See pages 85-89. John Dean was absent for key votes in 1836; he voted for Meadows as Speaker in 1839 and he opposed other bills desired by the Government that year too.

<sup>24</sup>Blue Book (1839), 71; Blue Book (1843), 69; Blue Book (1846), 66; Blue Book (1851), 120.

<sup>25</sup>George Mathew to W. E. Gladstone, no. 20, 12 March 1846, CO23/213/151.

<sup>26</sup>John Gregory to Earl Grey, no. 46, 20 June 1851, CO23/138/386-389.

<sup>27</sup>Bahamas Almanac and Register (1857), 42 and 53-54; Bahamas Almanac and Directory (1879), 31-32.

<sup>28</sup>*Nassau Guardian*, 9 October 1880.

Samuel Minns remained in the House until 1846, when he was re-elected but requested to vacate his seat.<sup>29</sup> John Dean was a member until 1843. Thomas Minns was last elected in 1839.<sup>30</sup> Samuel Minns was a Notary Public, a Justice of the Police, Adjutant in the militia, Secretary of the Henegua Salt Pond Company Limited and on the committee of the Church Aid Society.<sup>31</sup>

Another coloured attorney, Thomas M. Mathews, won one of the seats for the Town District of Nassau in 1846 and Henry Stevenson, a coloured businessman, took the Andros seat in 1849.<sup>32</sup> Henry Stevenson was the son of Henry Stevenson, Sr. and Jessamyn Thompson, a free coloured woman.<sup>33</sup> He changed seats (to the Western District) in 1869 but died in 1871.

It was Thomas Mathews who would become the most prominent in Government. Mathews was probably 'passing' since there are no references to his colour in correspondence. In 1849 he was made a Notary Public and in May 1850 he was appointed to the Executive Council, making him the first coloured (even if not acknowledged) man to hold such a position.<sup>34</sup> Governor Gregory informed the Secretary of State on recommending him for the appointment that he was the senior barrister after the Attorney General (George Anderson) and he had "every reason to think highly of him".<sup>35</sup> Mathews joined the Board of Public Health and later became a Justice of the Peace and trustee of the Public Library.<sup>36</sup> He acted as Attorney General on five occasions and as Chief Justice on four. Mathews resigned

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<sup>29</sup>Votes of the House of Assembly (1848-1852), 12.

<sup>30</sup>Election Book: 1808-1868

<sup>31</sup>Bahamas Almanac and Registry (1857), 43, 45, 49 and 53-54 and Blue Book (1848), 96.

<sup>32</sup>Election Book 1808-1868 and Votes of the House of Assembly (1848-1852), 12.

<sup>33</sup>Among the O'Brien Family Papers, held in the Department of Archives in Nassau, there is an affidavit from G.H. Litch to Jessamyn Thompson, proving she was a free coloured person and was manumitted on 6 Aug. 1806. The introduction to the family papers states "very little is known of the Stevenson side of the family". Presumably, the father was a Scotsman since the son belonged to the Presbyterian Church (see memorial plaque inside St. Andrew's Kirk). Henry Stevenson Jr. married in 1835 Christina Farquharson, coloured youngest daughter of planter Charles Farquharson of Watlings Island (also of Scottish birth).

<sup>34</sup>Blue Book (1850), 66.

<sup>35</sup>John Gregory to Earl Grey, no. 48, 30 May 1850, CO23/135/249-251.

<sup>36</sup>Bahamas Almanac and Register (1859), 39; Bahamas Almanac and Directory (1879), 31-32 and 34.

from the House and the Executive Council in 1858.<sup>37</sup> But he returned to the Legislature in 1868, when he stood for the Church Party in the Town District, defeating the Wesleyan incumbent of the seat.<sup>38</sup> After the Disestablishment issue was decided, he resigned his seat. In 1876 Mathews was appointed to the Legislative Council, partly because he was serving as Acting Chief Justice and partly in view of past Government services.<sup>39</sup> Governor William Robinson thought highly of Mathews and recommended him for permanent appointment in the colonial service, but he was too old by this time to be considered.<sup>40</sup> Mathews served in the Legislative Council until 1885 when he retired “unable to attend to duties”.<sup>41</sup>

Stephen Dillet’s son, Thomas William Henry Dillet, joined his father in the House in 1856. First he represented Exuma; he switched to the Western District of New Providence in the following year and in 1860 he won the Abaco seat.<sup>42</sup> Thomas Dillet was educated at the King’s College School in London; he studied law with Thomas Mathews and entered the Middle Temple for his Bar studies. This is an impressive curriculum vitae for the son of a coloured Bahamian tailor and some indication of his father’s prosperity and ambition. He had been appointed a Notary Public in the 1840s by Governor George Mathew, but had been suspended from that office by him.<sup>43</sup> Dillet was reinstated once Mathew had been relieved of his post. Governor John Gregory believed the charge made by his predecessor unfair and “very revolting” and supported Dillet’s efforts to obtain Government employment. He had high hopes for him but did emphasise in correspondence that he was “a Man of Colour”.<sup>44</sup> One cannot tell if the skin colour made any difference to Dillet’s aspirations, which did not yet get realised; the Colonial Office did have a large number of applicants for its patronage.

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<sup>37</sup>See pages 167-168.

<sup>38</sup>Blue Book (1868), 90.

<sup>39</sup>William Robinson to Earl of Carnarvon, Governor’s Dispatches, no. 105, 17 June 1876, 514.

<sup>40</sup>William Robinson to Earl of Carnarvon, Governor’s Dispatches, no. 115, 10 July 1876, 520; Robinson to Earl of Carnarvon, no. 110, 4 August 1877, CO23/217/403-405; Robinson to Michael Hicks Beach, no. 105, 2 August 1878, CO23/218/216; Colonial Office minute no. 10631, CO23/218/214-215 and no. 986, 22 January 1880, CO23/219/672-673.

<sup>41</sup>Henry Blake to Earl of Derby, no. 21, 27 February 1885, CO23/226/35-36.

<sup>42</sup>Election Book: 1808-1868.

<sup>43</sup>See page 110.

<sup>44</sup>John Gregory to Herman Merivale, 18 April 1850, CO23/135/15-17.

Thomas Dillet became Editor of the *Bahama Herald* and the Secretary of the School Board. In 1864 he was at last appointed as acting Assistant Justice. An Englishman was appointed to the Assistant Justiceship in June 1866, but Governor Rawson Rawson persuaded Thomas Dillet to take a seat in the Legislative Council. Dillet was still keen to pursue a professional career in Government service and the Governor was ever supportive, giving him three months' leave to present his case to the Colonial Office in London. Rawson pressed his claims to the Secretary of State, "looking to the considerate manner in which Mr. Dillet has acted towards this Government with reference to this office – to the praiseworthy performance of his duties – and to the pecuniary sacrifice which he has been called upon to make, and the very serious disadvantages under which he would return to the bar of this Colony".<sup>45</sup> Fortunately for the Governor, Dillet came back to The Bahamas without an appointment, for he was to prove a useful member of the Legislative Council in 1868 during the battle to disendow the Anglican Church.<sup>46</sup> Dillet continued to oppose the Bill after Walker's compromise, loyal to Church principles.<sup>47</sup> In 1869 Dillet left The Bahamas to take up the post of Clerk of the Courts and Keeper of the records in British Honduras.<sup>48</sup>

In 1866 John J. Thomson was elected for the Western District of Nassau.<sup>49</sup> He was the subject of the dispute over precedence that led to the end of the volunteer militias.<sup>50</sup> He was a member of the Church Party in the 1868 election, when he was re-elected. A much more prominent Churchman was William Armbrister, first elected for Cat Island in 1864.<sup>51</sup> Armbrister was assimilated into white society to such a degree that he seems to have been considered white. Certainly he was very fair-skinned, but his ancestry would have been well known in Nassau. He was the son of John Armbrister Jr., a Loyalist from St. Augustine, Florida, and Caroline Thurston, his coloured second wife, who managed the Cat Island

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<sup>45</sup>Rawson Rawson to Edward Cardwell, Governor's Dispatches, no. 125, 21 July 1866, 451-452.

<sup>46</sup>Minutes of Legislative Council, 19 March 1868, Votes of the House of Assembly, 39.

<sup>47</sup>James Walker to Earl of Granville, Governor's Dispatches, 29 April 1869, CO23/195/293-294.

<sup>48</sup>James Walker to Earl of Granville, Governor's Dispatches, no. 223, 17 October 1869, 25 and Walker to Granville, Governor's Dispatches, no. 241, 16 November 1869, 45-46.

<sup>49</sup>Election Book: 1808-1868.

<sup>50</sup>See 137-138.

<sup>51</sup>Election Book: 1808-1868.

plantations after her husband's death.<sup>52</sup> There were six children from the first marriage and six from the second, so with so many relatives in Nassau William Armbrister's background would have been difficult to hide. He set himself up in a dry goods store in Nassau and also became a cultivator of pineapples and sisal in Cat Island, using the credit and truck system.<sup>53</sup> Armbrister was one of the foremost members of the congregation at Christ Church.<sup>54</sup> In 1875 Armbrister was appointed to the Executive Council, probably to balance what William Robinson considered the malign influence of Robert Sawyer and Dr. Kemp.<sup>55</sup> In 1887 Armbrister retired from the House to the Legislative Council, appointed because he had "always been a warm supporter of the government".<sup>56</sup> However, a comment from William Parliament Adderley, a black Member of the Assembly, indicated that non-whites did not regard Armbrister as their representative. Adderley, on a visit to the Colonial Office in London in 1904, complained the 'people of colour' had no representation on either Councils. He emphasised that he did *not* count Armbrister.<sup>57</sup> He was made President of the Legislative Council in 1901.<sup>58</sup> He also sat on the Board of Public Works for thirty-four years and was Chairman of the Commissioners of the Asylum for seven years. On Armbrister's death, aged eighty-eight, the *Nassau Guardian* noted his "sterling upright character and his cheerful and genial disposition and his genuine humblemindedness".<sup>59</sup>

In 1875 Joseph Dupuch, returned for the Eastern District, had joined Armbrister in the House. Dupuch was a Presbyterian and had defeated Wesleyan, Dr. J. B. Albury, much

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<sup>52</sup>In the Register of Slaves of 1822, 932. Caroline Thurston is described as a "free woman of colour". William Armbrister's birth entry, Baptism Register Christ Church 1802-1828, 119.

<sup>53</sup>Bahamas Almanac and Directory (1879), 104. He is also listed as a wholesaler. He wrote his own reminiscences, A Short History of the Bahamas of Recent Date, held in the Department of Archives, Nassau. It is hand written and an edited and typed version has been prepared by Sandra Riley. See also Sandra Riley, "W. E. Armbrister's Loyalist Heritage", Journal of the Bahamas Historical Society, 2 (1980): 3-10.

<sup>54</sup>See page 210, note 6.

<sup>55</sup>William Robinson to Earl of Carnarvon, 8 October 1875, CO23/214/409-417 and Blue Book, (1875), 100.

<sup>56</sup>Henry Blake to Henry Holland, no. 90, 9 July 1887, CO23/229/353.

<sup>57</sup>A. Fiddian, memorandum of interview, 26 September 1904. CO23/259/581.

<sup>58</sup>Obituary, *Nassau Guardian*, 22 June 1907.

<sup>59</sup>*Ibid.*

to Governor Robinson's pleasure.<sup>60</sup> Dupuch was the son of Elias Dupuch, a Frenchman who had migrated to Nassau, via Martinique, in 1840 and started a foundry.<sup>61</sup> Joseph had inherited his father's entire estate after he died intestate, but he was already a successful businessman.<sup>62</sup> Dupuch built the Temple of the Royal Victoria Masonic Lodge on Bay Street and was its Grand Master. Several other coloured men had been members of and held office in this Lodge viz. Stephen Dillet, Thomas Dillet, Edward Laroda, alongside notable whites, such as George Anderson, J. H. Webb, R. C. Crawford, Postmaster and Police Inspector. One can thus assume some degree of social acceptance of these men.<sup>63</sup> Initially Dupuch only stayed in the House for one term, but returned in the 1889 election.

In the 1882 election James Carmichael Smith and G. A. McGregor were elected for the Western District of Nassau. McGregor was Resident Justice at Inagua and had been in Government service since 1855. His partner, J. C. Smith, was perhaps the most remarkable of the nineteenth century non-whites.

According to Powles, Smith, born in 1852, was "the son of a pure white man, of a Yorkshire family, by his wife, a coloured woman".<sup>64</sup> His father apparently made money during the Blockade-running era. He was educated at the Boys Central School and the Nassau Anglican Grammar School and afterwards went to sea for four and half years, visiting Australia and China. His daughter writes that one of the Bishops of Nassau took a keen interest in her father's intellectual development. She also mentions a period of schoolmastering in New York before returning to Nassau. He and his spinster sister, Margaret Butler Smith, had a house in George Street, Nassau.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>60</sup>Election Return, 1875, CO23/214/218 and William Robinson to Earl of Carnarvon, 23 June 1875, CO23/214/125-127.

<sup>61</sup>Etienne Dupuch, Tribune Story (London: Ernest Benn, 1967). 19.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., 30. Dupuch's advert in the Bahamas Almanac and Directory (1879) describes him as a builder and general contractor, specializing in fitting offices, stores and banks, and as a carriage repairer.

<sup>63</sup>Royal Victoria Lodge Minute Books 1840-1880, Department of Archives, Nassau. This lodge was under the constitution of the Grand Lodge of England and had been founded in 1837 by George Anderson.

<sup>64</sup>L. D. Powles to Sydney Buxton, 31 July 1893, CO23/238/278-286. His father was from the Scarborough area of England ("Mr. Smith of the Colonial Office", Library Notes, Royal Commonwealth Society, New Series, No.181, May 1972).

<sup>65</sup>Kathleen Walton Smith to D.H. Simpson, Chief Librarian, Royal Commonwealth Society, 24 January 1972. Kathleen Walton Smith to D.H.Simpson, 3 April 1972 identifies the Bishop as Edward Churton

Powles describes James C. Smith as “a light-coloured gentleman of integrity and ability” who “has for years devoted himself with singleness of purpose to the complete emancipation of his race”.<sup>66</sup> Smith comes across as an intelligent man, dedicated to the fight for justice for the coloured and black classes and committed to the economic improvement of his country. In many ways he was an optimist, believing that if some of the barriers and injustices were removed The Bahamas had every chance of prospering and her citizens making progress. His views particularly come across in the newspaper articles he wrote in 1886 in reply to the comments of James Gardiner, an English scientist working on a government-sponsored study.<sup>67</sup> Smith emphasised the deleterious effects of the ‘metayer system’ in retarding improvement and advocated peasant proprietary, alongside larger-scale capitalist farming. Gardiner and Smith bandied ideas and did not disagree about the problems of sharecropping and benefits of ownership. However, they differed over the amount of investment capital available in The Bahamas<sup>68</sup> and over Gardiner’s remarks that the black population bore some blame for the lack of economic improvement through laziness and lack of energy. Although Gardiner claimed lack of race prejudice in that he largely blamed the white Bahamians for the state of affairs, he expressed the standard Victorian Englishman’s view of the African: lazy, unmotivated, needing guidance and protection. Significantly, Smith’s reaction and the views he articulated show, for once, identity with the African by an influential mulatto and race pride alongside patriotism. His solutions to the economic problems of the Colony included changes in land tenure and improved public education, particularly more vocational training.<sup>69</sup> In later correspondence he advocates agricultural training for the ‘masses’, particularly in irrigation, use of manures and rotation of crops. Rather strangely he also wrote that there was “plenty of room for

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“who became a great friend up to the time my Father left The Bahamas for good”. The papers of John Carmichael Smith are kept in the Royal Commonwealth Society Library, Cambridge University.

<sup>66</sup>Powles, *Pink Pearl*, 101.

<sup>67</sup>*Nassau Guardian*, 25 September to 10 November 1886.

<sup>68</sup>See page 140-141.

<sup>69</sup> Smith later developed an intellectual interest in Political Economy, writing a number of pamphlets between 1900 and 1910. One of the pamphlets mentioned in his daughter’s list of publications, *The Distribution of Produce*, was produced in 1892, while he was still in The Bahamas. His daughter remembered her father as “a brilliant conversationalist – and could speak on many subjects as well as Political Economy” (Kathleen Walton Smith to D. Simpson, 24 January 1972).

small, capitalised farmers from England to settle out here”. His general conviction was that “in industry, in Education, are the roads towards progress”.<sup>70</sup>

He mentioned in his articles that he was a Monarchist by conviction and loyal to the British Government. In The Bahamas’ situation, Smith would have likely seen more immediate danger in government by an Assembly controlled by the merchant oligarchy than the paternalistic hand of the British Government. Essentially James Smith acted as conscience guided him. As an Assemblyman that might entail supporting the Government, or going against it, depending on the circumstances. When Smith spoke and voted against the Governor in 1886, despite Blake’s assertion that this was usual, this was not a matter of policy, simply a matter of an independent member voting as he saw fit.<sup>71</sup> Besides, Smith did earn his livelihood in Government offices, first as a clerk and storekeeper in the Commissariat Department and then as Postmaster.<sup>72</sup>

In 1887 Smith began a newspaper, *The Freeman*, that he claimed was “devoted solely to the interests of the coloured people”.<sup>73</sup> He railed against “a small gang of whites and so-called whites” who treated the black population as dogs, “not unkindly as a rule, but with the kindness they show their dogs, neither more or less” and who prevented them rising “to be anything more than hewers of wood and drawers of water”. He argued the black Bahamians, though they realised things were not right in their country, had “vegetated” and could not see a remedy.<sup>74</sup> The object of Smith’s newspaper was to provide the necessary education.

James C. Smith was much more radical and outspoken than previous coloured members of the House. But an individual member could achieve little. Those regularly opposing the Government were the white Wesleyans, whose interests were in many ways

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<sup>70</sup>James Carmichael Smith to Roger Yelverton, 26 February 1893, CO23/238/492-499.

<sup>71</sup>Henry Blake to Earl Granville, 22 May 1886, CO23/228/148-156. Blake was piqued that he lost the vote by one.

<sup>72</sup>E. B. A. Taylor to Lord Knutsford, no. 112, 14 August 1889, CO23/231/502-508 and Ambrose Shea to Lord Knutsford, no. 139, 5 November 1889, CO23/231/630-632. He replaced a postmaster who had absconded with Government money and Smith was credited with restoring order to the Post Office. Shea commented that his appointment would “have a special significance and value” as “he is a coloured man, a prominent member of the House of Assembly, and naturally exercises great influence with his people”.

<sup>73</sup>Powles, *Pink Pearl*, 103. Powles printed a letter sent in 1887 by Smith to *The Key of the Gulf*, a newspaper published in Key West. He was appealing for subscriptions to keep *The Freeman* going.

<sup>74</sup>*Ibid.*, 103-105.

opposed to those of the black and coloured population. James Smith did occasionally join with the Wesleyans to oppose the Government. This was evident, for example when they attempted to prevent local hotel owners from selling spirits to non-residents.<sup>75</sup> However, these were minor issues and this was not an alliance that Smith probably found too palatable.

James C. Smith did introduce a successful bill in 1885 to regulate the payment of advances and shares to masters and seamen of vessels engaged in sponge fishing, which was very much in the interests of the spongers in the face of their continued debt to the Nassau merchants.<sup>76</sup> The preamble to the Act read: "Provision should be made for the abolition of the present truck system, and for the payment and settlement of the wages or shares of the crews of these vessels in money only".<sup>77</sup> There had to be an agreement in writing, specifying the wages or share of the profits, the nature and duration of the voyage and the regulations governing the gathering and sharing of the catch. This agreement had to be read out and clearly explained to every seaman. Payment had to be in money only. Also, "it shall not be lawful for the owners, or persons fitting out the said vessels, to make any deduction from such wages or shares, for money due for goods sold, save and except to the extent only of the amount of the advances made on former voyages...which remain unsettled". It became unlawful for owners, agents or outfitters to make advances above specified sums to masters and seamen. Smith also amended the bill at the third reading to include the obligation of the owner or agent to produce a complete copy of account sales and a detailed statement showing the division of the net proceeds. This amendment was an important innovation in the system, offering some protection to spongers. They had obviously greatly benefitted by the Act, but Governor Blake had to threaten to impose a two-percent tax on the sale of sponges in order to get the merchants to support it.<sup>78</sup> Merchants had desired legislation to prevent spongers selling their catch to a depot established at Andros and they got this concession in the Act, which stated that any person unlawfully disposing of produce would be guilty of larceny.

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<sup>75</sup>Votes of the House of Assembly (1883), 50. The Government successfully blocked the amendment.

<sup>76</sup>Votes of the House of Assembly (1885), 103.

<sup>77</sup>49 Vic. c.19, Acts of the Bahamas (1883-1891), 151-153.

<sup>78</sup>Henry Blake to Henry Holland, no. 49, 30 April 1887, CO23/229/119-129.

James Smith was a very active House member, serving on numerous committees, some concerned with issues important to the disadvantaged, such as medical relief for the poor, tariff reform, extension of the operations of savings banks and reform of the electoral law. Groups of citizens often requested Smith to present their petitions to the House. One was from the pilots of Nassau to improve conditions and rates.<sup>79</sup> On another occasion he presented petitions from his constituents concerning the state of Augusta Street (Delancy Town) during the rainy season and another from licensed draymen for a shed at Vendue House to protect their animals.<sup>80</sup> Smith also proposed disagreement to the House Committee's report refusing L. D. Powles' travelling expenses.<sup>81</sup>

As might be expected, Smith was returned again in 1889, as was G. A. McGregor and Joseph Dupuch. William Campbell Adderley, a black Bahamian elected for the Town District, J. W. H. Deveaux for Cat Island, and George R. Evans for Andros, joined the non-white group of representatives. Governor Shea commented on this increase in coloured members and stated "the fact has little significance as the question of race or colour was scarcely heard of". He added that this representation "tends to gratify a popular sentiment, while the presence of those coloured men in the Assembly will not be the cause of any inconvenience".<sup>82</sup> This is acknowledgement of the conservative politics of the coloured members to date, even of James C. Smith, who could be annoying but scarcely threatening. The fact that Governor Shea saw the election of such men as a safety valve is telling.

G. R. Evans was born in Andros and came to Nassau as a boy for schooling and to learn his trade (carpentry). He was a member of the Bahamas Friendly Society and the Royal Victoria Lodge and a founding member of the Aurora Lodge. He was also a vestryman at Christ Church.<sup>83</sup> William Campbell Adderley's father was Alliday Adderley, a Yoruba of Southwest Nigeria and a Liberated African. He had become a successful farmer and artisan, owning by the 1870s the extensive Goodman's Estate, extending from Goodman's Bay to Gladstone Road. He was the leader of the Wesley Methodist Chapel in

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<sup>79</sup>Votes of the House of Assembly (1887), 79-80.

<sup>80</sup>Votes of the House of Assembly (1889), 193-5.

<sup>81</sup>Votes of the House of Assembly (1887), 116.

<sup>82</sup>Ambrose Shea to Lord Knutsford, 23 November 1889, CO23/231/356-357.

<sup>83</sup>*The Tribune*, 14 July 1915.

Grant's Town and a trustee of the Wesley Church Trust.<sup>84</sup> William Campbell Adderley was the eldest son and forty-four years old when he won his seat for the Town District. His great-great-nephew, Paul Adderley, related: "In the polling division which voted at the Court House he was –as you might expect- at the bottom of the poll. But he was top of the poll at the polling division voting in Blue Hill Road at the Grant's Town Market".<sup>85</sup> Adderley was no radical though and advocated a gradualist approach to politics for blacks, to avoid confrontation and concentrate on improving their material circumstances.<sup>86</sup> He had little opportunity to pursue his policies as he died in 1892. Adderley was a former president of the Bahamas Friendly Society and another former president, Anthony Roberts, became a candidate for the vacant seat.<sup>87</sup> Roberts had worked himself up from stevedore to clerk/supervisor for a steamship company. He was a member of the Order of Odd Fellows and treasurer of the Mechanics Savings Society in Delancy Town, where he lived. He was, like Stevenson and Dupuch, a Presbyterian, a denomination usually considered all white in Nassau.<sup>88</sup> He won the Town seat, but died during the first session he attended.<sup>89</sup>

James Carmichael Smith continued to be the most forthright of the non-white members, but an unfortunate 'affair' effectively silenced him at the beginning of the 1890s. Whether Smith was cleverly sidelined by the 'Nassau oligarchy' or simply preoccupied by the procedures taken by an irate father trying to exact revenge for the sake of his daughter and family name is a matter of speculation. Stephen Albert Dillet, the illegitimate son of Stephen Dillet, brought charges of seduction and abduction of his daughter, Elizabeth,

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<sup>84</sup>For family history see McDermott, "A. F. Adderley".

<sup>85</sup>Ibid., 21. This is an indication of how much wealthier some inhabitants of Grant's Town had become. The fact their votes could swing the vote in the Town District, centred on Bay Street, was troubling to the white elite. Just prior to the 1896 election the Town district was divided into the City and Southern District, the former north of Meeting Street and the latter south of the street.

<sup>86</sup>Howard Johnson, "Friendly Societies in the Bahamas 1834-1910", *Slavery and Abolition* 2, no.3 (December 1991): 189.

<sup>87</sup>*Nassau Guardian*, 2 July and 9 July 1892. Significantly, neither national newspaper published an obituary for the black William Campbell Adderley.

<sup>88</sup>For example Craton and Saunders write that the congregation at the kirk "was exclusively white" (Michael Craton and Gail Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream: A History of the Bahamian People, vol. 2: From the Ending of Slavery to the Twenty-First Century* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1998), 92).

<sup>89</sup>*Nassau Guardian*, 24 May 1893. He died of Brights Disease, aged 54 years. The newspaper did print an obituary for this coloured man and wrote that he was held in high esteem.

against Smith. He claimed she was now pregnant with Smith's child and had been seduced under promise of marriage. Thwarted in his legal proceedings by his daughter's flight from The Bahamas, Dillet requested an enquiry by the Governor in Council, since Smith was a Government employee.<sup>90</sup> After surveying the evidence supplied by Dillet, Governor Shea decided that there was a case to answer and held an enquiry in 1893.<sup>91</sup> Smith was found guilty by the Executive Council<sup>92</sup> and suspended from office as Postmaster. The Governor and Council seemed to have been persuaded by Smith's letters to Miss Dillet, although unsigned, and Smith's refusal to be examined under oath. His legal adviser had urged him to admit nothing and make the other side prove its case. L.D. Powles believed this was a grave error of judgement as it made him look guilty.<sup>93</sup> In the letters Smith admitted paternity and urged Elizabeth to leave home and take lodgings. He also presented arrangements for leaving the country and promised to provide for her, although he did not offer marriage. The Council did comment that it was not shown that the girl was unwilling to leave. But it deplored the attempt to blacken Elizabeth Dillet's name, by bringing witnesses "of the lowest character". They felt the way Smith defended himself proved him "to be devoid of all honour and rectitude and unworthy of any position of responsibility and trust".<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>90</sup>S. A. Dillet to H. Jackson. Colonial Secretary, 1 November 1892, CO23/238/230-231.

<sup>91</sup>Ambrose Shea to Marquis of Ripon, no. 20, 21 February 1893, CO23/236/77-79 and no. 43, 8 April 1893. CO23/236/154-155.

<sup>92</sup>Members present were Governor Shea, the Receiver General, R. H. Sawyer, Dr. Kemp, W.E. Armbrister, Joseph Brown and J.H. Young (CO23/236/318-319).

<sup>93</sup>L. D. Powles to Sydney Buxton, 31 July 1893, CO23/238/278-286. Powles considers that Smith was initially given good advice by Ormond Malcolm "to make a clean breast of it", but the Governor told Malcolm to remove himself from the case.

<sup>94</sup>Ambrose Shea to Marquis of Ripon, no.55, 29 April 1893, CO23/236/256-262 and enclosures CO23/236/264-317. Lorenzo Gomez stated he had a relationship with Elizabeth while she was still at school. David Patton swore that Elizabeth had told him she was pregnant by a married man and she would have to accuse someone else. She said she was going away because her parents wanted her to swear to something she could not. F.B. Fountain, a married close friend of the Dilletts, accused Patton of asking him to go to the lawyer's office to sign a paper to the effect that he had had an "improper intimacy" with Elizabeth Dillet. At first he promised to do this for thirty pounds and release from a mortgage. He changed his mind at the last minute. Louis N. Duty, a former editor of *The Freeman*, said he knew of witnesses being bribed. (But Duty had fallen out with Smith.) Thomas Dorsett, a stonemason, swore he had had to interfere on Smith's behalf in a similar case. More troubling was that Smith called Elizabeth a prostitute during the enquiry. A letter to the Secretary of State from Rev. James Roberts of St. John's Native Baptist Church described her as "generally known to be of immoral character and a base woman" (CO23/238/356). Elizabeth's own account gives an impression of flirtation.

Elizabeth Dillet herself later contradicted her father's claim that Smith had promised to marry her in a statement she made to the Secretary of State.<sup>95</sup> Dillet had demanded that Smith marry his daughter but Smith declined, wishing to make a private settlement.<sup>96</sup> Smith had advised Dillet that if he chose a "hostile, noisy and public mode" of settlement, he should go to his legal adviser. Already Smith was suspicious that the plan was to have a public scandal. It is very difficult to know how far Smith's enemies engineered this scandal. It is beyond doubt that he was engaging in an alliance with Elizabeth Dillet, but it is fairly obvious that he never intended a permanent relationship. From the evidence, it seems creditable that he intended to keep this child and its mother, but as an illegitimate family. There also does not seem any evidence that Dillet was a vindictive or politically motivated man. He was an upright and law-abiding citizen, naturally protective of his eldest daughter and unhappy to see her 'shamed' by Smith. Whether this was enough to spur him to take the action he did that allowed the whole of Nassau to enjoy the scandal, or whether he was persuaded by others to take this path in order to ruin Smith, one can now only speculate. James Gardiner had stated that Smith had "many enemies in Nassau".<sup>97</sup> In his letter of support, C.H. Pollen, a former Governor's Secretary, observed: "He has I know been regarded with jealousy and suspicion by the not-quite-white" and he "has always been looked up to by the colonial natives, and as it seemed very justly, but is not at all popular with the merchants for the very obvious reason that he is the black man's champion".<sup>98</sup> Was Smith's misfortune in getting this girl pregnant just the opportunity the Nassau elite had been awaiting to rid themselves of this articulate champion? Smith's difficulties were explained by the Englishman, Chief Justice Roger Yelverton (in the midst of his own dispute with the local elite): "Such is the state of terrorism at Nassau that men like J.C. Smith, the

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<sup>95</sup>Elizabeth Dillet's statement to the Secretary of State, CO23/238/316-321. Her father had found her in New York in a House of Refuge and persuaded her to go to England to escape Smith's "vicious influence". He said she would not return to Nassau "as she refused to face the shame".

<sup>96</sup>S. A. Dillet to J. C. Smith, 18 May 1892, CO23/236/321 and J. C. Smith to S.A. Dillet, 18 May 1892, CO23/236/321. It was not Dillet who made the original charge of seduction but a neighbour, E.J. Stuart, a Resident Justice. Dillet was away at sea when Stuart claims he saw Elizabeth and Smith together and knowing "Smith to be a man of immoral character" questioned her. Elizabeth's version was that Stuart's wife guessed the cause of her sickness and questioned her. E.J. Stuart accused Smith of seduction, to which he replied: "If Elizabeth had said he had ruined her, he would abide by what she said". He supposedly offered to get Stuart's salary raised if he would assist him to settle the matter quietly.

<sup>97</sup>*Nassau Guardian*, 6 November 1886.

<sup>98</sup>Character reference from C. H. Pollen, CO23/238/278-286.

Postmaster dare not speak out their minds. It is as much as their position is worth. An official is soon found fault with and hauled before the Executive Council (of relations) who are his masters".<sup>99</sup>

Smith decided to appeal the decision to the Privy Council and went to England, where Powles helped him get legal advice.<sup>100</sup> The Secretary of State acquitted and exonerated Smith from the charges after hearing Elizabeth Dillet's statement.<sup>101</sup> All this took time and energy and when he returned to Nassau he did not seem to have the same intensity or force. He was not such a presence in the House, although returned by the voters in 1896. Smith felt the political climate in Nassau had changed. He wrote: "I did good service in the Legislature before I took office under the Government and since [,] when Dunlop [of St. Andrew's Kirk] was alive and the Sawyers were not so much at the elbows of the Governor".<sup>102</sup> Of course, Smith had always had his supporters, particularly among the black population, and a petition in his favour had been received by the Governor early on, although he dismissed this as not from "anyone of standing or prominence".<sup>103</sup> Pollen called him "a most valuable and excellent officer". Lieutenant Colonel W. McLeod of the Commissariat Department wrote that he never heard one word impugning Smith's character and had no doubt of his honesty and truthfulness.<sup>104</sup> The Colonial Office offered him an appointment as assistant Postmaster in Freetown, Sierra Leone, which he accepted.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>99</sup>Roger Yelverton to Marquis of Ripon, 17 March 1893, CO23/238/488-489.

<sup>100</sup>James C. Smith to H.M. Jackson, 29 April 1893, CO23/238/360; Ambrose Shea to Marquis of Ripon, no.64, 13 May 1893, CO23/236/434; J.C. Smith to Marquis of Ripon, 3 June 1893, CO23/238/377. Smith consulted the firm of Keely, Son and Verden of 14 Great Winchester Street (Verden to Marquis of Ripon, 12 June 1893, CO23/238/265).

<sup>101</sup>Colonial Office minute no.55, 29 August 1893, CO23/238/342-343.

<sup>102</sup>James C. Smith to Roger Yelverton, 26 February 1893. CO23/238/492-499.

<sup>103</sup>Ambrose Shea to Marquis of Ripon, no. 139, 28 October 1893, CO23/237/308-310. A letter of appreciation appeared in the *Nassau Guardian*, 17 May 1893, signed by J. W. Roberts, Pastor of St. John's Native Baptist Church, J. J. Kerr, Pastor of Baptist Union Churches and Daniel Wilshere, Superintendent of the Baptist Union.

<sup>104</sup>Character reference from C.H. Pollen, CO23/238/293-294 and Lt. Col. W. McLeod, CO23/238/287-288. Testimonials from McLeod and Lt. Col. J. A. Scott, CO23/238/322-323. McCleod said he would come to the Colonial Office at any time to be interviewed in Smith's defence.

<sup>105</sup>Another factor to induce him to move was that he married Harriet Walton in 1893. She was in Nassau during the enquiry, staying with Rev. Bailey of St. Andrew's Kirk. She was the daughter of a mill owner from Thornton, near Bradford. Her family gave their full consent to the marriage. Smith had quite a successful career in Sierra Leone, becoming Postmaster-General in 1900 and manager of the General Savings

The Smith case also brought up the questions of middle class morality and colour. “The intervening classes, like middle classes everywhere, were most bound and oppressed by the rule of respectable morality, being able to enjoy neither the confident double standards of the whites nor the easygoing indifference of the lower-class blacks”.<sup>106</sup> Powles, somewhat tongue in cheek, felt Smith had been severely dealt with because it was questionable whether any man ought to be retained in the public service if found guilty of immorality, that is, keeping a mistress. He pointed out, though, to have any effect any official, white or black, should be treated alike. Otherwise “the whole coloured population of the Islands will arrive at the conclusion that he has been got rid of because he was a coloured man”. Powles reminded the Colonial Office that such behaviour was habitual among married men in Nassau and the coloured people “know all about the irregular sexual relations of all the white people in Nassau, and, nearly everyone occupying positions under Government has such relations at the present moment”. Smith’s replacement as Postmaster, the unmarried Austin Thompson, R. H. Sawyer’s brother-in-law, had two families of illegitimate children and D. A. Brice, who took Smith’s place on the Board of Education, was married and had three illegitimate children. Powles considered unless Smith was reinstated “his dismissal will only produce the firm and rooted conviction that Smith has merely been got rid of because he is a coloured man”.<sup>107</sup>

J.C. Smith and Charles Osborn Anderson were elected for the Western District in 1896. Charles Anderson had been Chief Clerk at the Post Office and Acting Receiver General and was now Acting Resident Justice of Inagua. When he had been Acting Receiver General he had taken his place on the Executive Council, which had perturbed Governor Shea. He claimed it caused embarrassment when discussing local defence as race differences entered into considerations. He recommended that alterations be made in the

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Bank. He acted as Collector of Customs (1902-3) and Colonial Treasurer (1906-7). The Address of the Post Office staff in Sierra Leone attest to his ability, his affability and his concern to ‘Africanise’ and modernise the department. He retired to London in 1911 and was drafted into the Treasury during the First World War where he worked on the establishment of the National Savings Movement. After 1912 he was an active member of the circle of Pan-Africanists, Indian and African nationalists, Pan-Islamists etc. who congregated around Duse Mohamed Ali and he contributed articles to The African Times and Orient Review (Dr. Ian Duffield, Dept. of History, University of Edinburgh, to D. Simpson, Chief Librarian, Royal Commonwealth Society Library). James Carmichael Smith Correspondence File MSS446, RCS Library, University of Cambridge.

<sup>106</sup>Craton and Saunders, Islanders in the Stream, vol. 2, 97.

<sup>107</sup>L. D. Powles to Sydney Buxton, 31 July 1893, CO23/238/278-286.

Royal Instructions so as to debar the holders of acting appointments from seats in the Council.<sup>108</sup> The Colonial Office felt he exaggerated the awkwardness of the situation and Harris commented: "Nor is there much hope for us in the West Indies if we cannot fairly take the advice and opinion of those coloured people who are rising in the social scale. The fact is in the Bahamas the race jealousy has been allowed to become very accentuated". Lord Knutsford could see the case for change but not for the stated reasons. He wrote: "I should inform Sir Ambrose Shea that if the acting officer is capable, he should not in my opinion be excluded because he is a coloured man".<sup>109</sup>

Anderson did not get re-elected in 1902. He was involved in a four-way fight to retain his seat against Anton Bertram, the new Attorney General, George A. McGregor, the former representative for the District, and Herbert Hill. McGregor identified himself with the working men of the district and as an independent with no party interests. Hill, a clerk, nominated himself 'The People's Advocate' and was critical of the status quo in the Colony: "We are becoming more and more conscious of the gross neglect that we meet at the hands of a certain few." In a letter to the electors published in *The Nassau Guardian*, Anderson also endorsed Bertram. Ironically Bertram was elected, but Anderson lost out to Hill, whose grandfather and father had been politicians in Grenada and Tobago.<sup>110</sup> (McGregor withdrew in mid-morning.) Anderson resumed his parliamentary career in 1908, the significant part of his public service being between 1908 and 1940.

W.C. Adderley's nephew, Wilfred Parliament Adderley (the name has usually been attributed to his grandfather's political ambitions) campaigned in the Southern District in this election. He was the son of Alliday's eldest son, Joseph Richmond. He has been described as "a flamboyant extrovert" and "an immaculate, almost flashy dresser", possessing "a fine intellect, a lively imagination and boundless energy".<sup>111</sup> Unsuccessful in this election, five years later he was to win a by-election in the Southern District. He defeated Stephen Albert Dillet (the white merchant E.N. Murphy withdrawing on the day of

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<sup>108</sup>Ambrose Shea to Lord Knutsford, 23 November 1888, CO23/230/435-436. Notably, W. E. Armbrister's presence caused Shea no difficulties.

<sup>109</sup>Colonial Office dispatch no. 24542, 11 December 1888, CO23/230/433.

<sup>110</sup>*Nassau Guardian*, 20 May and 13 June 1903.

<sup>111</sup>McDermott, "A.F. Adderley", 25.

the election). The election of Adderley was looked on positively by Governor Gilbert Carter, who remarked to the Under-Secretary at the Colonial Office that he always “found Mr. Adderley a more loyal supporter of the Government than most of the white members, few of whom are able to give an independent vote.”<sup>112</sup> In the general election in 1902 Adderley had to fight S. A. Dillet again. They both chose to address the electors of the Southern District in letters to the *Nassau Guardian*. Dillet wrote: “There is no burning question before the country, nor party lines on which I might claim your support... I am OF THE PEOPLE; my best efforts will always be FOR THE PEOPLE; and my highest ambition will be to be approved BY THE PEOPLE”. Adderley chose to put himself forward as the advocate “for the fostering of Agriculture... which is the only hope and advancement of the masses of the Colony”. Adderley topped the poll with 269 votes, while Dillet lost out by two votes to the incumbent, merchant J. L. Saunders (229 to 231).<sup>113</sup>

Politically the coloured and black members had not posed any threat during the nineteenth century, certainly not to the Governor and colonial Government, of whom they were generally supportive, nor to the white merchant oligarchy, being too few in number and lacking even a vague notion of ‘party’ organisation or ties. Only James Carmichael Smith seems to have been viewed as irksome; he followed too independent a line. However, he could be maneuvered out, the ‘Sawyer clan’ taking advantage of his personal difficulties and finding the Governor amenable to taking severe action. These representatives were, for the most part, conservative and personally ambitious. They were aiming to climb upwards socially and economically; a political career was a step in the right direction. Even James Carmichael Smith probably eyed a seat on the Executive Council. A seat on a Council and even a Board was a power base, being used to the full at the end of the century by a group of whites to further cement their powerful position. Nevertheless, there was a notion by some of the coloured and black politicians of representing an element in society whose needs were being ignored by the dominant group. Carmichael Smith and W. P. Adderley fell into that category. In the twentieth century that role was more apparent among non-white representatives, but their lack of numbers and organisational ties still told against them.

In 1906 Leon Dupuch, the coloured owner and editor of *The Tribune*, was elected for

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<sup>112</sup>Gilbert Carter to Under Secretary at Colonial Office, 10 October 1904, C.O.23/259/627-629.

<sup>113</sup>*Nassau Guardian*, 20 May, 23 May and 6 June 1903.

the Eastern District. He had attempted to get a seat in the House in the 1903 general election, standing unsuccessfully in the Eastern District against R. W. Sawyer and A. B. Sutton. He had been put up as a candidate by what Leon's son Etienne Dupuch labeled, the "Outs", that is the whites who had not got the Governor's ear and who included some of the rising political elements. But his two rivals ran as a ticket and Arthur Sutton, allegedly, spent a lot to bribe voters.<sup>114</sup> When Sutton resigned in January 1906, Leon was renominated and was this time the only candidate. He was the nephew of Joseph, the former member of the House (died in 1907). A semi-weekly newspaper, *The Watchman*, had been started by the 'Outs'. Leon Dupuch ran this paper but he soon found out that the 'Outs' had a very limited idea of political inclusion and the newspaper did not satisfy him. Thus Dupuch started *The Tribune* in 1903, also a twice-weekly newspaper at first, which soon put *The Watchman* out of business. In line with the origins of the paper, its motto was "Being bound to swear to the dogmas of no master". However, Dupuch had already come into conflict with powerful elements in Nassau and his independent line and championship of the underdog made it difficult to maintain the newspaper. In fact he had to briefly leave for Montreal in 1906 to earn some money to keep the paper afloat.<sup>115</sup> Since the *Nassau Guardian* was the paper of the white elite, the founding of *The Tribune* by Leon Dupuch was significant for the representation of alternative viewpoints.

In 1908 another coloured member was elected for the Western District. This was William Ernest Callender, an attorney (Lincoln's Inn) from British Guiana, who had practised in his homeland and Bermuda before coming to The Bahamas in 1906. The latter election stirred up interest and hostility, presumably because Callender was foreign and coloured. Charles Bethell, a liquor merchant, opposed him. The letter from Bethell to the electors indicated how he wished to present himself: "As a scion of the good old stock, as a son of the soil, as a free and independent man".<sup>116</sup> Callender won the seat by a narrow majority, 199 votes to 188.<sup>117</sup> However, it was then questioned whether he would be able to

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<sup>114</sup>Dupuch, *Tribune Story*, 22. According to Etienne Dupuch, Sutton went bankrupt as a result of spending too much on the election.

<sup>115</sup>Dupuch, *Tribune Story*, 20-22. Note the Moseleys, one of the "Ins", ran the rival paper, the *Nassau Guardian*. Copies of *The Tribune* have not survived for the period 1903 to 1911.

<sup>116</sup>*Nassau Guardian*, 18 January 1908.

<sup>117</sup>*Nassau Guardian*, 5 February 1908.

take his seat as he had failed to produce his birth certificate (to prove he was a British subject). Leon Dupuch pointedly questioned the House how many and which members of the House had been asked to produce a birth certificate in the last fourteen years. The matter was referred to the Committee of Qualifications, who decided to allow Callender to take his seat.<sup>118</sup> But Leon Dupuch was not ready to leave it at that in view of the opposition that Callender had had to face. He brought up the fact that the birth certificate, for which Callender had cabled to British Guiana at a cost of five pounds, had arrived at the Post Office on 3 February but was not delivered to him until eleven 'o' clock on the 7 February, after the election had taken place.<sup>119</sup> (An inquiry was launched, but the explanation proffered, that the letter had been accidentally placed in the wrong post office box, was not accepted by Callender and Dupuch.) Antagonism in the House towards Callender was soon apparent and the tone of its debates was unusually personal, remarked upon unfavourably by the editorial of the *Nassau Guardian*.<sup>120</sup>

Leon Dupuch asked the House to censure the Provost Marshall for "flagrant neglect of duty in the matter of the Election Laws". He accused him of failing to require J. H. Brown, H. A. F. Hill, Lewis Taylor and Anton Bertram to produce their birth certificates when they were elected to the House. Callender seconded the motion but sympathized with the Provost Marshall "because he had been made a tool of. There were dark horses behind who had not the courage to come to the front." The matter was referred to a Committee.<sup>121</sup> Dupuch's motion was rejected with a reprimand for the two members who had brought it forward.<sup>122</sup> Dupuch and Callender castigated the report in no uncertain terms and Dupuch

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<sup>118</sup>*Nassau Guardian*, 8 February 1908.

<sup>119</sup>*Nassau Guardian*, 15 February 1908.

<sup>120</sup>*Nassau Guardian*, 19 February 1908.

<sup>121</sup>*Nassau Guardian*, 29 February 1908.

<sup>122</sup>The Report felt there were reasonable explanations for why the Provost Marshall should not require certificates for the members cited by Dupuch. J. H. Brown was previously elected to the House in 1891 so it was conceivable that the Provost Marshall would not require a certificate when he returned to the House. Taylor was born in the Turks Island on May 29 1848, before its separation from The Bahamas in the December, so there was no case. Bertram, as an ex-officio member of the Council, had to be a British subject, so there was no need to ask for proof. Hill came to The Bahamas as a boy in 1878 and the majority of the community was not aware he was not born here, so it was a forgivable oversight on the Provost Marshall's part. The report also made clear the law did not state it was the duty of the Provost Marshall to "require" candidates to produce a birth certificate at elections, but specifically laid the duty on the candidates themselves.

denounced the House: "This was the fountain head of law and order but if the source was corrupt what could they expect from the streams?" He restated that he had no desire to harm the Provost Marshall but "there was no one else to get at". Why was Callender required to produce a certificate and not others? "Some members of the House had been so surprised and disappointed at Mr. Callender's election that they did not scruple to do anything." Callender told the House "the intelligent public realised that this was the beginning of a new era when the people saw they were ruled by an oligarchy but it would be broken up so help me God".<sup>123</sup> Charles Anderson spoke up to state that he did not agree with Dupuch's resolution and did not think the Provost Marshall should be censured, but he felt the report was "a very puerile and faulty one" and its last paragraph carried a stigma on members that should be struck out. It is notable that only the two votes favoured the Resolutions, but six people (Adderley, Anderson, Dupuch, Callender, J. P. Sands and J. Young, the latter two members of the white elite) wished the last paragraph removed, against nineteen who did not. (The other non-white member, Evans, did not support Dupuch and Callender.)

Thus the most interesting contest in the 1910 general election was perhaps that in the Western District, where Charles Bethell, the only white candidate, once more opposed the much maligned William Callender with Charles Anderson and Herbert Hill making it a four-way contest. Bethell (321 votes) got revenge over his rival, coming first in the polls by a large majority, with Anderson second (167 votes). Callender (75 votes) and Hill (70 votes) were the unsuccessful candidates. The Southern District returned two newcomers to the political scene in Ernest Bowen and J. Roxborough, both black craftsmen. Stephen Albert Dillet was the unlucky candidate once more. This constituency had become the one place where those not part of the Nassau elite were more likely to win than those who were. It seems to indicate that bribery had its limits and a large body of black electors was voting on the issues. Leon Dupuch lost his seat in the Eastern District. R. W. Sawyer led the poll (319 votes), with newcomer Dr. C. C. Sweeting second (219 votes) and Dupuch trailing in with only 79 votes. Whatever went on in the Eastern and Western Districts to ensure the defeat of the two trouble-making, out-spoken coloured members, it was very successful. The two had been handicapped by lack of support in the House but they had been willing to

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Callender had made the necessary inquiries to the Provost Marshall prior to the election and the Committee had accepted that his failure to produce it on election day was no fault of his own.

<sup>123</sup>*Nassau Guardian*, 21 March 1908.

speak out against the merchant politicians. Even this group was changing its nature, becoming more loud and ill-mannered in House debates (with the exception of the cultured Deputy Speaker, Harcourt Malcolm). The younger whites that were taking over in the new century were less subtle, particularly after the First World War when Prohibition enriched different families. The non-white representatives had to accommodate themselves to the new circumstances. Some took the route of Charles Anderson, loyal Government man but always sitting among and supportive of the other coloured and black members.<sup>124</sup> Leon Young took a different tack; “Young’s style was not to try to buck the establishment, but rather to become integrated with it as a political equal”.<sup>125</sup> He would voice the concerns of the black population, but was very much working with the white elite.<sup>126</sup>

### Self-Help and Political Protest

Control of the institutions of education, religion, industry and poor relief meant that the white ruling class could impose its values and ideology on the less powerful. But promotion of public institutions had to be balanced by the cost, particularly in a Colony almost permanently financially strapped. Law and order would also be more of a priority when allocating public money. Self-help was much approved by both the Imperial Government and the Legislature. Thus the preamble to an Act passed to promote Friendly Societies read: “The altered relation of society in this colony, has rendered it expedient that encouragement should be given to persons desirous of forming themselves into one or more Societies, for their mutual relief and advantage”.<sup>127</sup> William Colebrooke expressed his approval in reply to an Address from the Bahama Emancipation Union Society: “The

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<sup>124</sup>George Haddon-Smith to Lewis Harcourt, confidential, 13 April 1913, CO23/271/152-153. Anderson was promoted to Postmaster in 1913. Grey-Wilson said Anderson had “great force of character” and was “tactful and level-headed”. He stated “his industry, accuracy, energy, loyal self-reliance and sense of responsibility” were all “very marked”. He observed his “social position [was] very good in his sphere”, noting he was coloured. Confidential Report of 1912, CO23/269/87.

<sup>125</sup>Benson McDermott, “L. W. Young: Formidable Force from Fox Hill”, Bahamas Handbook (Nassau: The Tribune, 1984), 15.

<sup>126</sup>See chapter six.

<sup>127</sup>5 Wm. IV c.40, May 1835.

formation of your Society with the intention, as I understand, of enabling you to provide for the support of the aged and infirm, without having recourse to parochial relief, is in the highest degree creditable to you, and it affords a happy presage of the moral and industrious habits which may be expected to prevail amongst the labouring population of this extensive Colony".<sup>128</sup> The Bahamas Friendly Society was formed in 1834 and was composed entirely of apprentices or those who had purchased their freedom. The fees (sixteen shillings to join and two shillings monthly) indicate some labourers managing to earn a satisfactory living and the beginnings of an 'elite working class'. This was to be a respectable institution, monitoring its members.<sup>129</sup> The Friendly Society was also a benefit society: any member sick or unable to work was entitled to a weekly allowance of seven shillings and, upon the death of a member, twelve dollars would be given to defray funeral expenses and thirteen pounds given to the widow.<sup>130</sup> The Eastern District Friendly Society and the Grant's Town Friendly Society were established in 1835, the latter was composed of Liberated Africans. The Eastern Friendly Society also imposed strict regulations: a member had to marry, "be a strict moral man' and attend worship each Sunday; any member found gambling, tippling or disturbing the peace would be strictly punished.<sup>131</sup> Thus the Government's desire to encourage self-reliance, thrift, morality and family stability found support and self-regulation among some of the working class. Also, the idea of taking responsibility for their own care in sickness, old age and death was much approved and relieved the public coffers.

After mid-century there was a tendency for the societies to divide along ethnic lines. Cleveland Eneas wrote that the reason for so many lodges, friendly societies and burial societies was that "...there was sufficient heterogeneity among [black Bahamians], to warrant separate social classes. This social segregation, which manifested itself in different

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<sup>128</sup>*Royal Gazette*, 18 March 1835.

<sup>129</sup>Potential members had to be approved by President and Committee; new members served a twelve months' probationary period; breach of regulations led to fines and then expulsion; the treasurer had to enter into a substantial bond; "no ardent spirits" were to be consumed at the annual dinner or at a member's funeral. The promotion of moral improvement was expressed in its address on the Queen's birthday: "We look forward to the promotion of the moral and religious instruction of our children as one of the greatest blessings which we can derive from the important changes by which we have been so largely benefited"(CO23/96/249).

<sup>130</sup>Regulations of the Bahamas Friendly Society, enclosed in William Colebrooke to Lord Aberdeen, 31 March 1835, CO23/93/168-169. Different currencies were still being used as legal tender. This was changed with an 1838 Act (2 Vic. c.4) which declared British sterling to be the money of account.

<sup>131</sup>Regulations of the Eastern Friendly Society, CO23/94/376-380.

lodges and churches, was practiced with a bit of seriousness”<sup>132</sup> Thus there were Yoruba, Egba, Congo and Nangobar societies.

The Friendly Societies developed into proto-political institutions by the 1880s and 1890s, led by members of the middle class. Johnson writes:

Friendly societies were used to mobilise the members of the black community for political action on issues which affected them. They also provided organisational experience for black politicians as well as a power base. In fact, the friendly societies can be seen as embryonic political parties.<sup>133</sup>

There were annual presentations of loyal addresses presented to the Governor on Emancipation Day; sometimes these would present a grievance of their members. Petitions were occasionally used to urge action or reform. A number of memorials, with a total of 1,100 signatures, had been sent to the House regarding the introduction of competitive examinations for entry to Government service.<sup>134</sup> In 1877 there had been a petition from the Bahamas, Grant’s Town, United, Yoruba, and other Friendly Societies for a reduction in the pecuniary qualifications of members of the Assembly.<sup>135</sup> The coloured and black Bahamians were starting to voice their grievances through the Friendly Societies and voting their leaders into the Assembly. William Campbell Adderley and Anthony Roberts were former presidents of the Bahamas Friendly Society (1888 and 1885-1887 respectively).

By 1911 there were about 160 Friendly Societies with a membership of 8,000. The Governor thought this was in excess of the needs of the community. Grey Wilson feared “that in too many cases the society is founded more for the benefit of the office bearers than with the intention of being of benefit to the members.”<sup>136</sup> Most of the new societies, such as the Order of Rechabites and Order of Odd Fellows, were affiliated to societies in Britain or

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<sup>132</sup>Cleveland W. Eneas, *Bain Town* (Nassau: Timpaul Publishers, 1976), 17. He stated most of the people of Bain Town were Yorubas and called themselves N’Ongas, as were most inhabitants of Fox Hill, with whom they had close relations. Just south of Bain Town was an area of bush known as Cantabutta, where the people were Congos (the equivalent in Fox Hill being Congo Town). “No N’ongo man would associate with a Congo under any circumstance. He regarded him as someone to be shunned, and segregation and discrimination, was rife. For a N’ongo to be labelled a ‘Congo man’ was as raw an epithet as could be imagined” (Ibid., 29).

<sup>133</sup>Johnson, “Friendly Societies”, 195.

<sup>134</sup>*The Freeman*, 17 April 1888. The Competitive Examination Bill was passed in 1888.

<sup>135</sup>*Votes of the House of Assembly* (1877), 52.

<sup>136</sup>Grey Wilson to Lewis Harcourt, no.119, 22 July 1911, CO23/267/399-400.

the United States. These had a certain appeal to Bahamians since they offered loans to members and offered help to those migrating to the United States through their sister organisations. Moreover, these were secret societies with elaborate rituals, very popular with black Bahamians.<sup>137</sup> Some of these societies were temperance societies, where pledges had to be signed on joining. Temperance had particular appeal to women and there was a marked increase in participation by women, who were excluded from other political activities.

In 1887 an Anglo-African League was formed, with L.N. Duty as Corresponding Secretary, in an effort to bring unity among the Friendly Societies and Benevolent Societies. It was an association of twenty-two societies and 4,000 members, with branches at Savannah Sound, Inagua, Harbour Island and The Bluff.<sup>138</sup> Johnson writes that it was also manifestation of a division over “the course of action which would most benefit the black community”. The Anglo-African League comprised those who advocated a more aggressive approach.<sup>139</sup> At a special meeting of the Anglo-African League in February of 1888, Samuel Bosfield, who had just taken over the editorship of *The Freeman* and was current president of the Bahamas Friendly Society, was in the chair. Delegates included S. T. Smith, immediate past editor of *The Freeman*, G. A. McGregor, J. A. Bridgewater (Bahamas Friendly Society), William Lightbourn (President of United Burial Society), John Storr (Ebo Friendly Society), G. Evans and J. Young (Ship Carpenters Union), Zacharias Cambridge and Robert Cambridge (President and Secretary of Grant’s Town Friendly Society).<sup>140</sup> The items discussed indicate the political nature of the Society: the necessity of a High School; the advantages of the Ballot Box and current legislation before the House. William Lightbourn commented on the “little race representation in the General Assembly”. But he blamed the non-whites for the situation. Louis Duty suggested vigilance committees to detect and report any violations of the Election Laws. The Election Law was under scrutiny in the House and the League felt this an opportune time for effecting change. The Society

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<sup>137</sup>Johnson, “Friendly Societies”, 190-191. Also, returning migrants had been exposed to the American societies in Florida.

<sup>138</sup>*The Freeman*, 15 November 1887.

<sup>139</sup>Johnson, “Friendly Societies”, 189. According to Adderley, the Anglo-African League remarked that “the traitor to the African race is elected President of the Bahamas Friendly Society”.

<sup>140</sup>*The Freeman*, 21 February 1888.

unanimously passed a resolution to approach the senior member for the City, Robert Sawyer, requesting him to introduce a Bill for the Ballot Box in the present session. He declined “as he thought that the people were not educated up to its use, and the ignorant voter would be in a more defenceless position than under the present system”.<sup>141</sup> A letter from ‘A. Citizen’ to *The Freeman* wrote that he knew that sending a deputation to Sawyer was a blunder; they had “chosen the very last man in the colony to bring forward such a popular reform”. He had sent a letter to the Nassau Times regarding the Ballot before the elections seven years ago, but it was suppressed by Sawyer as “premature”. The writer declared that Sawyer would think it premature “seven times seven years hence”.<sup>142</sup>

There was another meeting of the Anglo-African League in March because of its concern about an amendment to the Election Act of 1885 introduced by Joseph Brown “who has already during his one term of Colonial Parliamentary career, distinguished himself for his repeated efforts to curtail the right of choice of Constituents”.<sup>143</sup> If the amendment passed, candidates would have to declare before a JP that they had the qualifications to stand, that is two hundred pounds of assets. If they were to make a false declaration, they could be convicted of perjury and sentenced to imprisonment for a term not exceeding four years’ hard labour. The non-whites saw this as an attempt by the white elite to keep control of the House. A letter from Louis N. Duty in this edition of the newspaper declared: “It strikes a blow at the Constitution”.<sup>144</sup> An editorial in *The Freeman* claimed potential candidates would be “diffident and nervous in accepting the honour conferred upon them by any constituency requesting them to represent their suffrages in the Legislature, because of the crucial torture which would be inflicted upon them by the enraged Oligarchy in its vindictive spleen”.<sup>145</sup> The Act was passed, nevertheless, but with the draconian penalty reduced to one month’s imprisonment. Still *The Freeman* considered that it was “the

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<sup>141</sup>*The Freeman*, 28 February 1888.

<sup>142</sup>*The Freeman*, 20 March 1888.

<sup>143</sup>*The Freeman*, 13 March 1888.

<sup>144</sup>*Ibid.* The voting on the second reading of the bill was: Yeas – J. Brown; J.W. Culmer; both Sawyers; T.P. Moore; J.S. Johnson; J.F.W. Turtle; C.T. Sands; F. Bullard; H.C. Lightbourn; J.S. Darling; D.A. Brice; R.W. Farrington; Joseph Roker. Nays – G.A. MacGregor; H.T. Rahming; J.C. Smith; E.B.A. Taylor; J.H. Young; E.S. Hall; E.Y. Webb; G.B. Adderley; Lewis Taylor. Absent – S.P. Saunders; T.N.G. Clare.

<sup>145</sup>*The Freeman*, 20 March 1888.

clique's" trump card, to be played if the electorate attempted "to exercise their manhood" and denounce their rule.<sup>146</sup>

Other organisations of the middle and upper working class were established in the nineteenth century. Most were concerned with self-reliance, such as the Mechanics' Savings Society and the Industrial Co-operative Society, established in 1886 with forty-eight members. Stephen A. Dillet was manager of the latter and Frederick Fountain was its secretary. Its purpose was to sell articles at lower prices and return profits to members and to provide an easy and safe means to save money.<sup>147</sup>

Race pride and even Pan-Africanism did occasionally manifest itself. James Carmichael Smith made this speech to the combined friendly societies in 1887:

Let us endeavour to become more and more united, and let the children of Africa throughout the Western Hemisphere remember FATHERLAND or MOTHERLAND, let them remember AFRICA which is sometimes called the Dark Continent, but which is to us in the West, *the Land of the Rising Sun*.<sup>148</sup>

However, divisions within the various organisations and lack of leadership prevented any serious challenge to the firm grip on political power that the white elite enjoyed. Some of the middle classes saw themselves as 'white' and were accommodated. Others aspired as individuals and accepted the values and terms of the elite, with the few moments of tension that arose easily contained. James Carmichael Smith was a rare exception. The lack of institutional focus and unity prevented the potential of the middle class as a political force being realised.

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<sup>146</sup>*The Freeman*, 13 April 1888.

<sup>147</sup>*The Freeman*, 31 January 1888.

<sup>148</sup>Quoted in Johnson, "Friendly Societies", 194.

## CHAPTER SIX

### THE MOST INCOMPETENT AND CORRUPT LEGISLATURE IN THE WEST INDIES<sup>1</sup>

Governor William Allardyce described the political situation in The Bahamas during the early twentieth century.

... the present form of Government, although excellent in large communities, is I fear fatal to progress. The Colony is really run by a few merchants in Bay Street who are members of the House of Assembly and control a majority of votes there. This small clique is in terror of the Dark Brother, with few exceptions, and the Dark Brother knows it, and although unorganized keeps him on tenterhooks. Were they organized, or had even one man of fair ability among them, and presuming the distrust of their own colour would be overcome, the majority in the House would be coloured. When that arrives, should it ever come, the conch will creep into his shell but before doing so will demand an altered form of Government... Their ideal seems to be jog along as at present, make ends meet somehow, and let the future take care of itself... We manage – or mismanage – our own affairs in our own way, and we pay for our mistakes.<sup>2</sup>

The Governor listed the various problems of the Colony: secondary education non-existent; no industrial institutions; venereal disease rife; bad sanitation; slaughter house revolting; laxness of ‘conch’ in business and official life; House convinced tariff only way to raise revenue (and even present form not satisfying merchants). Allardyce added that, in regard to the tariff: “I have been warned – friendly like – not to put my hand in this pie, that is their prescriptive right”. He commented that debates in the House showed the white elite’s hypersensitivity and discussions there were often personal and petty. Finally, he correctly stated that “on principle they do not like officials from outside the Colony, and they like

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<sup>1</sup>Comment of Edward Darnley of the Colonial Office in 1910.

<sup>2</sup>William Allardyce to Macnaghten, Colonial Office, private letter, 4 July 1917, CO23/280/461-464.

those whom they know are tolerant of their, what shall I say, whims, and not too severe on their shortcomings”.

Edward Darnley, in charge of the West Indian section, expressed Colonial Official acknowledgement of the shortcomings of the Bahamian Government: “We have long been aware that the Government of the Bahamas is extremely inefficient in many respects, and on the whole perhaps more so than any other West Indian Government. This inefficiency is chiefly displayed in sanitation, education, public works, finance and the treatment of the public services.”<sup>3</sup> When the Colonial Advisory Medical and Sanitary Committee commented unfavourably on The Bahamas’ sanitary and health conditions in 1926, the Colonial Secretary, Alan Burns, explained to the committee the political difficulties in the way of securing improvement.<sup>4</sup> The House was reluctant to raise the required revenue to cover the costs of health and social reforms; it objected to the expense of bringing in outside expertise and it considered the Boards could look into the needs and recommend piecemeal reforms. L. B. Freeston of the Colonial Office considered the root of the problem, in this case, was “an unqualified and largely ignorant Board of Health” and the need was for a general attack on the local Board system. Darnley, experienced in Bahamian attitudes, felt this was unlikely to succeed as “the unofficials on the Boards were greatly attached to them” and the threat was likely to be seen as a bluff anyway.<sup>5</sup> The white elite had heard Colonial Office criticisms and threats for some years and found them mostly empty.

In the opinion of the Governor in 1930, Major Charles Orr, the constitution of The Bahamas was in theory unworkable “but with infinite tact, patience and goodwill” it could “be made to work after a fashion”.<sup>6</sup> He expressed a similar view in a private letter: “...the existing constitution works passably well, given patience and tact. I doubt however if it would stand a severe strain, such as a really serious financial crisis.”<sup>7</sup> He considered the major drawback was the reliance of the Executive on the Legislature for appropriations.

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<sup>3</sup>Colonial Office dispatch no. 37360, June 1927, CO23/358.1-11.

<sup>4</sup>Comment of Professional Members of Colonial Advisory Medical and Sanitary Committee on Bahamas situation at meeting held on 15 June 1926, CO23/297/109.

<sup>5</sup>Colonial Office dispatch no. 8715, 21 April 1926, CO23/297/95-96 and 98-99.

<sup>6</sup>Charles Orr to Lord Passfield, confidential, 18 November 1930, CO23/425/18-20.

<sup>7</sup>Charles Orr to Sir Samuel Wilson, private, 5 December 1930, CO23/442/16-17.

Thus, he wrote: “The driver of a motor car is somewhat hampered if he is wholly dependent for the supply of petrol, oil, and even spare parts on persons over whom he can exercise no control, and who have their own ideas as to how and where the vehicle should be driven”.<sup>8</sup>

Harcourt Malcolm, Bahamian constitutional expert, foresaw potential difficulties in the Constitution too:

A form of Government in which there is no provision for the creation and maintenance of sympathy between the executive and the representatives of the people offers countless opportunities for deadlocks. It is striking testimony to the ability and common-sense of the inhabitants of these islands that, although their political constitution is perhaps unworkable in theory, they nevertheless have succeeded in working it with much satisfaction for a period of nearly two centuries.<sup>9</sup>

The relationship between the Executive and Legislature was subjected to more severe strains during the twentieth century than had occurred in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. That the constitution survived intact is probably a consequence of the insignificance and financial solvency of the Colony and the quiescence of the people in general.

The occupational complexion of the House in 1901 followed the late nineteenth century pattern in that there were eighteen merchants; one planter; two employees of merchant houses; one manufacturer; three Government officers (one British); three professionals and one craftsman (see Table 15). The merchants (even W. P. Adderley) all had business premises in the Bay Street area. The term ‘merchant’ as used in this table covers a variety of types of merchandising - wholesaler, retailer, commission agent, sponge merchant or broker, liquor dealer, shipping agent – but several of them were involved in more than one aspect of business. Several of the merchants were also growers, such as J. W. Culmer, who was one of the biggest pineapple cultivators. Robert Sawyer (President and Managing Director), Joseph Brown, J. W. Culmer and D. A. Brice were directors of the Bank of Nassau, until 1908 still the only banking institution in the Colony. Harcourt Malcolm would become the guardian of House privileges and rights; the House and the Colonial Office were often ensnared in seemingly petty questions of constitutional correctness, which had wider implications for Legislative independence and importance. Difficulties in the House for the Government at the turn of the century were accentuated by

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<sup>8</sup>Charles Orr to Lord Passfield, confidential, 18 November 1930, CO23/425/19-20.

<sup>9</sup>Harcourt Malcolm, History of the Bahamas House of Assembly (Nassau: House of Assembly, 1921), 68.

the electoral defeat of the Colonial Secretary, J. Spencer Churchill, by the merchant T. H. C. Lofthouse<sup>10</sup>.

Table 15. The House of Assembly in 1901.

Name	District	Date Elected	Occupation
R.H. Sawyer	City	1896	Merchant
E.C. Kemp		1896	Merchant
W.P. Adderley	Southern	1901	Merchant & Contractor
J.L. Saunders		1896	Merchant
R.W. Sawyer	Eastern	1896	Merchant
J.H. Brown		1896	Merchant
C.S. Rae	Western	1897	Merchant
C.O. Anderson		1896	Chief Clerk, P.O.
J.R.C. Young	Abaco	1896	Merchant
C.W.M. Sutton		1896	Merchant
Thomas Russell		1896	Merchant
Robert H. Curry	Andros	1900	Merchant
George R. Evans		1900	Ship's carpenter
George H. Gamblin	Exuma	1901	Commissariat Office
James Bullard		1896	Manager
W.C.B. Johnson	Harbour Is.	1896	Manufacturer
O.F. Pritchard		1896	Clerk in family business
H.W. Lightbourn		1896	Merchant
H.G. Malcolm*	Eleuthera	1900	Attorney
J.W. Culmer		1896	Merchant
H.C. Sturup		1896	Planter
J.H. Young	Grand Bahama	1896	Merchant
W. Rees Davies	Inagua	1900	Attorney General (British)
D.A. Brice	Long Island	1896	Merchant
G.B. Adderley		1896	Merchant
Dr. G.H. Johnson	Watlings Is.	1896	Dentist
T.H.C. Lofthouse	San Salvador	1901	Merchant
J.P. Sands		1896	Merchant
Dr. F.A. Holmes	Crooked Is.	1896	Doctor (Speaker)

Source: Blue Book (1901-2), M 8-9.

- The post of Deputy Speaker was created in 1901 and H. Malcolm elected to it.

<sup>10</sup>He was the son of the Methodist minister, Rev. Thomas Lofthouse, and owned the large, modern department store, 'The Brick Store' on Marlborough Street.

### Control of the Legislature and Legislation 1900-1914

Legislation conformed to the desires of the merchants, who continued to dominate the House. The fact that the members of the House of Assembly basically represented their personal interests had a stultifying effect as far as economic and social development was concerned and each Governor after the turn of the century found his desire to reform the taxation system thwarted. Governor William Allardyce complained: "The Free List at present is absurdly broad, but that I understand they are averse to touching. Most of the Members have a store, office, or shop on Bay Street and Bay Street will take such action as will be considered best for Bay Street!"<sup>11</sup>

Thus, there were a few tussles with Governor Grey-Wilson over tax reform. The House defeated a Tariff Act in 1907, which had included preferential treatment for the United Kingdom and Canada.<sup>12</sup> The proposed revision of the Tariff included a reduction of duty of 25% on dutiable items, save on tobacco or liquor, to be granted immediately to the United Kingdom and Canada, and to be extended to any country offering to treat The Bahamas in the same liberal spirit. The Governor might have been able to rustle up enough support for this part of his scheme, but he also proposed to make up lost revenue by raising some duties, a nominal increase on necessities but a substantial increase on alcohol and new duties on petrol, pistols and ball ammunition and phonographs.<sup>13</sup> Members pointed out the lack of information backing the claims made for the advantages of trade with Canada, the distance between The Bahamas and Canada, the possible delays in winter and the lack of a guarantee that the Elder Dempster line would continue running between the two countries. They believed the United States was The Bahamas' natural market. However, the biggest obstacle to getting the support of several Bahamian merchants was the fact that they were heavily in debt to New York merchants and agents. Few had the necessary cash flow to easily transfer to Canadian Merchant Houses. The other fear for some merchants was that

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<sup>11</sup>William Allardyce to Sir Gilbert Grindle, confidential, 23 September 1915, CO23/276/143.

<sup>12</sup>*Nassau Guardian*, 6 February 1907. The idea of reciprocity appealed to some Bahamians and the editorial of the *Nassau Guardian* wrote in favour. It believed it would appeal to businessmen and those "imbued with those imperial ideas of preferential trade within the Empire so ably and impressively advocated by Mr. Chamberlain". Moreover negotiations with the United States for a Reciprocity Treaty had been abortive in 1901.

<sup>13</sup>Overall, though, the Preferential Tariff would have been reduced *ad valorem* on British products from 20% to 15%.

the United States might retaliate. Moreover, it was George Gamblin's argument that people wanted a *reduction* of tariff, not preference. There had been a large surplus the year before and most felt the idea of any raising of duties was untenable. Of course, the members opposing the scheme dwelt on the small increases on everyday items that affected the working class. To counter this argument, J. H. Young, the Government spokesman, emphasised that liquor and tobacco would receive the brunt of the increases and some everyday items like cotton goods would be cheaper. Several of the members were liquor merchants so that argument was not very appealing. The more dramatic cry of J. H. Brown that the proposal was suicidal and the perceived threat of increased taxation won the day.<sup>14</sup>

The Governor also lost a Bill for regulating the raising of loans. The Legislative Council threw out a bill relating to carriages that, according to the Governor, contained "some very objectionable provisions designed to personally benefit members of the Legislature". The House retaliated by ordering consideration of amendments made by the Legislative Council to a Bill relating to cars to be delayed for six months.<sup>15</sup> The upshot was that motors and carriages would escape taxation for a while. Grey-Wilson felt strongly about the need to widen and deepen the sources of taxation. There was no tax on land and no tax on real or personal estate. There was a house tax, but with an unsatisfactory incidence and which was virtually refunded in the municipal services it provided. There was a miniscule contribution by owners of hired vehicles towards road upkeep. There was also a small probate duty, which the House now tried to remove and which Bill the Governor vetoed.<sup>16</sup> The Governor came up against a brick wall when it came to tax reform and the prospects of change did not look good.

Grey-Wilson also hoped to reform what he called the "grave scandal" of the truck system, specifically that employed in the pineapple canning industry at Governor's Harbour, Eleuthera.<sup>17</sup> William Johnson, owner of the pineapple factory, objected to the way the

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<sup>14</sup>*Nassau Guardian*, 3 April 1907.

<sup>15</sup>William Grey-Wilson to Earl of Elgin, no.63, 11 July 1907, CO23/262/198-201; *Nassau Guardian*, 22 June 1907.

<sup>16</sup>W. Grey-Wilson to Earl of Crewe, no.59, 9 June 1908, CO23/263/192-193.

<sup>17</sup>*Nassau Guardian*, 6 February 1907. Wages were paid in tokens at the factory to be exchanged for goods, at first at local stores but now exclusively at the company store. See Howard Johnson, *The Bahamas from Slavery to Servitude, 1783-1933* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996), 105-108.

Governor referred to this system and stated the House did not know of any “grave scandal” in its connection. R. W. Sawyer seconded Johnson’s motion to eliminate the House’s proposal to duly consider a measure, but they narrowly lost the motion.<sup>18</sup> In the next session Johnson once more attempted to get the House’s Address to the Governor amended to remove the agreement to consider the truck system. Leon Dupuch strongly denounced the system, but Johnson, E. P. L. Solomon and Lorenzo Brice all claimed it was not of sufficient importance to be referred to in a Governor’s speech. Their amendment was lost again, by twelve votes to seven.<sup>19</sup> In this matter the Governor did attract the support of the majority of members; presumably those shopkeepers who did not benefit from the system were keen to see it go. The Truck Act was passed in 1907, stating the wages of workmen must be paid in the current coin of the Colony and no contracts were to be made with workers as to spending their pay at any particular shop.<sup>20</sup>

Both the Governor and the coloured representatives desired to reform the electoral system, the latter realising that open voting was the root of the merchants’ dominance of the Legislature. In February 1910, with a general election looming in the summer, William Callender had resolved: “That in the opinion of this House the antiquated and almost obsolete mode of voting openly for candidates for election to the House of Assembly should be abolished and that voting by ballot which has been adopted in most civilized countries should be substituted there for”.<sup>21</sup> He also resolved that the House send a message to the Governor respectfully requesting him to initiate such measures during the present session. Callender mentioned that there was ample evidence of bribery and corruption. He witnessed it at his own election. He spoke of protection for the uneducated and the interests of morality. With a secret ballot, “nobody would have a chance to intimidate, to put up lists in offices of those who had not voted as employers wanted, to say, ‘Go vote for Mr. So and So and let him give you work’”. William Parliament Adderley seconded the motion. The Opposition now rehearsed their arguments against the secret ballot being employed in The Bahamas. Firstly, it claimed The Bahamas was not ready for the secret ballot and could not

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<sup>18</sup>*Nassau Guardian*, 9 February 1907.

<sup>19</sup>*Nassau Guardian*, 18 February 1907.

<sup>20</sup>*Nassau Guardian*, 25 May 1907.

<sup>21</sup>*Nassau Guardian*, 2 February 1910.

be compared with Australia and Canada. Secondly, the ballot was just as open to bribery and corruption, as the experience of the United States showed. Besides, where was the evidence of bribery under the present system? Thirdly, the move would disfranchise about forty percent of the voters.<sup>22</sup> Members questioned whether there was a demand for change and whether the House had a moral right to make such a change without a mandate from the people. They denied men felt victimised.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, the “objectionable” manner in which it was introduced to the House “violated the rights and privileges of their chamber”. The resolution should not be adopted as “the House was the judge of the election of its own members and the judge of its own procedure”.<sup>24</sup> Leon Dupuch responded on behalf of the supporters of the secret ballot, arguing that if the ballot could be used in England, Australia and Haiti, then it could be used in The Bahamas. He declared it was a reflection on the people to say they were not intelligent enough and an indictment of the educational system, for which the House was responsible. He reminded the House that between twenty and twenty-five years ago R. H. Sawyer had said that the time was not ripe for the introduction of the ballot, so had no progress been made? Dupuch advocated a fair trial for the ballot so that the people could show they were able to use it as well as in England. Dr. Johnson emphasised that just prior to a general election would not be the time to make such an important change and George Gamblin argued the expense and time needed to instruct people how to vote by ballot could not be spared at this juncture. This argument would have persuaded the undecided. The strength of the anti-ballot group was reflected in the size of their majority, twenty to three, against the motion.

A few days later a letter in support of the secret ballot appeared in the *Nassau Guardian*, sent by a H. M. Stevenson. He revealed how the rumour of a literacy test being introduced to remove the vote from the labouring classes was spreading in The Bahamas. He realised that this idea was being linked in people’s minds with the secret ballot, as though

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<sup>22</sup>The elite assumed that the secret ballot had to be accompanied by a disfranchising measure of some sort, such as a literacy test.

<sup>23</sup>The black member for Andros, Evans, agreed. He considered “speaking” more satisfactory and believed his constituents were not intimidated. He stated he did not even go down to his constituency at the last election and had never paid a shilling to any man to vote for him, but still had been returned.

<sup>24</sup>This is a reference to Callender’s request to the Governor to initiate the reform. George Weech remarked that Callender did not understand the constitutional law; the ballot could only be introduced through the House itself. Evans agreed it had not been introduced in the proper way and also thought the resolution hasty and premature.

one would not be introduced without the other. Of course, he also appreciated that for some politicians a literacy test would be a “saving clause”. But he asked: “Are we going to have the principles of justice in vogue in the Southern States cited as patterns for British subjects to emulate? Or is it a political bogey?” Stevenson called the bribery and corruption practised in The Bahamas “sordid and debasing”. He remarked that at least the secret ballot would be a serious check to interference and that was why some were so bitter about its introduction.<sup>25</sup> But the white ruling class had easily fought off this attempt at reform and in 1910 another general election took place under the open voting system.

In the 1910 general election there were nine elected contests and six no-contests. Six constituencies returned the same members; five had a partial change and four chose entirely new representatives (see Table 16). Of the twenty-nine elected members, twenty had sat in the previous House. The *Nassau Guardian* commented: “In no district where there has been a contest has there been any issue fought out of any great importance, the battles revolving around personalities rather than principles”.<sup>26</sup>

There were changes in the composition of the ruling elite, a reflection of the death and retirement of many of the old guard. Of the latter group, James Sands, just appointed to the Executive Council, became the Government spokesman<sup>27</sup> and J. W. Culmer was joined by his son, Dr. James Culmer, the resident surgeon at the General Hospital. After the death of Robert Sawyer, Culmer Senior had joined the Executive Council (in 1907). It was felt the Governor needed a House member capable of giving assistance to the Government. There had been an important change to the practice of appointment to the Executive Council in 1907: henceforward all appointments were only for five years’ duration, although they were renewable. This might have been a significant weapon in the hands of a Governor facing an intractable or hostile member; in fact, relations between the Executive Council and the Governor proved amicable after the turn of the century. Most Executive Council members were re-appointed after their five-year term. There was a small disagreement between the Governor and Culmer in 1909 over the recurring issue of whether a Council member should

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<sup>25</sup>*Nassau Guardian*, 9 February 1910.

<sup>26</sup>*Nassau Guardian*, 6 July 1910.

<sup>27</sup>Gilbert Carter to Joseph Chamberlain, 8 January 1901, CO23/256/4-5. His appointment to the Council was deemed “politic”.

be allowed to act against Government policy. An order of the Governor regarding the division of Eleuthera for local government was revoked by one vote. James Culmer voted against. However, Sir Gilbert Grindle considered the Governor had been “misled by the analogy of the Cabinet, or a responsible ministry...that analogy cannot be pressed”.<sup>28</sup> Nothing further transpired from the dispute, which was over a minor vote anyway.

Table 16. The House of Assembly, 1910

Name	District	Occupation
Dr. F.A. Holmes (Speaker)	City	Doctor
George Weech		Merchant
E.L. Bowen	Southern	Tailor
J.T. Roxborough		Carpenter
R.W. Sawyer	Eastern	Merchant
Dr. C.C. Sweeting		Merchant (ex- Dentist)
C.E. Bethell	Western	Merchant
C.O. Anderson		Chief Clerk, Post Office
J.R.C. Young	Abaco	Merchant
G.M. Cole		Pharmacist
A.K. Solomon		Attorney
R.H. Curry	Andros	Merchant
G.R. Evans		Ship's Carpenter
G.H. Gamblin	Exuma	Bank Manager
E.V. Solomon		Clerk
W.C.B. Johnson	Harbour Island	Merchant
E.P.L. Solomon		Manager
Dr. G.H. Johnson.		Dentist
H.G. Malcolm (Dep. Speaker)	Eleuthera	Attorney
J.W. Culmer		Merchant
Dr. J.J. Culmer		Resident Surgeon
W.K. Moore	Grand Bahama	Merchant
D.S.D. Moseley	Inagua	Printer
L.G. Brice	Long Island	Merchant
W.J. Pinder		Merchant
B.E. Williams	Watlings Island & Rum Cay	Merchant
T. Culmer	San Salvador	Planter
J.P. Sands		Merchant
H.F. Armbrister	Crooked Island	Auctioneer

*Source:* Blue Book (1910-1911), M6-8.

<sup>28</sup>William Grey-Wilson to Earl of Crewe, confidential, 11 August 1909, CO23/265/223; Colonial

Harcourt Malcolm was the third returned member for Eleuthera.<sup>29</sup> As the son of the Chief Justice and related by marriage to another leading white Nassau family, the Adderleys,<sup>30</sup> and being both cultivated and articulate, Malcolm was destined to be a leading figure in the House. Dr. Holmes died at the end of 1913 and Harcourt Malcolm was elected Speaker. There was undoubtedly no-one better qualified to take this position. He had the most profound knowledge of the history of the Bahamas House of Assembly and had uncovered documents in England charting the Colony's constitutional development, which he published as a book in 1921. In 1904 he had issued a Manual of Procedure for the benefit of members. He was an excellent public speaker and a charming man, extremely popular among his peers. The *Nassau Guardian* commented: "It is to his personality no less than his talent that he owes his rapid advancement for his urbanity, attractive modesty and unfailing courtesy have secured for him a place in the esteem of his fellow members surpassing that which his ability and unequalled knowledge of constitutional law demanded".<sup>31</sup>

William Christopher Barnett Johnson, member for Harbour Island, the Father of the House and President of the Chamber of Commerce, was elected Deputy Speaker.<sup>32</sup> He had recently refused a seat on the Executive Council and had never been an ally of the Government. Leon Dupuch referred to him as the "Enfant Terrible" of the Opposition and admitted "we have been trying to imagine our friend in Government, leading strings, and somehow our powers of imagination get tired".<sup>33</sup> Dupuch wrote that he was an able debater, persistent and tenacious; he added he did not take defeat graciously.<sup>34</sup> He was a leading member of the so-called Out-Island Party, a loose association of white members who represented Out Islands and who generally opposed the Government. Other prominent

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Office dispatch no. 29134, 1 September 1909.

<sup>29</sup>These three had been challenged, but they easily shook off the challenge (Malcolm: 682; Culmer: 667; Dr. Culmer: 660; Micklewhite: 75).

<sup>30</sup>He was married to the daughter of G. B. Adderley, merchant and former member of the House.

<sup>31</sup>*Nassau Guardian*, 31 January 1914.

<sup>32</sup>William Johnson originally represented Eleuthera (from 1889) but he succeeded his uncle, J. S. Johnson, to the Harbour Island seat in 1896.

<sup>33</sup>*The Strombus*, January 1913, 2.

<sup>34</sup>*The Strombus*, August 1913, 7-8.

members were Lorenzo Brice (Long Island) and Dr. George Johnson (Harbour Island).<sup>35</sup> William Johnson was also one of the leading 'Outs', using Dupuch's designation, but this again was a vague grouping of the Opposition.

In Harbour Island, William Miller, the English Surveyor-General, attempted to win a seat to bolster the Government's position in the House, but the two Johnsons and another newcomer, Edward Percy Lee Solomon, defeated him. Solomon was the son of Julius Solomon, the Resident Justice. Edward had been in Government service himself but he had left it for commerce, becoming the managing partner in R. H. Sawyer and Company. Other prominent merchants in this House were George Weech (first elected 1905); R. H. Curry (first elected 1900); Walter Moore (first elected 1909); B. E. Williams (first elected 1903); Dr. C. C. Sweeting (of The New York House) and Charles Bethell.

One of the most able and respected members of the House was George Gamblin, who had been made manager of the Royal Bank of Canada when it opened a branch in Nassau in 1908. It was Gamblin's forceful speech in 1907 that had done much damage to the chances of the Government's Preferential Tariff passing through the House. He was appointed to the Executive Council to replace W. E. Armbrister as the Governor believed he would be able to give valuable assistance to the Government.<sup>36</sup>

Local issues played a role in the elections on some islands. In Long Island there were three candidates, the two incumbents Lorenzo Brice and William Pinder and Edmund Knowles, a shopkeeper of Shirley Street, Nassau. Their families all originally hailed from Long Island. Brice and Pinder retained their seats (364 and 297 votes respectively, with Knowles getting 254 votes). Three generations of the Brice family were to hold a seat here (D. A. Brice, Lorenzo Brice and then Carl Brice), rather in the manner of inheritance of a family property. A letter from an elector in the southern part of the island stated that the voters did not appreciate a new man (Knowles) "butting in".<sup>37</sup> However, another writer to the *Nassau Guardian* disagreed: "We fully expected to send Messrs. Brice and Knowles

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<sup>35</sup>George Johnson originally sat for Watlings Island (from 1895) but he was solicited for the Harbour Island seat in 1903. He was born in Dunmore Town, Harbour Island. Dr. Johnson joined the Council in 1912, in place of J. H. Young. He had always been a moderate in the House and now won over to the Government side.

<sup>36</sup>William Grey-Wilson to Earl of Crewe, no.150, 9 November 1908. CO23/264/71-72.

<sup>37</sup>*Nassau Guardian*, 6 July 1910.

back as our representatives, but alas! We were disappointed. Nevertheless let me say, Mr. Knowles was the favourite of the free thinking elector".<sup>38</sup> Presumably he was referring to bribery, but at least there was the excitement of local rivalries. Indeed, Knowles won in Deadman's Cay and was second to Brice in both Clarence Town and Ragged Island. Henry Taylor, then a seven-year-old boy, remembered the 1910 Election in Clarence Town:

I saw strange men arriving from Nassau. They were all dressed in their 'Sunday-go-to-meeting' clothes...The people of Clarence Town, as well as those from the neighbouring settlements, were all in festive attire and their manners and moods were also, to say the least, festive. The bar-rooms seemed to be doing a roaring trade, so much so, that I can remember seeing men being taken up bodily from the streets and carried to their homes.<sup>39</sup>

A letter to the newspaper regarding the election of the planter, Timothy Culmer, gives us a flavour of election day on San Salvador. He described men, women and children marching to the Government office, accompanied by a band, singing

"Hold the Poll for we are coming  
Culmer's name to vote.  
Send the answer down to Nassau  
By his name we'll vote!"

The author also gave some of the reasons why Culmer was so popular in San Salvador: he had their interests at heart; he had already caused them to get a better price for their sisal; they paid less in his shops for their food and goods. "We are pleased to have a planter like ourselves to represent us in the General Assembly."<sup>40</sup> Needless to say the interests of a large planter like Culmer and the poor smallholders that extolled him were not always identical.

Governor Grey-Wilson described "the salient features" of the 1910 election as "bribery and corruption". It is not possible to find concrete evidence of this as there were no criminal proceedings against anyone. There is just one fairly innocent allusion by the letter writer from Long Island who mentioned that "there was much to eat and drink in both districts (Simms and Millerton), all gratis".<sup>41</sup> In his opening address to the newly elected House, the Governor stated: "The Legislature is not justified in retaining a system against

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<sup>38</sup>*Nassau Guardian*, 20 July 1910.

<sup>39</sup>Henry M. Taylor, *My Political Memoirs: A Political History of the Bahamas in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (Nassau, by the author, 1987), 3.

<sup>40</sup>*Nassau Guardian*, 13 July 1910.

<sup>41</sup>*Nassau Guardian*, 6 July 1910.

which it is possible to level the charge that it tends to debauch and denigrate the electors”.<sup>42</sup> Most of the members disliked the insinuation that some of them owed their victories to illegal shenanigans and in the House’s address to the Governor retorted that if the alleged corruption were so pronounced those responsible for administering the laws were remiss in their duties. The legislators thought the Governor far too bold. Lonely voices in support of the Governor were the non-white members. (Callender and Dupuch, of course, had not been re-elected.)<sup>43</sup> Charles Anderson, seconded by Evans, proposed to strike out the House’s comment about the alleged bribery and corruption and substitute a sentence saying the House equally deplored any undue influence in the elections. A very large majority rejected this amendment.<sup>44</sup>

In January 1912 there was a message from the Governor to the House transmitting suggestions concerning the introduction of a secret ballot. Malcolm accused the Executive of encroaching on the House’s privileges; he alleged there had been a breach of constitutional practice. Malcolm equated the message with a bill and he stated the Governor knew the Executive ought not to have introduced a measure in any way relating to the election of a member to a seat in the House. He accused the Governor of ignoring the views of the House concerning the ballot and of seeking to force his own views on them. J. P. Sands, the Government representative, withdrew the message to avoid further trouble. It was only Charles Anderson who spoke in support of the Governor: “If certain evils existed was it not the duty of the Executive to take steps to remedy these evils? If the House failed in their duty it was certainly the duty of the Executive to take the matter up.”<sup>45</sup> Harcourt Malcolm sent a statement of his views to the Colonial Office, but it considered the memo “mere rhetoric... The worst of it is that the weaker his case the more his rhetoric will appeal to the House”.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>*Nassau Guardian*, 11 January 1911.

<sup>43</sup>See pages 234.

<sup>44</sup>*Nassau Guardian*, 21 January 1911.

<sup>45</sup>*Nassau Guardian*, 13 January 1912.

<sup>46</sup>Harcourt Malcolm to Private Secretary, 17 January 1912, CO23/269/44-45 and C.O. minute no. 3163, 31 January 1912, CO23/269/36-37.

In May, Sands again brought forward the message. Kenneth Solomon, in the absence of Malcolm, took up the offence. He complained that, having told the Governor that this was a matter more properly left to the initiative of the people or their representatives, the Executive had come to the House with this message. He noted that he waited until the end of the session, when Malcolm had left the island. He asked the members assembled: "Is the House going to sit with folded hands and allow the Executive to do what they like in this particular matter?" Solomon considered that the moment they printed that message they would give up some of their rights and privileges. Sands retorted that he could not see anything wrong, citing a precedent. He emphasised that if he had intended to introduce a bill, he would have done it in the usual way. Sands argued that the Governor had the right to make suggestions, which he had done in a most courteous way. Johnson thought they should go ahead and print the message. He added that they would see then how far the Executive infringed on their privileges - "We're all as watchful and jealous as Malcolm". A number of other members agreed that the Governor should be extended this courtesy and the message was printed this time.<sup>47</sup>

Nevertheless, the Governor decided against proceeding with what would inevitably be a lost cause. Three years later, Governor Allardyce proposed that they let the Ballot issue remain in abeyance. He doubted whether passing a bill at the time would overcome the prevalence of corrupt practices at elections. Besides, he felt the bitterness and ill feeling caused by discussion of the issue would have a more deleterious effect on the community.<sup>48</sup> The white elite had weathered the storm; the open voting system was the basis of their political dominance and members would never willingly introduce the reform.

Two officials of the Colonial Office cast their judgement on the Bahamian Legislature after its election in 1910. Edward Darnley considered: "That body is the most incompetent & corrupt Legislature in the West Indies".<sup>49</sup> Two rejections of funds from the House in the same month further amazed the Colonial Office. The House refused to vote one hundred pounds to investigate scientifically the water supply. R. Wilson quipped:

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<sup>47</sup>*Nassau Guardian*, 4 May 1912.

<sup>48</sup>William Allardyce to Bonar Law, 16 October 1915, CO23/276/214-216.

<sup>49</sup>Colonial Office dispatch no. 15099, 9 May 1911, CO23/267/192-193 and no.16871, 23 May 1911, CO23/267/222. Sir Gilbert Grindley had added: "British Honduras runs it hard."

“Another nail for the prospective coffin of the Bahamian House of Assembly”.<sup>50</sup> When a resolution to adopt the report of the Select Committee on the depressed Sponge Industry, recommending a grant of three hundred pounds for investigations, was defeated by a considerable majority, Wilson wrote: “They are hopeless”. Sir Gilbert Grindle added that it was “quite useless to pursue it with this ignorant legislature”.<sup>51</sup>

### Crises of Confidence among the Agro-Commercial Elite

#### Confederation with Canada

By 1911 The Bahamas was experiencing hard times. There had been a severe hurricane in 1908 and droughts over several years. The migration to Florida was a drain of able-bodied men and was adversely affecting trade.<sup>52</sup> The Bahamian agro-commercial elite appeared to experience a loss of confidence, which led it to consider yielding its autonomy and confederating with Canada. A public meeting was held in 1911 attended by some minor Canadian representatives, merchants and members of the House.<sup>53</sup> A committee was appointed to present a resolution to the House requesting the Governor to seek permission to invite the Government of Canada to a conference with the object of possible admission of The Bahamas to the Canadian Confederation.<sup>54</sup> Leon Dupuch’s newspaper questioned the wisdom of the idea: “Why should this Colony, that has enjoyed for a great many years, an autonomy which gives it practically self-government, and subordinates it only to the British Crown, change that enviable position to one of subordination to a federation of Colonies, younger, though larger, than this”.<sup>55</sup> The *Nassau Guardian* was just as unenthusiastic. It

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<sup>50</sup>Colonial Office minute no. 15620, 21 May 1912, CO23/269/277. Darnley foresaw that they would get a rude awakening when a few American tourists got typhoid. This happened in 1925-6 when 8 Americans contracted typhoid, one dying (Colonial Office dispatch no. 37360, June 1927, CO23/358/1-11).

<sup>51</sup>Colonial Office minute no. 17220, 4 June 1912, C.O.23/269/377.

<sup>52</sup>See chapter nine of Johnson, *From Slavery to Servitude*. This was the second wave of migration to Florida, lasting from 1905 to 1924. Miami was the most popular destination and Bahamians were mostly engaged in construction and agricultural work.

<sup>53</sup>The President of the Sun Life Assurance Company seemed to be the main figure behind the idea; the other Canadians were the Mayor of Rigaud, Quebec, and a Judge from Whitby, Ontario. The House members were Dr. G. H. Johnson, W. C. B. Johnson, C. S. Rae, L. Brice, G. Cole, G. Evans, E. Bowen and H. F. Armbrister.

<sup>54</sup>*The Tribune*, 22 February 1911.

<sup>55</sup>*Ibid.*

believed the arguments offered on behalf of the Union were wildly improbable. “Millions – Canadian millions, not ours – if necessary, will be spent on dredging our harbour, which will straightway become the winter headquarters of a mythical Canadian navy. The whole of the Canadian binder twine market can be secured for the Bahamas, which should be enough to enrich us all.”<sup>56</sup> The paper pointed out that preferential trade relations, which the House had rejected when the Governor and Council had introduced such proposals in 1907, could have secured the commercial advantages.

W. C. B. Johnson moved the resolution in the House, but even its supporters were half-hearted and their arguments were unconvincing. C. O. Anderson labelled the suggested benefits “visionary” and R. W. Sawyer pointed out the Tariff had not been carefully considered; no facts and figures had been presented and they had no idea whether the Canadian Government or people wanted them to unite. Harcourt Malcolm declared: “If they were going to barter their institutions and privileges they had better go to the United States.”<sup>57</sup> The Resolution was adopted, nevertheless, by twenty-one votes (including the three black members) to six. The Colonial Office remained non-committal as officers felt the proposal would die a natural death. The Governor realised the idea might be a one-way appeal; “Whether Canada is prepared to become the fairy godmother is another matter”.<sup>58</sup>

In March 1911 a perceptive letter from Robert M. Bailey to the *Nassau Guardian* pointed out the false hopes and illusions that Bahamians entertained in regard to Confederation. He wrote that their representatives were telling the Bahamians that Canada would receive them with open arms and that there was no colour prejudice there. At the same time a cable item informed them of a party of American blacks being refused admission into Canada as they were deemed undesirable citizens. At the meeting those who brought up this matter were greeted by cries of ‘A Fake’, ‘Inspired at Nassau’ etc. So Bailey asked whether Canada would receive “us” with open arms. He painted a scene of the House going to Ottawa, where the Dominion House “with smiling countenance, and open arms, [was] waiting to receive them, when suddenly she espies Messrs. Anderson, Evans, Bowen and Roxborough. The smile vanishes, her arms are slowly folded: “No, no, *they* are

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<sup>56</sup>*Nassau Guardian*, 15 March 1911.

<sup>57</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup>William Grey-Wilson to Lewis Harcourt, no.32, 9 March 1911, CO23/267/80 and no.44, 4 April 1911, CO23/267/120-123.

'undesirable', get rid of them, and come again".<sup>59</sup> The same issue of the *Nassau Guardian* printed two extracts from American newspapers confirming Bailey's belief that Canada would not be welcoming The Bahamas into its federation. Under the headline "WHO WANTS THE BAHAMAS?", the *Philadelphia Inquirer* wrote "Canada will not take the Bahamas as a gift...Nobody loves a lean lot of islands...Alas for vanished hopes! Those who seek repose from work and worry can do no better than to visit the Bahamas. Otherwise, they are a negligible quantity to the outside world." The *New York Herald* quoted the Canadian Minister of the Interior: "So far as my information goes, there is a very strong sentiment on the part of many people against the admission of negroes". The Colonial Office had come to the same conclusion and one of them had spoken to the Canadian Prime Minister, Sir W. Laurier, who said he had "no intention of dallying with the proposal"; apparently the proportion of coloured to white inhabitants was sufficient to put him off.<sup>60</sup> Not that the Governor did not offer a solution in a speech to the Imperial Club of Canada. His answer to white fears was to alter the suffrage: "Naturally no reference could be made to the question of colour...[but] by putting the qualification of an elector in the Bahamas so high that we should automatically shut out the ignorant blacks of the colony."<sup>61</sup> His speech displayed a raw racism not apparent during his administration.

Another public meeting was held in March of 1912.<sup>62</sup> By 1913 support for union had evaporated and when one of the Canadian representatives returned to drum up support there were no meetings and the issue was not raised in the House.<sup>63</sup> The affair had died its predicted natural death. It was a desperate plan anyway, a clutching at straws when times

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<sup>59</sup>*Nassau Guardian*, 29 March 1911.

<sup>60</sup>Colonial Office minute no. 16891, 23 May 1911, CO23/267/210-212.

<sup>61</sup>D.J. Goggin, ed., Empire Club of Canada: Addresses Delivered to the Members during the Session of 1911-12 (Toronto: Warwick Bros. & Rutter, 1913), 40-47. He claimed that there was "practically" manhood suffrage in The Bahamas, but the black man invariably elected the white man to represent him. He explained that the Colony did not have the horrors of the Southern US and white women were safe. He admitted this was not because blacks were treated equally. "He [the black man] admits himself-the most intelligent of them with whom I have spoken-he admits himself that he is the white man's inferior. He admits that he is of a child race, undeveloped"(45). Thus he advised the Canadians it was probably not expedient to elect on such a suffrage. The Secretary of State was furious: "The man is an ass and had better realise that we know it"(Colonial Office minute no. 399 11/12, 4 January 1912, CO23/268/154-155).

<sup>62</sup>William Grey-Wilson to Lewis Harcourt, no.42, 5 March 1912, CO23/269/170.

<sup>63</sup>George Haddon-Smith to Lewis Harcourt, confidential, 12 April 1913, CO23/271/138-139.

were bad. Exactly who was behind it is difficult to pinpoint – the president of a huge Canadian company, the Governor or one or two Bahamian merchants, who saw their own salvation? But, if The Bahamas were to give up its autonomy, it would be to a white dominion.

#### Crisis at the Bank

By 1912 the Bank of Nassau was in deep financial trouble. Its role was pivotal in the local economy and, with this crisis, the financial difficulties of prominent merchants were publicly exposed. The Vice-President, R. N. Musgrove, and one of the directors, R. W. Sawyer, resigned.<sup>64</sup> The Governor thought both of these merchants were insolvent, but he also thought J. W. Culmer, the President and Managing Director, was in financial difficulties and borrowing substantially without providing adequate securities. Culmer was a liability to the Bank.<sup>65</sup> For a while, though, the Bank weathered the storm. It appointed new directors – H. W. Lightbourn, R. Young, J. Butler and Dr. F. A. Holmes. The Governor reckoned all of these were of reliable character and the first two at least had a good financial standing.<sup>66</sup> The outstanding accounts of directors were securely adjusted and directors were prohibited from signing notes as security for anyone. But the Bank was still facing a substantial loss from realising the estates of Musgrove and R. H. Sawyer, which had to be met from the Reserve Fund. There were still weaknesses: the small proportion of liquid assets to liabilities; miniscule allowance for depreciation of securities; the high dividend of ten percent.

In 1914 Lightbourn became President and more new directors were appointed: R. H. Curry, Dr. G. H. Johnson and Dr. J. Baird Albury. But these adjustments only delayed the crisis and in 1916 there was a run on the Bank, caused by the dismissal of the manager, R. Wheatley Turtle, for “neglect to attend to the correspondence of the Bank, incompetent discharge of his duties and failure to maintain discipline”.<sup>67</sup> The Governor discovered that

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<sup>64</sup>Musgrove committed suicide. Sawyer resigned from the House, but returned two years later.

<sup>65</sup>William Grey-Wilson to Lewis Harcourt, confidential, 13 March 1912, CO23/269/195-197. The Governor had reappointed Culmer to the Executive Council a few weeks before in order not to cause any anxiety about his financial affairs and further damage the Bank (George Haddon-Smith to Lewis Harcourt, confidential, 15 May 1913, CO23/271/223-227).

<sup>66</sup>George Haddon-Smith to Lewis Harcourt, confidential, 15 May 1913, CO23/271/223-227.

<sup>67</sup>Memorandum by Attorney General on the Bank of Nassau Crisis, January 1917, 2 January 1917, CO23/279/18-29. Wheatley-Turtle was a member of the House and a cousin of George Weech.

the Royal Bank of Scotland had just made a loan of three thousand pounds to the Bank of Nassau (on the note of two directors, Young and Curry), but refused the Bank's application for a further loan of ten thousand pounds two days later. At that time there were only about one thousand eight hundred pounds in the Bank of Nassau to satisfy cheques presented for payment and the loan would have been swallowed up in payments. The Government and the various Boards, who kept separate bank accounts for their yearly budget, had ten thousand, seven hundred and twenty-five pounds on deposit at the Bank. A conference was summoned at Government House, attended by the Governor, the Colonial Secretary, the Attorney General, H. W. Lightbourn, W. C. B. Johnson, George Gamblin (manager of the Royal Bank) and Harcourt Malcolm (Legal Adviser for the Bank). Depositors had withdrawn seven thousand eight hundred pounds and the Bank could not pay a cheque for Government funds. The meeting decided to prevent closure of the Bank and take steps to reassure the public, avoiding a panic. Hence payments were suspended on 15 December but business was able to resume three days later and twenty percent of deposits were being paid.<sup>68</sup>

The seriousness of the situation could not be more obvious. The Bank of Nassau was run by the elite merchants of Nassau, most of whom served in the House of Assembly, on the Executive Council and/or on the Boards. Closure of the Bank would damage morale and reputations, as well as cause grave financial problems for individuals and, inevitably, the Colony. The Colonial Government was in danger of losing all its money and needing the Imperial Government to bail it out. The Governor had to take a positive role to bring the crisis to a satisfactory conclusion.

Gamblin and the Attorney General made a hurried examination of the Bank's affairs and concluded that, in the event of a winding up, depositors would be paid in full, which was somewhat of a relief to the Government. The Royal Bank of Canada would "father" the Government accounts and advance a further six thousand pounds to the Bank of Nassau to ease the situation. The Government and Boards withdrew twenty percent of their holdings and obtained the necessary credit at the Royal Bank, so that in the future all receipts and cheques would be against that bank.

There were differences in Gamblin's statements and the Bank of Nassau's, especially in the estimated value of assets. His notes also revealed that loose methods of accounting prevailed in the bank. The Directors gave out no information to the public, even to

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<sup>68</sup>William Allardyce to Secretary of State, telegram, 16 December 1916.

shareholders. The Attorney General thought the directors were shielding Turtle, who had been sent out of the way to the Berry Islands. At first, though, he could find no evidence to justify criminal proceedings, just infringement of the by-laws since Turtle was not under bond. Macnaghten of the Colonial Office suspected fraud: "There is something fishy about this, and I am left with an impression that some persons – not necessarily Mr. Turtle alone – have been feathering their nests".<sup>69</sup> In fact, criminal proceedings soon began against Turtle and another Bank employee, Carey. By June Carey had been convicted and had received nine months' prison sentence. Meanwhile the Royal Bank of Canada bought out the Bank of Nassau.<sup>70</sup> The Attorney General's official report of July 1917 disclosed incompetence, negligence and criminality on the part of the directors of the Bank, the cashiers and the auditors. He wrote that proceedings would involve R. W. Turtle; his father, J. F. W. Turtle, the previous manager and Legislative Council member; John Butler, director and Board member; William Johnson, director and House member; Charles Menendez, auditor and D. J. McDonald, auditor (and a former Receiver General and Treasurer). Proceedings might possibly be brought against H. W. Lightbourn, President and Legislative Council member; J. Young, director and Executive Council member; Dr. G. Johnson, director, House and Executive Council member and Frank Menendez, Legislative Council member.<sup>71</sup> The Governor, however, doubted whether a conviction would be obtained, even if proceedings were taken. These persons represented the principal local families and the leading merchant and business houses and it would mean "the good name and superior status of the white Colonist would be still further lowered". He also worried, since so many were in positions of trust, that proceedings might go against the Government and create bitter feeling.<sup>72</sup> The Imperial Government was not willing to refrain from prosecution and Edward Darnley caustically commented: "In this Colony we have to deal with a very low standard of commercial morality which can only be raised gradually. Moreover, we have a group of

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<sup>69</sup>Colonial Office memo no. 3576, 19 January 1917, CO23/279/2-4 (in response to W. Allardyce to Walter Long, confidential, 3 January 1917, CO23/279/5).

<sup>70</sup>William Allardyce to Walter Long, confidential, 20 June 1917, CO23/280/176-177.

<sup>71</sup>Attorney General's Memorandum, July 1917, CO23/280/331-343.

<sup>72</sup>William Allardyce to Walter Long, confidential, 28 July 1917, CO23/280/326-329.

amateurs playing at banking”.<sup>73</sup>

R. W. Turtle was convicted and sentenced to seven years’ imprisonment. Criminal proceedings were pursued against W. Johnson, J. Butler and the auditors. All the defendants pleaded guilty. The auditors received a seventy five pounds fine each, plus costs, and the directors a one hundred and twenty five pounds fine, plus costs. The *Nassau Guardian* omitted the names of Menendez, McDonald, Johnson and Butler from its account and *The Tribune* was also sympathetic.<sup>74</sup> Johnson and Butler did resign from various Boards and as Justices of the Peace, but Johnson was re-appointed President of the Chamber of Commerce.

The support of the newspapers and other whites seems to show that the standing of the elite was not sapped by the scandal. Governor Allardyce had explained his reluctance to prosecute in terms of protection of the whites: “The status of the whites in the Bahamas was not what it ought to be. Whites have not the respect nor the standing with the dark population.” Moreover, he had felt there would be mass resignations if they were brought to court, given the number of close relations in the Legislature; this would have made the Colony impossible to govern.<sup>75</sup> This did not happen but his attitude revealed a reluctance to injure the ruling class in any way.

#### Effects of First World War

The Bahamas did not suffer too many hardships from the war at first, but the entry of the United States in 1917 led to a shortage of food and supplies and prices soared. Various restrictions introduced by the Government caused resentment among the Bahamian population at large. The two most objectionable as far as the locals were concerned were lighting restrictions and the Food Control Commission, which interfered with profiteering and the sale of wheat flour. In 1918 there occurred what Governor Allardyce termed “Our Political Disturbance”. There was a demand that the Food Control Commission should rescind their order to lessen the percentage of wheat in flour. The Governor considered this was the work of Harcourt Malcolm, who had called the Governor’s message to the House “one of the most unusual and extraordinary that had ever been sent to the House”.<sup>76</sup> The

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<sup>73</sup>Colonial Office memo no. 41491, 20 August 1917, CO23/280/320-325.

<sup>74</sup>William Allardyce to Walter Long, confidential, 10 August 1918, CO23/283/147; Telegram, 11 November 1918. CO23/283/331; Telegram, 21 November 1918, CO23/283/336.

<sup>75</sup>William Allardyce to Walter Long, confidential, 28 July 1917, CO23/280/326-329.

<sup>76</sup>William Allardyce to Walter Long, confidential, 29 April 1918, CO23/282/467-468.

Governor found he was also guilty of infringing parliamentary privilege in some rather oblique way. Allardyce accused Malcolm of packing a committee formed to prepare a reply to the Governor with persons with “a well known inimical attitude to the Executive, and unreasonable and extremist views”.<sup>77</sup> The Governor deduced their objectives were twofold. Firstly, it was designed to force a constitutional crisis and render unpopular a Government responsible for the restrictions. Secondly, it was hoped to create a public furore and remove the sting out of the tail of the Bank issue. It might have achieved the latter, but this was not extensively reported anyway. It was more likely a warning to the Executive not to exceed its powers even in a war time emergency situation. The ruling class had also cleverly harnessed the labouring classes on to its side. Harcourt Malcolm had made his point; it was all a storm in a teacup anyway and the matter was left to rest.

The Bahamas’ economy was affected by world post-war economic trends, but there were also internal difficulties caused by the failure of the Bank of Nassau; the decrease in migration to the United States and the return of emigrant workers after the passage of the US Immigration Act of 1917; the lack of progress in agriculture; depression in the sisal and sponge industries and general stagnation in the local economy. In 1919 the merchants of Nassau petitioned the Governor in relation to the increased cost of living and of goods in general, caused, as they viewed it, by the high rate of exchange now imposed by the Royal Bank of Canada. There was also a memorial from the labouring classes complaining about the prohibitive cost of rice, grits, lard, pork, meal and fish.<sup>78</sup> The Governor met with the Royal Bank’s exchange expert, but there was little they could do. There had been an increase in the rates of exchange, but this was probably a result of the general depreciation of sterling and was beyond the Royal Bank’s control. Public officers were given some assistance as their salaries were temporarily increased in December. The rest of the population had to struggle on as best they could. A Tariff Act (1919) was more beneficial to the importer than the consumer and did not make an appreciable effect on the high cost of living.

One sign of economic difficulties and discontent was a resurgence of interest in the

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<sup>77</sup>The Governor should not have questioned a deputation presenting a resolution to him. The Committee members were W. Johnson; R. H. Curry; C. E. Albury and L. W. Young.

<sup>78</sup>Supplement to the *Nassau Guardian*, 26 November 1919. The labouring classes suggested price control

idea of federation with Canada. In 1919 a resolution of the Chamber of Commerce proposed to reopen negotiations with the Government of Canada.<sup>79</sup> This was part of a scheme by a few Canadians to promote the movement for federation of the West Indies within the Dominion. Again nothing transpired, mainly because the economic picture was looking a good deal rosier by 1920.

The financial problems of the Nassauvian merchants were resolved, almost overnight, by the imposition of Prohibition on the United States. At the same time the Revenue of the Government soared, leading to almost a half a million pounds' surplus by 1923 (see Table 17).

Table 17. Revenue and Expenditure, 1918-1923 (in pounds)

Year	Revenue	Expenditure	Surplus/Shortfall
1918-1919	81,048	98,236	-17,188
1919-1920	204,296	108,939	95,357
1920-1921	254,019	220,813	33,206
1921-1922	470,987	267,402	203,585
1922-1923	852,573	377,164	475,409

*Source:* Annual Report 1921-1922, 1-2, CO23/290/315-348; Annual Report 1922-1923, 5, CO23/295/267-279.

The increase in customs' receipts provides the cause of the increased revenue:-

1919-1920	165, 504	(figures in pounds)
1920-1921	219,203	
1921-1922	426,809 <sup>80</sup>	

<sup>79</sup>Resolution of Chamber of Commerce, 26 March 1919, CO23/284/221.

<sup>80</sup>Annual Report 1921-1922, 1-2, CO23/290/315-348.

Imports for 1923 totalled two million, one hundred and nineteen thousand pounds. The value of the principal classes of articles were:-

Spirits	1,010,000	(figures in pounds)
Wines	66,000	
Cordials/Liqueurs	12,000	
Malt	28,000	
Tobacco, Cigars etc.	22,000	
Foodstuffs	314,000 <sup>81</sup>	

The duties collected on alcohol were a god-send to the Bahamian economy, even when the import duty on whiskey was reduced in 1923. By March, 1924 the Colony was virtually free of debt.<sup>82</sup> The large surplus allowed the Government to embark on much needed reforms. It also had the effect of making the Imperial Government less likely to alter the constitutional arrangements in an effort to increase efficiency. Edward Darnley of the West India Department, who showed a marked contempt for the white ruling class, was still keen to embark on changes to the Bahamian constitution. Darnley gave his opinion thus: "I have no doubt that it would be greatly in the advantage of the Colony in general and the coloured population in particular if the constitution was materially modified when a favourable opportunity occurs. The Colony is now almost self-governing. The House of Assembly possesses both the financial initiative and the veto. There is in the Colony nothing like the experience, capacity and breadth of view which would be necessary to work such a system satisfactorily, and there is no prospect that there ever will be."<sup>83</sup> Darnley made the usual prerequisite for a change: a crisis in The Bahamas. But profits from liquor duties meant a financial crisis was unlikely. There was, though, the possibility of a diplomatic crisis given the American Government's wrath at the rum running activities into the United States.<sup>84</sup> However, Gilbert Grindle pointed out the reasons for the British Government's reluctance for such a step. The Bahamas had no neglected assets to develop; it had only flourished on illegal or dubious activities. The Colony had barely been able to pay for rudimentary administration. Once the Imperial Government took control it would be

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<sup>81</sup>Annual Report 1922-1923, 7, CO23/295/267-279.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., 6.

<sup>83</sup>Colonial Office dispatch no. 37360, June 1927, C.O.23/358/1-11.

<sup>84</sup>Colonial Office dispatch no. 37360, June 1927, C.O.23/358/1-11.

obliged to drive out the rum-runners and pay for preventive measures. This prospect made the intervention unlikely and undesirable to Britain; the ruling elite could rest assured no changes were in store.

### Changes in the Legislature in the 1920s

The general election, due in 1917, was delayed because of the First World War and eventually took place in 1919. Very little popular interest was recorded and only about one third of electors voted. Twenty-three out of the twenty-nine seats remained in the same hands (see Table 18). A few changes took place after the election, W. P. Adderley not having the required assets for qualification and T. Culmer retiring. The House of 1919-1920 did not look very different from the previous one. There were thirteen merchants, two commercial employees and three shopkeepers; two attorneys; two government officers; one contractor; one dentist; one bank manager; one printer; one mason and one tailor. (The identity and occupation of H. F. Dann is unknown.) There were three members of the Executive Council: J. R. C. Young, Dr. G. H. Johnson and G. H. Gamblin, who was now the Government spokesman in the Assembly. There were only two Government officials: Charles Anderson, the long-serving Postmaster, and T. A. V. Munro, a port official, and thus a relatively minor officer.

Henry Taylor once more observed the election process in his native Long Island. The three candidates in 1919 were the same as in 1910, William J. Pinder, Lorenzo Brice and Edmund G. Knowles. The bars were closed on election day, but drinks and food were made available to voters in certain homes. Each candidate bought a hog or sheep to slaughter. Afterwards the victorious candidate “would pitch another binge... During this second phase of drinking, each candidate authorized one of his agents to start paying cash to those who had voted for him”. A record was made in the polling station, which was used as a paysheet. The amount paid for votes averaged about three shillings.<sup>85</sup> This might be three days’ wages for a man, so not to be sneezed at. Besides an elector had two votes to barter. But it was an indictment of the situation in The Bahamas that the degree of dependence was so severe that votes could be purchased for such a handout. Political naivety also ensured it

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<sup>85</sup>Taylor, Political Memoirs, 10-11.

was not a true patron/client relationship and little else was secured in the interests of the islanders.

Table 18. The House of Assembly, 1919-1920.

District	Representative	Occupation
City	H. Malcolm	Attorney
	H. P. Lofthouse	Merchant
Southern	E. L. Bowen	Tailor
	H. N. Chipman	Shopkeeper
Eastern	L. W. Young	Contractor/liquor dealer
	H. J. Russell	Clerk
Western	C. E. Bethell	Merchant
	C. O. Anderson	Postmaster
Abaco	J. R. C. Young	Merchant
	C. C. Sweeting	Merchant
	Frank Duncombe	Commission manager
Andros	R. H. Curry	Merchant
	H. F. Dann	
Exuma	G. H. Gamblin	Bank manager
	R. J. Bowe	Merchant
Harbour Island	W. C. B. Johnson	Merchant
	Dr. G. H. Johnson	Dentist
	T. A. V. Munro	Port Officer
Eleuthera	R. W. Sawyer	Merchant
	Bruce S. Bethell	Merchant
	E. H. Burnside	Merchant
Grand Bahama	W. K. Moore	Merchant
Inagua	D. S. D. Moseley	Printer
Long Island	L. G. Brice	Merchant
	E. D. Knowles	Shop-keeper
Watlings Island	T. A. Toote	Attorney
San Salvador	G. W. Armbrister	Merchant
	T. Toote	Shop-keeper
Crooked Island	J. E. B. Williams	Stone mason

*Source:* Blue Book 1919-1920, M6-M8 (for members of House).

There were “Dark Brothers” in the House, but these members had not caused any worries to the ruling clique. They were sincere but moderate in their views. There had only been four non-white members in the 1910 House – Anderson, Evans, Bowen and Roxborough. Wilfred Adderley had lost his seat, but this was only a temporary setback as he won a by-election in the Southern District in 1912 (replacing Roxborough). Another

black Bahamian joined the House that year: Leon W. Young, replacing R. W. Sawyer in the Eastern District. Leon Young was a native of Congo Town in Fox Hill. He was a carpenter by trade and had migrated to Key West in the late nineteenth century. On his return home, he was employed by Charles Bethell, the liquor merchant and property developer.<sup>86</sup> Thus started his close relationship with members of the white elite. He was particularly close to W. C. B. Johnson and R. W. Sawyer. Bert Cambridge, a future black MHA, stated that Young was Sawyer's mouthpiece in the House. Johnson, Sawyer and Young would agree measures and then get Young to introduce them.<sup>87</sup> Alvin Braynen, another future House colleague, who admitted he was no admirer of Young, claimed he "was in with the white boys, and he stuck with them. They could always call on him for help, and they used him extensively in campaign meetings. He was a fluent speaker, and when he had to 'talk black' he could do it. Young was a man who would do anything for money".<sup>88</sup> T. A. Toote, the black lawyer, elected in 1915, said that he "fought bitterly with him during their parliamentary careers".<sup>89</sup> Young operated an 'odds and ends' store and real estate office on Bay Street, which became a meeting place for friends to discuss politics. Bert Cambridge was one of those who met at the Bay Street Shop. He asserted: "We talked politics all day but in those days there was never any consideration of race".<sup>90</sup> White merchant and future Speaker of the House, Asa Pritchard, agreed: "In those days there was no thought of race at all – there were no prejudices".<sup>91</sup> This played into the white elite's hands.

George Evans had died in 1915, but a large majority elected Ezekial Bain, another

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<sup>86</sup> In the by-election Young narrowly defeated merchants William Peet and Edmund Knowles. By 1926 Young himself was to become a prosperous building contractor and developer and he was awarded the lucrative sub-contract for the Fort Montagu Hotel (Benson McDermott, "L. W. Young: Formidable Force from Fox Hill", *Bahamas Handbook* (Nassau: The Tribune, 1984), 17). Among his developments was *Village Estates in Congo Town*.

<sup>87</sup>Ibid., 25. Since R. W. Sawyer relinquished his seat because of his financial difficulties, it could well be that Young was hand-picked to stand for the Eastern District, which contained Fox Hill.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid., 24. Braynen related how during a debate he told the Speaker that Young caused him to doubt the veracity of the Scriptures which recorded that God decreed that "the serpent should forever walk on his belly – but (pointing to Young) that man stands up!" (ibid.).

<sup>89</sup>Ibid., 19.

<sup>90</sup>Ibid., 24.

<sup>91</sup>Ibid. Pritchard remarked on Young's knowledge and respect for the rules of the House and on his friendliness, although most who knew him agreed he could be acrimonious and he had a temper.

black Bahamian, for Andros in September 1915. He was unique as he actually lived in the island constituency he represented (at Mastic Point). He was a boat builder, building contractor and merchant. Thaddeus Augustus Toote was elected for Watlings Island in 1915. In 1916 Thaddeus 'Sankey' Toote, a shopkeeper and the father of T. A. Toote<sup>92</sup>, took J. P. Sands' seat at San Salvador. T. A. Toote was a very intelligent and educated attorney, but he was very moderate in his views. Randol Fawkes, later leader of the Federation of Labour, reckons that T. A. Toote carried briefs for white merchants and his political role was "Touch not the Lord's anointed".<sup>93</sup>

J. E. B. Williams, a coloured liquor merchant with premises on Bay Street but a native of Long Cay, had replaced H. F. Armbrister in Crooked Island. Henry Taylor, now a teacher in Pompey Bay, Crooked Island, observed that people were discussing politics more and more knowledgeably but were still quite oblivious to the need for reforms.<sup>94</sup> Williams had kept in touch with the voters and was regarded as honest and conscientious. But "in politics he sailed with the 'tide of complacency', never for a moment making any effort to try to update or improve the political, economic or social status of the people of the Colony". Like many of the non-white politicians, he co-operated with the "Bay Street Barons". Despite the cronyism, there was by 1919 a small minority of non-white House members. In addition, Wilfred Adderley was returned to the House in 1921, as member for Andros (no contest).<sup>95</sup>

In May 1923, A. F. Adderley, son of Wilfred Adderley, was elected for Eleuthera. His father had provided him with an excellent education, sending him to Denstone College, Staffordshire, in 1908, from where he entered St. Catherine's College, Cambridge. He worked in the administration of the War Factory Service during the First World War and

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<sup>92</sup>T. W. Toote was father to both Thaddeus Augustus Toote and Frederick Augustus Toote, who ran the Philadelphia branch of the United Negro Improvement Association and was a director of the Black Star Line. As a boy T. W. Toote makes an appearance in several pieces of writing on Nassau. Journalist William Drysdale met young Sankey, who had been once or twice to America and was a hero among his friends, at the Royal Victoria Hotel entertaining the visitors. His mother gave him the title "Thaddeus of Warsaw"; now known as "Thaddeus of Warsaw Toots" (William Drysdale, "In Sunny Lands: Out Door Life in Nassau and Cuba", *Harper's Weekly*, 18 Sept. 1885, 27). He was from then known as "Sankey" Toote.

<sup>93</sup>Randol Fawkes, *The Faith That Moved the Mountain* (Nassau: Nassau Guardian, 1979), 16.

<sup>94</sup>Taylor, *Political Memoirs*, 32.

<sup>95</sup>*Blue Book* (1921-1922), 100.

then was called to the English Bar (Middle Temple) and Bahamas Bar in 1919. Eleuthera had been a stronghold of the white merchant class, although the island had a considerable black population. Adderley's election was a dent in that hegemony.<sup>96</sup> Another black representative, S. C. McPherson, joined the House after a by-election in 1923 in the Southern District (replacing Bowen). Macpherson was a tailor, who had served his apprenticeship with R. M. Bailey. He had migrated to Miami after the First World War and worked at Burdines Department Store for two and a half years as a tailor. When he was there he joined The United Negro Improvement Association and the experience must have furthered his political education.<sup>97</sup>

Table 19. The House of Assembly, 1925.

District	Representatives
City	H. G. Malcolm, C.C. Sweeting
Southern	A.K. Solomon, S.C. McPherson
Eastern	L.W. Young, W.G. Cash
Western	C.E. Bethell, A.C. Burns (Colonial Secretary)
Abaco	J.R.C. Young, F.G. Duncombe, B.R. Russell
Andros	R.H. Curry, W.P. Adderley
Exuma	R.J. Bowe, E.V. Solomon
Harbour Island	W.C.B. Johnson, Dr. G.H. Johnson, R.T. Symonette
Eleuthera	R.W. Sawyer, O.H. Curry, A.H. Pritchard
Grand Bahama	W.K. Moore
Inagua	A.E.J. Dupuch
Long Island	L.G. Brice, E.D. Knowles
Watlings Island	T.A. Toote
San Salvador	Thaddeus Toote, G.W. Armbrister
Crooked Island	J.E.B. Williams

Source: Blue Book (1925-1926), 94-96.

<sup>96</sup>Blue Book (1922-1924), 98-100.

<sup>97</sup>Jolton Johnson, Some Personalities in Bahamian Education, (Nassau: Dept. of Archives, 1992), 28-29. Mrs. Eva McPherson-Williams, daughter of Samuel McPherson, wrote this biographical sketch.

Another general election was held in the summer of 1925. This had the appearance of even more of a non-event than the 1919 election. There was a significant decrease in both registered electors and voters since 1919.<sup>98</sup> There were also nine ‘no contests’ (out of fifteen districts) in 1925. The contests probably resembled the one in Crooked Island witnessed by Henry Taylor. Arthur H. Sands, son of the late James P. Sands, opposed James Williams. “Neither of them discussed the issues and both of them made fantastic promises”.<sup>99</sup>

The results of the election do not reveal any startling changes in representation (see Table 19). There was a new black member, W.G. Cash, for the Eastern District, but no A. F. Adderley, who chose not to contest his seat. Unusually, there was a white member for the Southern District, Kenneth Solomon, who was appointed to the Executive Council in 1926. There was another coloured member too: Etienne Dupuch, editor of *The Tribune*. However, Charles Anderson had moved to the Upper House, so there was no increase in the number of coloured members. There was also R. T. Symonette, the coloured merchant, but his associations were wholly with whites and he considered himself white. R. J. Bowe was also a ‘nearly white’ and can be considered in the same category. The Colonial Secretary, Alan Burns, had gained election for the Western District, so the Government had an able spokesman. Otherwise, the make-up of the House was much the same: domination of white merchants, with a few able lawyers of both colours (Malcolm, Solomon, T. A. Toote) and the outspoken Dupuch following in his father’s footsteps.

The election of Roland Symonette was a symptom of another change in the type of white (or nearly white) members, the advent of those enriched by bootlegging.<sup>100</sup> The names of the beneficiaries are still well known – Kelly, Bethell, Symonette, Sands, Christie, Collins. For the first time a moneyed white class was created in The Bahamas, a division in

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<sup>98</sup>Blue Book (1919-20), L2 –3 and Blue Book (1925-26), 88.

<sup>99</sup>Taylor, Political Memoirs, 33.

<sup>100</sup>Nassau was “a kind of smugglers’ clearing-house within the law, a British territory with a favourable geographical position at America’s back door. The liquor is brought by liners as legitimate cargo from London and Glasgow to Nassau, where it is taken ashore and warehoused after payment of duty to the Bahamas Government. It is then sent to Rum Row and sold to American bootleggers who smuggle it ashore” (From H. De W. Wigley, With the Whiskey Smugglers (1923), cited in Philip Cash, Shirley Gordon and Gail Saunders, Sources of Bahamian History (London: Macmillan, 1991), 101). Allan Kelly’s schooner was almost permanently anchored inside Gun and Cat Cays and was constantly replenished by powerboats from Nassau. Not many Bahamians were actively engaged in rum running; Roland Symonette was an exception and earned himself a massive fortune.

the Bahamian elite. Despite the heavy duty on spirits, the merchants were ensured a substantial profit both from the volume of trade and from the passing of two Acts beneficial to them. The Tariff Amendment Act (No.2) of 1920 allowed an eighty percent drawback on liquor exported from the Colony, provided it had been landed outside the Colony. (Most liquor exported from The Bahamas was nominally consigned to the French island of Miquelon.<sup>101</sup>) The Tariff Act of 1923 cut the duty on whiskey by half. Edgar Bacon did not approve of the nouveaux riches as “some of these people are of obscure origin, and ignorant of the ordinary amenities of civilised life, yet they are to be reckoned with for awhile, as part of the new Nassau”.<sup>102</sup> Several would acquire seats in the House – Symonette; A. H. Kelly; R. G. Collins and G. Murphy. George Murphy and R. G. Collins were both Americans. Murphy was the chief supplier of the infamous rumrunner, William McCoy. He later turned to real estate development (Shirley Slope and Tower Heights) and managed the Montagu Beach Hotel, all solidly white residential/entertainment areas. He and the other whites who became wealthy and powerful through bootlegging, were despised at first by the established elite for their unpolished manners and were considered parvenus, but gradually they became accepted and respected. Symonette is perhaps even more interesting because in his case, as Saunders expressed it, “money ‘whitened’”.<sup>103</sup> He too expanded into real estate, hotels, shipbuilding and construction. Governor Bede Clifford did not regard him highly. In 1935 he told the Colonial Office he was disturbed by the growth of power of “one Symonette who was ill-affected to the Govt. He was a thorough scoundrel, who had made a fortune bootlegging & by pretty open bribery controlled a good many seats”.<sup>104</sup>

The new affluence led to improvements in the infrastructure, communications and material and social conditions. These were particularly undertaken to make The Bahamas more attractive to tourists, particularly rich ones, under the Development Board, which began its work in 1920. The Board was controlled by merchant politicians and first chaired

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<sup>101</sup>D. G. Saunders, “Prohibition, A Mixed Blessing for the Bahamas”, Journal of the Bahamas Historical Society, 15 (October 1993): 12.

<sup>102</sup>Edgar Mayhew Bacon, Notes on Nassau, the Capital of the Bahamas (New York, 1927). 76.

<sup>103</sup>Gail Saunders, Bahamian Society after Emancipation (Kingston: Ian Randle, 1990), 10. He was knighted and became the first premier of The Bahamas in 1964.

<sup>104</sup>H. Beckett, Colonial Office note of brief conversation with Sir Bede Clifford, 18 June 1935, CO23/524/12.

by R. H. Curry and then Harold Christie, MHA from 1927. A consortium of Bay Street merchants even managed to negotiate themselves a loan from the Assembly to open the Montagu Beach Hotel in 1926. Worse was the way real estate operators, particularly Christie and Symonette, managed to acquire vast acres of prime land and sell them off to foreign investors. Craton and Saunders sum up the megalomaniac ambitions of Christie: “For Christie real estate was no more or less than a commodity—a natural resource of tremendous potential for personal wealth and power. His choice of a telegraphic address, ‘Chrisland,’ betrayed an unconscious ambition to take over the entire Bahamas, if only to divide it up again for sale and profit”.<sup>105</sup> They note that he could take advantage of local circumstances: “the shortage of money, the failure and hardship of traditional agriculture, the local farmers’ ignorance of the value to others of their beachfront lands, muddled and tenuous titles, and an inefficient if not actually corrupt Surveyor General’s Department and Registry”. The Colonial Administration seemed caught in two minds, whether to encourage development or to stunt this personal aggrandizement by Christie and other nouveau whites. Even worse, it was not at all loath to evict peasant farmers, even the tenants of Crown Land, in the interests of development.

The rest of the population did not greatly benefit from bootlegging, although a few mariners of all colours were engaged in the smuggling; non-whites were employed in the manual labour; black women made the burlap bags to hold the bottles and a few coloured and black merchants owned smaller liquor warehouses. In fact, the gulf between the rich and the poor increased and became more accentuated as increasing numbers of Out-Islanders migrated to Nassau in search of elusive jobs. The Bahamian labouring classes were not able to take much advantage of the construction boom owing to the poor educational levels, especially in vocational trades, the break-down of the apprenticeship system and a lack of experience in new building methods. Americans sought winter homes and came to The Bahamas in vast numbers as visitors, attracted by the freedom to drink, but Bahamians did not gain employment in significant numbers as Jim Crow laws were imported too and maids, laundry workers, bell-hops etc. were brought over from the States to work in the hotels.

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<sup>105</sup>Michael Craton and Gail Saunders, Islanders in the Stream, A History of the Bahamian People, vol.2: From the Ending of Slavery to the Twenty-First Century (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1998),246.

The availability of resources for dealing with social problems led to some improvements, even though the attitude of the elite did not alter. One of the most urgent of reforms was construction of proper water and sewage systems. Piped water in Nassau was one of the first initiatives, but this was not provided for the black suburbs of Grant's Town and Bain Town. Measures were taken against venereal disease; a bacteriologist was appointed in 1923. A dental clinic and X Ray department was established in 1924. An Infant Welfare Centre was set up in 1925, but was a charitable institution, although it received a Government grant. The Midwives Act of 1927 demanded examination and registration of all practitioners in this field. A leper colony was provided in 1928. But these basic improvements were long overdue and as much due to the need to improve Nassau for tourists as concern for the local population.

The House did decide to pay for an expert to investigate the public health and medical conditions in The Bahamas. But some House members disagreed with this expense. Merchant Asa Pritchard declared in the House that he could not see the necessity of having an expert from England or anywhere else. He thought members of the Board, if they put their shoulders to the wheel, could clean out their own house without assistance from any other country. This was seconded by Symonette.<sup>106</sup> Still Pritchard and Symonette were in the minority; the House did vote two thousand pounds for the purpose of inaugurating a campaign to improve sanitary conditions in New Providence and to establish a proper Health Department, with the assistance of a British expert.<sup>107</sup> Dr. Wilfred W. D. Beveridge was chosen by the Colonial Office to carry out the task. The House, for the most part, heeded Beveridge's recommendations, centralising the administration of Public Health by creating the post of Director of Medical Services and reconstituting the Board of Health.

### Harcourt Malcolm

The most outstanding politician of the first quarter of the century was, without doubt, Harcourt Malcolm, son of Ormond Malcolm. He was born in 1875, had read law at Lincoln's Inn and returned to The Bahamas in 1899 to establish his law practice. He was

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<sup>106</sup>*Nassau Guardian*, 20 April 1927.

<sup>107</sup>Enclosure in Dispatch no. 79, 23 May 1927, CO23/359/118.

elected for Eleuthera in 1900 and was the first to hold the newly created office of Deputy Speaker (1901). In 1906 the position of Attorney General was vacant and Malcolm applied. The Governor, Grey-Wilson, admitted Harcourt had “considerable ability, great quickness, a ready tongue and marked lucidity of expression”.<sup>108</sup> However, the Colonial Office and successive Governors were wary of the situation where the Chief Justice and most important local attorney were so intimately related. Moreover, as far as the Governor was concerned, he was too closely connected with the local elite. He would find it difficult to examine impartially the truck system or to condemn electoral corruption. The fact his father, with whom he lived, was Chief Justice would produce accusations of unfairness. Besides, Harcourt Malcolm had been factious in the House and persistent in his opposition to Government. The Governor went as far as to state: “I have not met anyone in this Colony in whom Mr. Malcolm inspires confidence.” The Colonial Office agreed that such an appointment would be unwise and appointed J. Bromhead Matthews to the post in 1907.

The position of Attorney General became available again three years later. H. Bertram Cox of the Colonial Office noted: “What we want is a fairly young & able man steeped in the healthy conditions of the English Bar & able to hold his own in Court against Mr. Harcourt Malcolm who is able & has his father on his side & is the darling of the Bahamas.”<sup>109</sup> Nevertheless there was intrigue on foot in The Bahamas to force the hand of the Colonial Office to appoint Malcolm Attorney General. Part of Sir Ormond Malcolm’s ‘intrigue’ was to intimate his impending retirement in order to pave the way for his son. On hearing this Sir Gilbert Grindle warned that this was “a calamity to be avoided at all cost”.<sup>110</sup> Besides there was some question of the legality of some of Malcolm’s proceedings in a lawsuit of the previous year, which the Chief Justice refused to settle.<sup>111</sup> The Governor was concerned once more with the connection between the Chief Justice and the Colony’s leading private law practitioner. He wrote to the Secretary of State: “This relationship I do

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<sup>108</sup>William Grey-Wilson to Earl of Elgin, 17 November 1906, CO23/261/627-631.

<sup>109</sup>Colonial Office dispatch no. 29232, 1 September 1909, CO23/265/413-414.

<sup>110</sup>Colonial Office dispatch no. 30650, 14 September 1909, CO23/265/417-418.

<sup>111</sup>Arthur Dupuch to Earl of Crewe, 28 August 1908, CO23/265/24-25. There was a complaint from Arthur Dupuch, cousin of the House member, Leon Dupuch, concerning the winding up of the affairs of his father, Joseph. Harcourt Malcolm was the attorney of Arthur’s mother, the widow, and he felt Malcolm had an undue influence over her.

not doubt secures for Mr. Malcolm a great deal of business and creates an atmosphere that I can only describe as paralyzing".<sup>112</sup> In a private letter to Cox, the Governor described the case as "unpleasant" and said it served to show that in small places like The Bahamas local legal men should not have legal appointments.<sup>113</sup> The Colonial Office agreed with him. Sir Gilbert Grindle had already written: "It is so important to defeat the Malcolm intrigue for getting Mr. Harcourt Malcolm made Attorney General in spite of the Governor's strong objections."<sup>114</sup> H. Bertram Cox wrote a strongly worded note: "The Chief Justice is a disgrace to the bench and his ambitions for his son should not be gratified. I hope there is no chance of Harcourt Malcolm being considered."<sup>115</sup> To the relief of the Government administrators, Frederick Wells Durrant was appointed Attorney General in 1909. The Colonial Office appointed as Chief Justice Bromhead Matthews, who had just left his post as Attorney General in The Bahamas. This would certainly annoy the Bahamian elite. The Governor also succeeded in having an Act passed to retire Government officers at sixty years of age; he did not wish an obstructionist, like Sir Ormond, to cling to such an important office again. The Assembly acted in its accustomed manner and attempted to reduce the salary of the Chief Justice from one thousand to eight hundred pounds per annum. Herbert Cox commented: "The salary of the Chief Justice, Bahamas, has been one of the triumphs of Colonial jobbery... The tactics were worthy of the American 'boss'". Darnley agreed that this was "characteristic of Bahamian politics".<sup>116</sup>

Harcourt Malcolm's ethics were also called into question during the Bank of Nassau case. A Mrs. Albury, a relative of the younger Wheatley Turtle, was prevailed upon to pay a large sum of money on his behalf at the beginning of the proceedings. She had not been apprised of all the facts and she probably would not have been so willing to pay this sum if she had been aware of his culpability. This led to a subsequent court case, *Bank of Nassau v Albury*. The Legal Advisor at the Colonial Office, H. Bushe, made his feelings clear regarding Malcolm's role:-

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<sup>112</sup>William Grey-Wilson to Earl of Crewe, no. 139, 10 October 1908, CO23/264/22-23.

<sup>113</sup>William Grey-Wilson to H.B. Cox, private letter, 11 November 1909, CO23/265/501-502.

<sup>114</sup>William Grey-Wilson to H.B. Cox, private letter, 11 November 1909, CO23/265/501-502.

<sup>115</sup>H. B. Cox, undated enclosure with Colonial Office dispatch no. 30650, CO23/265/425.

<sup>116</sup>Colonial Office minute no. 16871, 23 May 1911, CO23/267/222.

The part of the case which leaves a very uncomfortable impression is that affecting the position of Mr. Malcolm. I am told that the honourable H. G. Malcolm K. C., who appeared at the trial on behalf of the Bank, is identical with Mr. Malcolm the solicitor who acted professionally for both the Bank and Mrs. Albury. I doubted the possibility of this, as it seems so strange a lack of taste for a man to appear as counsel in a case in which such serious allegations are made against him personally...it would appear that Mr. Malcolm either actively or tacitly, while acting for the Bank and for Mrs. Albury, got, or allowed (I don't [know]which) Mrs. Albury to assist his other client, the Bank, in their difficulties, by signing documents gravely affecting her own position, and without receiving the slightest consideration therefore; and further did this by concealing from Mrs. Albury what was perfectly well known to him, but was not known to her that...the liability which she was incurring was not, as she thought, a contingent and somewhat unlikely one, but was, as he knew, an actual existing liability...I think that some enquiry with respect to Mr. Malcolm's professional conduct over this matter is called for.<sup>117</sup>

The Bahamas' Chief Justice Sir Daniel Tudor did not agree there was a *prima facie* case against Malcolm and Darnley of the Colonial Office considered the local bar association would only whitewash him so there was no alternative but to drop the enquiry. Darnley merely hoped that Malcolm would view the Colonial Office's interest as a warning.

By 1920 Harcourt Malcolm was again a candidate for the vacant Attorney General's post. J. S. Risley, a Legal Advisor at the Colonial Office, was adamant: "I protest most strongly against this...His conduct in connexion with the case of Bank of Nassau v Albury renders him, in my opinion, an undesirable member of any Bar and utterly unfit to be a Law Officer of the Crown". He went on: "Almost any appointment would be preferable to that of Mr. Malcolm", adding another candidate might be less able, but at least he would be trustworthy.<sup>118</sup> The other Legal Advisor, Bushe, entirely agreed. He remarked that if Malcolm had been a solicitor in England, he would have been suspended and possibly struck off for his misconduct. He suggested that the enquiry into his conduct only failed because there was no one locally with sufficient courage to conduct it. He concluded: "I think his appointment would be deplorable." Grindle summed up the Colonial Office view of Malcolm: "Mr. Malcolm is an exceptionally able man, head and shoulders above the rest of the local bar and personally agreeable. He is a great authority on the history of the colony and a most charming companion. But our legal advisors think badly of him...I agree that Mr. Malcolm is not up to our English standards of legal probity – in the conditions of the

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<sup>117</sup>Colonial Office memo no. 39408, 14 August 1918, CO23/283/67-71.

<sup>118</sup>Colonial Office memo no. 61234, 15 December 1920, CO23/287/281-287.

Bahamian bar no man is likely to be so.” Grindle also had reservations about his appointment since he had come to believe “Mr. Malcolm has evidently been engineering a situation in which his own appointment would impose itself on the Secretary of State”. He was referring to a series of Acts regarding the Civil Service in The Bahamas. A low salary of seven hundred pounds per annum had been attached to the Attorney General’s post and the holder of this office was to no longer practise privately. The Imperial Government had not been able to disallow it without depriving the public service personnel of a bonus, which would have upset the local administrators. It would be very difficult to find an Attorney General at such a salary. Grindle considered the idea was to appoint Malcolm as a last resort, as the House had left an opening whereby private practice could be restored. By that time, Malcolm would be entrenched and could only be removed by promotion to Chief Justice. He wrote: “The intrigue is evident.” In the event of Malcolm’s appointment, since he already controlled the House so “he would also control the Government and be master of the Bahamas”.<sup>119</sup>

Thus another outsider, Willoughby Bullock, was appointed Attorney General in 1921. The new Governor of the Bahamas, Major Cordeaux, sent a telegram for information about him: his professional qualifications and questions about his Government service. Risley of the Colonial Office saw through this: “This is a deliberate attempt to prejudice a man unknown in the Colony before his arrival there. Another intrigue of Mr. Harcourt Malcolm no doubt.”<sup>120</sup>

A smear campaign targeting the Receiver General and Magistrate, Joseph M. St. John Yates, and Police Commanadant, E. E. Turner, caused some difficulty with the white elite in 1921. Harcourt Malcolm was perceived to be causing the trouble, in a fit of spite for not being appointed Attorney General. Yates and Turner apparently earned local hostility when William Fletcher Albury, a clerk, put up for the Club<sup>121</sup>, was blackballed by two persons, believed locally to be Yates and Turner. Subsequently Albury was arrested for ‘unnatural offences’ (offence against a minor), but the case was dismissed for lack of evidence. The allegations made against the two officials were that, in instituting a

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<sup>119</sup>Ibid.

<sup>120</sup>Telegram, 23 February 1921, CO23/288/96 and C.O. dispatch no. 9300, 26 February 1921, CO23/288/95.

<sup>121</sup>Probably the Nassau City Club or even the Royal Nassau Sailing Club.

prosecution, Turner was actuated by personal animus and, in issuing the warrants, Yates was guilty of an irregularity.<sup>122</sup> No charges were brought against them and they were not placed on trial. The Governor, however, was anxious to have them transferred out of the Colony as soon as possible and did not want them to resume duties. (They were on full pay leave.) From the start the Colonial Office was not keen to punish in any way men who were not guilty of anything. H. Allen wrote: "In the absence of any charges it is most objectionable that men should be hounded out of a Colony in this way but if transfers can be arranged it would be a good thing from many points of view". The Colonial Office was more inclined to consider transfers once the men had returned to duties.<sup>123</sup>

Governor Cordeaux requested the Secretary of State to rescind his instructions and leave reinstatement of the two officers to his discretion. The Governor felt the House would refuse to transact any business pending removal of the officers in an attempt to force the Governor's hand. This would set a bad precedent and there would be difficulties in filling posts in The Bahamas when candidates knew the circumstances.<sup>124</sup> The Secretary of State decided to allow the Governor latitude, although the Colonial Office believed the Governor had made the initial mistake in improperly indicting the two officers. He promised to try to effect the transfers, although he considered it desirable that, before the House dealt with the matter, the leading members should be informed of his attitude as to the transfers and they should realise that any show of political pressure could make it impossible for him to effect the transfers.<sup>125</sup>

Charges could have been framed against the two men based on the majority report that eventually came out. However, the Governor accepted the minority report of the Attorney General, which acquitted both officers and decided there was no prima facie case for preferring charges.<sup>126</sup> Grindle of the Colonial Office commented: "The Commission was a shocking exhibition of partiality and prejudice on the part of the local members".<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>122</sup>Colonial Office dispatch no. 4128, 25 January 1922, CO23/290/15-20.

<sup>123</sup>Colonial Office dispatch no. 2123, 13 January 1922, CO23/290/11-12.

<sup>124</sup>Telegram, Cordeaux to Secretary of State, 24 January 1922, CO23/290/21.

<sup>125</sup>Telegram, Secretary of State to Cordeaux, 7 February 1922, CO23/290/22.

<sup>126</sup>Report on Yates and Turner, CO23/290/321-373.

<sup>127</sup>Note by G. Grindle, 3 July 1922, CO23/290/296-297.

Winston Churchill also accepted the findings of the minority report and concurred with the Governor in acquitting both officers of having been actuated by any personal interest or motive, or by any motive other than a sense of duty. He stated clearly that they were entitled to be fully reinstated, but they themselves might welcome a chance of taking leave outside the Colony and agree to full pay leave.<sup>128</sup>

Yates and Turner filed charges of professional misconduct against Harcourt Malcolm in Lincoln's Inn. They alleged he made unfounded charges of misconduct against the acting Chief Justice and the Commandant of Police; he wilfully and deliberately made statements which he well knew to be false; he obtained documents by deception in order to substantiate the charge against them and he allowed a witness for the Crown to enter and remain in his chambers when he was the defending attorney.<sup>129</sup> These charges were referred to a Special Adjourned Council and it decided that Malcolm be asked to attend a Council on a date to be fixed when he was in England.<sup>130</sup>

This incident certainly looked to have been stage-managed by the Bahamian elite to discredit two expatriate officers who had fallen foul of one of its members. As usual it is difficult to gauge the views of Bahamians outside this group, but there is a letter in the Colonial Office records that does perhaps shed some light on this. It was written by a certain John Henry Tomson, who described himself as an ordinary Bahamian: "I has no big business in the town but I am just a labouring class man". He informed the Colonial Office: "The town of which I am a citizen is dealt with by favours and today, Sir, it's just the way with Major Turner and Sir James Yates. Justice on both sides don't work good in this little town you must only be on the one side that's so called white and that's why today Sir they are treating these two gentlemen so mean".<sup>131</sup> In another letter this same man wrote that the Governor was giving way to members of the House, mentioning by name Herbert Russell,

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<sup>128</sup>Winston Churchill to Major Cordeaux, draft no. 88 Gov. 25527/22, 4 August 1922, CO23/290/384-385.

<sup>129</sup>Charges against Harcourt Malcolm filed by Yates and Turner, CO23/291/184-203.

<sup>130</sup>R. P. R. Rowe, Under Treasury and Steward of Lincoln's Inn, to Under Secretary of State, Colonial Office, 7 October 1922, CO23/291/181. There is no further mention of this charge against Malcolm in the Government records.

<sup>131</sup>J. H. Tomson to Colonial Office, 21 December 1921, CO23/292/560.

Brice and, interestingly, Leon Young. He quoted Young as saying in the House “who is the secretary he be damned where he is, he is ruling in England and well [*sic*] rule in Nassau”.<sup>132</sup>

Etienne Dupuch also described the affair. “The Commandant of Police had personally arrested one of these ‘privileged’ people in a public place and taken him to the police station as he would have done an ordinary offender. The prisoner was charged with a grievous offence. The town blew up. The House of Assembly held meetings almost nightly and members made wild and uncontrolled statements. There was such a fever of resentment that even coloured leaders got on the band-wagon and they shouted as hard as the privileged group. Only a reckless fool would try to stem this tide of emotion.”<sup>133</sup> He reckoned the Inquiry was like a lynch-court. *The Tribune* took the side of the officials and “the town jumped on my neck like a ton of bricks”.<sup>134</sup> Clearly it did not take much to stir the ‘anti-foreigner’ feeling; now the non-white middle classes could be brought into the fray too.

The Colonial Office personnel preferred to blame Harcourt Malcolm for this vindictive incident, and more generally for the negativism of the House and for lack of social reforms. Edward Darnley commented: “Mr. Malcolm has been recommended for a knighthood, but the recommendation was not upheld, largely I believe because he has thrown away the immense opportunities he has had for remedying evils such as these”.<sup>135</sup>

In 1928 Malcolm and Governor Charles Orr clashed over constitutional ‘niceties’. There was a dispute over a money bill that led to a dissolution of the House of Assembly, last dissolved in 1868 (and then at its own request). The Legislative Council delayed passing the Out Island Bill as it had some objections to it. The House of Assembly, believing it would not be passed by the Council, inserted the money provisions in the annual Appropriations Bill, passed by both Houses. But the Legislative Council did pass the first bill, so the House had twice as much money as intended. The Legislative Council thus deleted from the Appropriations Bill the items covered by the former bill. Besides, the Council had a long-standing quarrel with the House for tacking onto Appropriation Bills large and special money votes. The House did not intend to accept these amendments, as a

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<sup>132</sup>J. H. Tomson to Colonial Office, 13 January 1922, CO23/292/559.

<sup>133</sup>Etienne Dupuch, *Tribune Story* (London: Ernest Benn, 1967), 32.

<sup>134</sup>*Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>135</sup>Colonial Office dispatch no. 8715, 21 April 1926, CO23/297/95-96 and 98-99.

matter of principle, and were not prepared to present it so amended for the Governor's assent. The House might have had it in mind to have a conference with the Council, as provided in cases of disagreement, and hopefully some arrangement might have been reached over these two bills involved in the conflict between the two Houses. The Governor came to the Legislative Council to sign each bill passed during the Session. Assembly members, led by Harcourt Malcolm, were also present. The Speaker passed the Governor the bills to sign but did not present the Out Island Bill, so the Governor inquired if there was not another bill for signature, to which Malcolm rudely replied that he was acting unconstitutionally. The next day the Governor dissolved the House and issued writs for new elections. J. S. Risley commented: "Possibly if Mr. Malcolm had met him with a courteous & straight-forward explanation of the position, the present crisis might have been avoided".<sup>136</sup> The Governor immediately left for England on leave.

Two members of the House, Eric Solomon and F. Duncombe, also went to England to express their views to the Colonial Office about the Dissolution. They believed there was a possibility that the new House would not only refuse to present an Appropriations Bill, but would decline to pass the necessary Votes of Indemnity to cover expenditure authorized in the interim on the Governor's warrant. This would result in deadlock, soluble only by the recall of the Governor or amendment of the Constitution. The Colonial Office would not yet pass comment on the situation, but Darnley did remark that "up to the present Sir Charles Orr has shown much judgement and discretion in conducting a difficult administration".<sup>137</sup> Andrews, the Legal Advisor, wrote that the Governor's action in dissolving the House in consequence of 'unconstitutional' action by the Speaker was quite in order. He had discovered a similar action in 1772, but close comparison was not possible as there was no printed record of the House proceedings. However, he stated: "It is rather important to know how the Speaker stands in refusing to present a Bill for signature". Malcolm contended that the relation between the Governor and the Legislature in the matter of assenting to bills was the same as those of the Sovereign and Parliament in England and that the Governor had no knowledge of any bills passed by the Legislature other than those reported to him by the Legislature and presented to him for assent by the President and Speaker, according to

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<sup>136</sup>Colonial Office dispatch no. 56303, CO23/381/2-21. Risley wrote his note on 2 July 1928.

<sup>137</sup>Ibid. Darnley, 8 June 1928.

whether the bill originated in the Legislative Council or House. Thus he had no power to require any other bill to be presented to him for assent. Major Orr objected that this would enable the Speaker, at his mere pleasure, to suppress any bill duly passed by both Houses. The Colonial Office Dispatch noted: "This objection would hardly deserve serious consideration in the case of any community other than the Bahamas, but there, unfortunately, the House of Assembly is entirely subservient to Mr. Malcolm". But, as Andrews commented: "The question remains whether the dissolution was not a sledgehammer to kill a flea". The new House was sure to be the same and if the Governor refused to accept Malcolm as Speaker, it would be sure to find a way to retaliate. Unless the time was ripe for a change in the Constitution, dissolution seemed to him "singularly unfortunate".<sup>138</sup>

Orr, meeting with Risley and Grindle, confirmed his intentions were, when the new House nominated Malcolm as Speaker, to refuse his approval and tell them to nominate someone else. If they refused, he would have another dissolution. Orr maintained he was ready to resign rather than accept Malcolm as Speaker. He said the members of the House looked on Malcolm as the "infallible oracle" on questions of privileges and constitutional law and upon himself as "merely a blustering and rather ignorant old soldier".<sup>139</sup> The memorandum on this discussion noted that Malcolm's "constant aim is to assure for the Bahamas the position of a practically independent Constitutional Monarchy, in which the House of Assembly is in as strong position as against the Legislative Council and the Governor, as the House of Commons is against the House of Lords and the King, and for the Speaker of the House of Assembly a considerably more important position than that of the House of Commons". Orr simply saw Malcolm's action as arrogant and a dangerous precedent. The Law Officers upheld the Governor's action in every particular. L. Freeston commented: "It seems at least possible that the blow to Mr. Malcolm's prestige will go far towards crippling his aspirations to become uncrowned King of the Bahamas".<sup>140</sup> Gilbert Grindle, though, hesitated about a contest with an elected assembly over its choice of Speaker. "A chastened Malcolm back in his old office would be probably much less

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<sup>138</sup>Ibid. Andrews, 26 June 1928.

<sup>139</sup>Memorandum on discussion with Sir Charles Orr, 29 June 1928, CO23/381/63-66.

<sup>140</sup>Colonial Office dispatch no. 56303, CO23/381/2-21. Freeston added this comment on 20 July 1928.

harmful than an embittered Malcolm who ‘may have been wrong on a question of constitutional practice but has been vindictively arrested by the Governor’ (quoting Orr)<sup>141</sup>.

Most of the ruling elite in The Bahamas supported Malcolm and the old members, who stood, were returned unopposed. The Speaker had to be re-elected and the Colonial Secretary, Alan Burns, let it be known that he would not approve his re-election in view of his rudeness. He let Malcolm know he expected an apology and Malcolm handed Burns a letter expressing regret that anything said by himself should be construed by the Governor as being disrespectful to the King’s representative and disclaiming such intentions. He also accepted Burns’ suggestion that the Press should be informed of his apology.<sup>142</sup> The rest of the House was annoyed with Malcolm, but he was re-elected Speaker, now approved by Burns, who admitted he was the most suitable person. Malcolm was regarded as a political martyr, but he probably lost some influence among the newer House members. And most of the British administrators found Malcolm much more congenial and good company than the whites rising to power in The Bahamas. Sir Bede Clifford, despite their frequent political differences, described Malcolm as one of his closest friends.<sup>143</sup> There was a lack of personal animosity and probably some admiration of his intellect and skill. Values were changing in The Bahamas and the British officers preferred dealing with one of the old school, like Malcolm, rather than the new monied class. But “money ruled” now in The Bahamas and “Mammon was king – those who did not pay him reverence were too few to matter”.<sup>144</sup> It was with this group that Sir Bede Clifford clashed in the 1930s.

#### Sir Bede Clifford and Reserve Powers

In the 1930s the sympathy between the Executive and Legislature that Harcourt Malcolm had referred to as essential to the working of the Bahamian constitution broke down, inevitably over control of finance. Governor Bede Clifford wanted to swiftly amend the Customs Law in order to prevent forestalling by merchant politicians, a campaign of

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<sup>141</sup>Ibid. Risley, 20 July 1928; Grindle, 21 July 1928.

<sup>142</sup>Telegram, 2 August 1928, CO23/381/28.

<sup>143</sup>Bede Clifford, Proconsul: Being Incidents in the Life and Career of the Honourable Sir Bede Clifford (London: Evans, 1964), 205.

<sup>144</sup>H. MacLachlan Bell, Bahamas: Isles of June (London, Williams and Norgate, 1934), 193.

which had been carried on in the past.<sup>145</sup> Clifford intended to protect the revenue from those who might be tempted to evade levies while the amendments were being discussed in the House by passing a resolution enabling the authorities to collect the new duties *in anticipation of* legislative approval. At first the House agreed to his resolution, but once members realised what they had done, “they stirred themselves into a frenzy of excitement, accusing the Leader of the Government of having failed to follow correct procedure with the result members had unwittingly surrendered their jealously guarded privileges in matters relating to taxation”.<sup>146</sup> They attempted to pass a new resolution repudiating the former one, but the wily Clifford sent down two conciliatory messages and refrained from acting upon the resolution immediately. This put the House in a more tractable mood. He anticipated a few minor alterations to the Tariff Bill but he thought this would demonstrate to the House its control over finance and keep members happy. At this point he thought the relationship between Executive and Legislature would remain friendly and productive.

The House of Assembly, though, attempted to outmanoeuvre Clifford by adjourning until the following Monday. With four steamships due to arrive and the resolution in abeyance, it hoped “to enable certain interested members to forestall the impending duties”. When the House reconvened, Clifford anticipated members would vote to make the Act operative from a later date so merchants could make their profits. Clifford wrote: “The motto of this colony ‘Expulsis Piratis etc.’ is of no practical significance. The pirates are still with us.”<sup>147</sup> The House, of course, underestimated Clifford, who had no scruples about invoking the resolution he had tricked the House into passing. The duties were enforced from the 16 November and because it had adjourned for a week, the House had no opportunity to protest against the Government’s action. Clifford could crow: “The House was thus hoist by its own petard.”<sup>148</sup> Considerable criticism of the legality of the Government’s collection of duties without statutory authority ensued from the House members. But after much fuss, the tariff proposals of Clifford were accepted in their

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<sup>145</sup>In anticipation of tariff changes merchants would buy in goods at the reduced duty while the merchant/politicians debated at length and held up the Bill.

<sup>146</sup>Bede Clifford to P. Cunliffe-Lister, confidential, 14 November 1932, CO23/461/28-35.

<sup>147</sup>Bede Clifford to H. Beckett, private, 16 November 1932, CO23/461/26-27.

<sup>148</sup>Bede Clifford to P. Cunliffe-Lister, confidential, 8 December 1932, CO23/461/22-24.

entirety. The Secretary of State commented in a private letter to Clifford: “You have had a pretty testing time, but you certainly seem to have handled your politicians with tact and skill”.<sup>149</sup> Clifford had outgunned the House of Assembly; nevertheless, this was a warning of trouble to come. Moreover, the financial situation was deteriorating in The Bahamas, with the impending repeal of the Volstead Act and the United States suffering a Depression.

Clifford wanted to further increase the Revenue by a combination of taxation, salary levies and economies. He realised direct taxation would never be accepted by the House, so he suggested securing an increase in customs duties by changing to the system where the customs duties were levied on the value of imported goods plus freight, insurance and commissions. He also desired an increase in duty on spirits, a stamp tax and a motor tax. The House saw no reason for proactive legislation, as the financial position in the Colony was still sufficiently sound. Besides, ever mindful of their own interests, members felt Government economies and salary reductions would suffice. The Secretary of State was not so optimistic and recommended a financial expert be sent to The Bahamas. The Governor and Executive Council agreed with this proposal but the Finance Committee excused themselves from authorising the expenditure on the grounds that the financial position was still sound and it was too important a decision for them to deal with. It recommended the Governor to refer the proposal to the House via a message. Clifford realised the House was unlikely to welcome the idea “due to the fact that the House is more exercised about the effect of such a visit upon its control over Finance than about the Financial outlook”.<sup>150</sup> To invite an expert would be an admission that the House was unable to cope. This was the gist of its reply: it should first be given the opportunity of overcoming impending difficulties.

In fact, the sound financial position did hold up for a while longer and this delayed the breach in relations between Executive and Legislature. In 1934, though, Clifford’s budget proposals received a hostile reception from the House. It was quite obvious members were anxious to maintain the finances of the Colony on a sound basis, but only as long as they were not called upon to make any sacrifices. This had been evident when members of two House Committees, to which a Stamp Tax Bill and a Bill for the Licensing of Commercial Houses had been respectively referred, refused to attend meetings or attended

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<sup>149</sup>P. Cunliffe-Lister to Bede Clifford, private, 21 January 1933, CO23/461/15-18.

<sup>150</sup>Bede Clifford to P. Cunliffe-Lister, confidential, 28 September 1933, CO23/494/21-26.

merely to obstruct. Then, to drag its feet, the House decided to meet only once per week! A situation developed where any proposals submitted by the Government were opposed simply because they were Government measures. The critical point was reached at the end of March 1935 when the House threw out a number of Government measures without giving them the normal courtesy of referral to a Select Committee. One was a Magistrates Bill, whereby the Chief Justice could invite the Governor to extend the jurisdiction of a Magistrate to enable him to deal with trivial cases in an Out Island. The House members opposed, what they regarded as, the unwarranted interference with the British justice system, but rejection was more a desire to reject any Government measure.<sup>151</sup> The Governor attempted conciliation, offering concessions, including abandoning the extension of the magistrate's jurisdiction, in order to induce the House to proceed with the legislative programme. This failed. The Governor's speech had mentioned that the Estimates, in rough draft only, could not be printed and placed before the House until the legislation on which the Revenues were estimated was accepted. The House emphasised their obduracy by pointedly asking for the expected date of the Estimates.

Meanwhile the Press announced that an informal meeting of the Assembly would be called from which Government members would be excluded. The purpose of the meeting was to draw up a sound financial policy for the Colony. This was farcical: an Assembly within an Assembly deciding the financial policy of the Colony without input from the Government. To halt this move in its tracks, Clifford hurriedly prepared the Estimates, which retained the economies referred to in his Speech, but not Revenues dependent on new legislation. However, he warned the House that if liquor revenues were not maintained, then it would be resummoned to deal with the financial position.

But Clifford's budget still included the controversial change in the system of calculating customs duties. The Assembly rejected his duty changes and Clifford prorogued it. The Governor proposed to assume sole responsibility for securing a balanced budget and to change the basis of duties by executive order. A compromise looked to have been reached, but a milder version of the Protection of Customs Revenue (to prevent forestalling) was also rejected, again without the courtesy of a Committee. In consequence the Government did not proceed with the Salaries Bill (a temporary seven and half percent

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<sup>151</sup> The extended jurisdiction of magistrates would also deprive local Counsel of a certain amount of legal work.

reduction in salaries). The House threw out the Magistrates Bill and Clifford thought that two Crime Bills would receive the same treatment. He decided to dissolve the House.

The Editor of *The Tribune*, expressing views most of the House members agreed with, considered Dissolution was an injustice, particularly in regard to past cooperation between the House and Clifford. “For no apparent reason whatever, except a gnawing desire to exercise absolute control over every department of life in the Colony, [he] has kicked them out of their ancient and honourable Assembly, bag and baggage.”<sup>152</sup> He blamed difficulties in balancing the budget on government extravagance – “a lavish and extravagant standard of living ... carried on at all costs”- and squandering of money in such ill-judged schemes as sewer and water projects, Clifton Pier, a new electrical plant and investments in hotels. *The Tribune* considered this “clamour for taxation” an unfair burden “on a community already famished by the depression”. As far as the editor could see the Customs Duty Bill would give the Government extraordinary powers over duty “which the House regarded as an infringement on the pocket book of the consumer and, as the representatives of the people, [the House members] exercised their right to reject it”. The Governor, he alleged, denied any new tax but had given a new interpretation of ‘ad valorem duty’, which amounted to the same thing.

The *Nassau Guardian* saw nothing sinister in the Customs Duty Bill: “Nearly every country in the world provides against the evasion of payment of duties in the event of tariff changes”.<sup>153</sup> The newspaper pointed out the more experienced members of the House supported the bill. It considered the majority opposed without “a single cogent argument”.<sup>154</sup> Also, the editor felt that misconceptions were being spread by “irresponsible persons” that under the new custom law poor men would be taxed out of existence and the cost of living would rise. In fact, it emphasised foodstuffs would be unaffected and there would only be a few dollars difference even on large luxury items. Thus there would seem to have been a split in white ranks, but the younger, more headstrong members were the more persuasive.

The problem was that the House, who held the power of the purse, and the Governor

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<sup>152</sup>*The Tribune*, 25 April 1935.

<sup>153</sup>*Nassau Guardian*, 12 April 1935.

<sup>154</sup>*Nassau Guardian*, 27 April 1935. This paper usually expressed the views of Harcourt Malcolm.

could not agree on an appropriate strategy for dealing with the depression into which the whole world was slipping. Governor Clifford, responsible for sound Government, was determined to deal with the financial situation in the manner he considered appropriate, but his hands were tied. House members considered dictatorial and presumptuous any moves he made to get round the obstacle that their obstinacy and limited vision posed. The problem was that the relations between Executive and Legislature remained fixed in the seventeenth century, with the result that the Executive had no voice in either the Upper or Lower House, and the latter claiming sole right to deal with financial legislation. The only solution was a change in the Constitution to alter the balance of power.

Governor Clifford believed the time had come to invest the Governor with Reserve Powers of some type or other. He thought the House liable “to indulge in undignified displays of irresponsibility so long as they realise that they are able to paralyze the Government of the Colony”.<sup>155</sup> The three areas Clifford felt might warrant consideration for Executive action were: questions of policy affecting imperial and international relations; measures required to safeguard the revenue, prevent forestalling or maintain financial stability; provision for the continuance of law which would otherwise expire if and when the Governor prorogues the Assembly.

Clifford’s main concern was the acceptance that the Government could not introduce bills involving taxation into the Legislature. Thus he wrote: “My real criticism is that the powers of the Bahamian Assembly are too great for Representative Government and too small for Responsible Government”.<sup>156</sup> The House had at times acted irresponsibly. It refused or was unable to govern itself, but it then exercised its powers to prevent Government from governing. Hence the assertion that the Constitution was unworkable. Clifford considered that the House’s procrastination could be excused if it was really representative of the people or if members had their interests at heart, but the House was “composed of a coterie of commercial and professional men whose interests frequently do not coincide with those of the mass of the people”.

Legal opinion from the Colonial Office was that in The Bahamas legislation by Order-in-Council was out of the question. Once the Crown had set up an elected assembly

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<sup>155</sup>Bede Clifford to P. Cunliffe-Lister, confidential, 5 April 1934, CO23/504/61-80.

<sup>156</sup>*Ibid.*

in a settled colony it was held to have made “an irrevocable grant of its legislative powers”.<sup>157</sup>

Sir Bede Clifford felt he could curb the powers of the House by strict application of Article XXV of the Royal Instructions, viz. “No public money whatever, whether it be appropriated to any particular service or not by the law granting the same, shall be issued or disposed of otherwise than by warrant under the hand of the Governor, by and with consent of the Executive Council”. However, the Colonial Office cautioned him that it had to be read with the Colonial Regulations. Although it could be used to curb extravagant expenditure by the Legislature, it did not enable the Governor to govern without the Legislature or to carry on for long in the absence of the votes of the Legislature.<sup>158</sup>

Another question was whether the Governor was able to refuse to sign a warrant for expenditure voted by the Assembly. The “Constitutionalists” of The Bahamas argued he could only do so on account of financial stringency. The wording of the Appropriation Acts – “There shall be paid out of the Treasury by warrant in the usual manner”- was an imperative enactment, binding on the Governor. By this interpretation, the Act gives statutory recognition to usage, that is the Governor should not refuse to sign a warrant for money voted by the House. Governor Clifford, though, claimed absolute discretion. One expert in the Colonial Office, Guy Cooper, considered that by Article XXV he did probably have discretion; by invoking Article XXV he could in effect disallow certain items of expenditure. His opinion read: “I think that in proper cases the power of the Governor to veto particular items of expenditure can and should be exercised though generally a veto by the Executive is to be avoided.”<sup>159</sup> Besides, as Cooper pointed out, as a direct representative of the Crown no mandamus would lie against him to compel him to perform a public duty. Cooper also cited two other considerations. Firstly, the earliest Charter provided the Governor with a “negative voice” in legislation, recognised by the “Constitutionalists”. The refusal to sign a warrant is a negative act. Secondly, in the United States, where separation between the Executive and the Legislative is analogous to that in The Bahamas, the Presidential Veto is frequently employed. It seemed to show that in such constitutions a

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<sup>157</sup>J.H. Finlayson’s Legal Opinion, 2 May 1934, CO23/504/41-43.

<sup>158</sup>Colonial Office note, CO23/524/8

<sup>159</sup>Guy Cooper, Notes on the Bahamas Constitution, 21 July 1936, CO23/539/16-25.

power of veto was necessary and there were not the objections, which applied where the Executive had a voice in the Legislature.

Guy Cooper advised that the right of initiating money bills claimed by the House had long been recognised and must now be treated as an established usage, however unfortunate the result might be. The only way to alter the Constitution was by Imperial Act as was the case in Jamaica in 1866 and in British Guiana in 1928, but in each case the initiative had come from the Assembly, an improbably occurrence in The Bahamas. The Governor and Colonial Office considered the options during these years, but at what point would they act? And, even if they desired change, could they effect it?

Others lamented the breakdown in the sympathy between the two branches of Government and various proposals to engender cooperation between them were suggested in the columns of the two newspapers. Robert Bailey wrote: "I have no objection to an artillery duel between Government Hill and the Public Square. But when their firing is erratic, and non-combatants are endangered, it's time to take notice". He considered the bridge could be adequate representation of the Government in the House and suggested the Attorney General should be a member. (This was the practice in Bailey's native Barbados, but in The Bahamas the Attorney General was nearly always a foreigner, so this measure would not be supported.) He also suggested the House should appoint a standing committee to assist the Government in the preparation of the legislative programme.<sup>160</sup> Etienne Dupuch was also concerned about the problems and warned his readers about the dangers to their liberties if they did not eliminate the causes of friction. He predicted: "One of these days we will be pushed into a corner and our constitution taken away from us without ever being allowed an opportunity of presenting our case".<sup>161</sup>

After the Dissolution of the Assembly, Clifford hoped that the newly elected House would be more amenable, the Governor having demonstrated that he was not afraid to use the power of Dissolution.<sup>162</sup> Clifford was to be disappointed. In November some members of the House presented a memorial regarding the Dissolution, claiming "the forestalling bill" was "an entirely novel proposal as far as any part of the Empire which possesses

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<sup>160</sup>*The Tribune*, 27 April 1935.

<sup>161</sup>*The Tribune*, 4 May 1935, 5.

<sup>162</sup>H. Beckett, Note of Conversation with Bede Clifford, 18 June 1935, CO23/524/12.

representative institutions is concerned” and that the majority of the House was not prepared to accept it.<sup>163</sup> Clifford was opposed by an alliance of white Bay Street business men/politicians and black/coloured politicians. Notably, Malcolm, the Speaker, dissociated himself from the memorial.<sup>164</sup> Beckett had no doubt of the stance of the Colonial Office in this dispute: “The position over this matter in the Bahamas is nothing less than a scandal, & we ought to do all we can to help the Governor”. The Secretary of State politely rejected the House’s claim, a minor victory for the Governor.

In 1936 the battle was resumed. This time there was also a continuation of the struggle between the Legislative Council<sup>165</sup> and the House that had flared up in the 1920s. The Legislative Council had found a new Consolidated Tariff Act conflicted with the Canada-West India Agreement in a few details and had made the necessary changes to bring harmony. There were also some minor adjustments of wording, but no change in the intentions of the Act. The House, on the direction of the Speaker, refused to accept most of the amendments on the grounds that the Legislative Council had no right to amend a Tariff Bill. The Council was indignant at this pettiness but Clifford requested them not to create a deadlock. The Council did pass a resolution repudiating the attempts of the House to abridge its powers: - “...there is nothing in the Constitution of the Colony which limits the right of the Legislative Council to amend any legislation whether or not such legislation deals with questions of finance or imposes or remits taxation, and any contention to the contrary, or reference to precedents alleged to have been established can in no way abridge the legislative powers conferred on this Council by His Majesty the King”.<sup>166</sup>

Meanwhile, the Governor warned the House the Government would collect the tariff in line with the Canada-West Indies Agreement. Members complained of his threatening stance. In retaliation, the House failed to pass the Minimum Wage Bill and the Marine

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<sup>163</sup> Memorial regarding the Dissolution of The General Assembly on 7 May 1935, 14 November 1935, CO23/537/30-38. It was signed by A.H. Sands, S.C. McPherson, L.W. Young, A.F. Adderley, H.M. Chipman, W.C.B. Johnson, R.T. Symonette, R.W. Sawyer, Asa Pritchard, F.H. Christie, G.W. Roberts, L.C. Brice, E. Dupuch, B.R. Russell, G. Knowles, H.G. Christie, and R.H. Curry.

<sup>164</sup>Bede Clifford to Malcolm MacDonald, confidential, 26 November 1935, CO23/537/22-28.

<sup>165</sup>Members of the Legislative Council were Sir George Johnson, President (since 1930); P.W.D. Armbrister (since 1916); N.B. Burnside (since 1923); C.O. Anderson (since 1924); N.V.S. Solomon (since 1931); A.K. Cole (since 1931); J.H. Jarrett (since 1933) and J.B. Albury (since 1935), Blue Book (1935), 102

<sup>166</sup>In Bede Clifford to W. G. A. Ormsby-Gore, 13 June 1936, CO23/539/1-10.

Products Bill (to protect sponge beds and other marine products), although the Governor did get through the Juvenile Offenders Bill. For the remaining year of his administration, Clifford simply worked out a modus vivendi with the Legislature, allowing him to pass Acts he desired without introducing any profound changes. J.S. Robtham noted in Colonial Office correspondence that the House remained “unco-operative where their pockets are concerned”. He continued: “It is the usual Bahamas issue; until the Colony goes bankrupt, you cannot get anything you want done without provoking a first class political crisis with repercussions at home”.<sup>167</sup>

The fact was it would be difficult to convince politicians in Britain that a move to take away power from an elected Assembly to give more power to an appointed imperial officer would be beneficial to the mass of these colonial subjects. The Colonial Office only got as far as debating the issue of increasing the Governor’s power and seeking expert advice on the constitutional issues. In effect, the Bahamian white merchants remained the rulers.

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<sup>167</sup>J.S. Robtham, Colonial Office note, 13 June 1936, CO23/561/2.

CHAPTER SEVEN  
CHALLENGES TO WHITE DOMINANCE

The first decade of the twentieth century witnessed the stirrings of class and race consciousness all over the British Caribbean. These found expression in serious disturbances in Jamaica, Trinidad, British Guiana and St. Lucia. There was some early formation of working class institutions, although only the British Guiana Labour Union survived into the era of the mass labour rebellions of the 1930s.<sup>1</sup> The Bahamas did not experience this working class unrest or formation of political working class institutions, although it did have many self-help organisations, such as friendly societies and fraternal lodges, sometimes termed 'proto-unions', which gave working men experience of organisation and a sense of self-reliance. The early part of the century had been a time of struggle for most black Bahamians, the only respite seeming to be migration to Florida where there was plenty of work on the East Coast Railroad. Remittances were sent home to families left behind but they did not bring long-term benefits to the lower classes; rather the money ended up in the hands of the Bay Street merchants. "This process helped to create a typical 'remittance society' in which external money raised aspirations and increased the taste for foreign goods while further narrowing and weakening the indigenous economic structure and actually widening class divisions."<sup>2</sup> Returnees were dissatisfied with

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<sup>1</sup>See O. Nigel Bolland, *On the March: Labour Rebellions in the British Caribbean, 1934-1939* (Kingston: Ian Randle, 1995) and Richard Hart, "Origin and Development of the Working-Class in the English-Speaking Caribbean Area: 1897-1937" in *Labour in the Caribbean: From Emancipation to Independence*, eds. Malcolm Cross and Gad Heuman (London: Macmillan, 1988).

<sup>2</sup>Michael Craton and Gail Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream: A History of the Bahamian People*, vol. 2: *From the Ending of Slavery to the Twenty-First Century* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1998), 222.

Bahamian wage levels and their 'showy' behaviour and new ideas disturbed the whites.<sup>3</sup>

It seems somewhat ironic that in The Bahamas where there was some kind of representative Legislature and where more black people did have the vote than in many parts of the British West Indies the inhabitants were so apolitical. Although the Crown Colony system of government retarded political development in some ways, the middle and working classes at least had the common goal of political reform of an authoritarian system. This tended to create a more radical element in the middle class, who became agitators for reform among the dispossessed. The middle class in The Bahamas was a more conservative and cautious element, who sought a seat in the Legislature more as a personal ambition, and then feared to lose the prize by too strident criticism of the dominant whites. No middle class leader chose to identify too closely with the labouring classes in order to channel their genuine grievances into a political protest. Charles Duncan O'Neale demonstrated in Barbados the possibilities for a middle-class socialist in taking up the cause of the working class.<sup>4</sup> But none of the Bahamian coloured or black middle class, educated abroad, returned with such leanings.

Although there had been an outburst of patriotism after Britain's declaration of war in 1914 and many less well off Bahamians contributed to the Relief Fund, enthusiasm waned as the war dragged on. Many were too caught up in the day-to-day business of subsistence in remote settlements to be concerned about world affairs. In 1917 there was a fall-off in recruitment for the West Indian regiment. While on a recruitment drive, the Governor met with "a lack of patriotism... at some of the villages [and] the unpatriotic not to say disloyal sentiments expressed at others, the general attitude of the coloured population, and their disinclination amounting almost to hostility to volunteer for active service clearly indicated that certain baneful influences had temporarily got the upper hand".<sup>5</sup> Some of the remarks

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<sup>3</sup>Robert Curry, a white Bahamian writing in 1930, described the "Miami Sport", who had just "returned from Miami with a flashy new suit and yellow shoes" in Robert A. Curry, *Bahamian Lore* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., (Paris: by author, 1930), 69.

<sup>4</sup>See H. McD. Beckles, *A History of Barbados. From Amerindian Settlement to Nation-State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 156-157.

<sup>5</sup>William Allardyce to Walter Long, confidential, 2 July 1917, CO23/280/190-193. The "baneful influences" referred to Roman Catholic priests, Father Chrysostom Schreiner and brothers Gabriel and Leander Roerig (William Allardyce to Walter Long, confidential, 29 April 1918, CO23/282/467-468). The American State Department refused Schreiner entry to the US and considered him "obsessed with the German idea" and

he had heard indicate that for some Bahamians this war was always an irrelevancy and their patriotism wholly exaggerated. For some it did not matter which flag they were under; most wished to be left to get on with their lives in their own way. But the fact that some termed it a 'White man's War' showed a degree of racial awareness and politicisation, awaiting instruction and channeling.

The First World War was a formative influence for many West Indian participants and they returned imbued with resentment at racial discrimination suffered. This resentment combined with worsening economic conditions to produce popular unrest in several British colonies.<sup>6</sup> Four hundred and forty-one Bahamians, mostly coloured or black, served in the British West Indies Regiment during the war. Only the autobiography of Etienne Dupuch, the light-skinned son of Leon Dupuch, can give us any insight into their experiences, although the soldiers must have become aware of the anti-colonial and nationalist ideologies of other more politically mature colonial subjects. Dupuch specifically mentions conversations with Indians and friendships with liberal West Indians, such as Trinidadian Andrew Cipriani.<sup>7</sup> Dupuch and his fellow Bahamians also came into contact with a type of Englishman that they had not come across before, the uneducated lower classes. He did not find them too congenial and learnt of the sense of racial superiority that they harboured. He recounted an incident between a Sikh sergeant and an English private when he for the first time "realised that the lowest, dirtiest, scrubbiest Englishman was considered superior to the finest Indian".<sup>8</sup> Some Bahamian soldiers did demonstrate discontent at the end of the war. In support of the mutiny by a battalion of the West Indian regiment at Taranto, a group of Bahamians refused to relieve a squad of Englishmen on latrine-cleaning duties and were arrested, court-martialed and sent to army prison. Johnny Demeritte, though severely wounded, joined in the race riot in Liverpool in 1918.<sup>9</sup> Dupuch claimed that he came back to The Bahamas "a very bitter man" and that he "swore that never again would I lift a finger,

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"a German propagandist" (L. Lanier Winslow, US Dept. of State, to Conville Barclay, British Embassy, Washington DC, CO23/285/164-165).

<sup>6</sup>See Bolland, *On the March*. chap. 2.

<sup>7</sup> Etienne Dupuch, *A Salute to Friend and Foe: My Battles, Sieges and Fortune* (Nassau: The Tribune. 1982).

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 54.

<sup>9</sup>Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream*, vol.2, 233.

certainly not risk my life, in defence of king and country".<sup>10</sup> Etienne Dupuch would take up the mantle of his late father, both as journalist and editor of *The Tribune* and as a member of the House of Assembly. However, this was hardly a radical newspaper and, although Dupuch was always anti-racist, he displayed the contradictions of many coloured Bahamians and would not have put himself at the head of the black masses. His anti-colonialism was just as ambiguous and in 1940 he was the enthusiastic chairman of the War Materials Committee (from 1945, Aid for Britain). For the most part, there was little discernible effect on the political scene in the Colony from returning veterans. Partly the boom period of the 1920s in The Bahamas dampened enthusiasm for change, whereas economic hardship in other colonies led to serious disturbances in which demobilised soldiers played a major role.

Nevertheless, the British Government was concerned about unrest among the "coloured population" after the War and the effect of inflammatory literature. The Secretary of State advised preparation of legislation to control the press.<sup>11</sup> The Governor duly reported an article "of an inflammatory nature" in the Garveyite newspaper, *The Negro World*, which was being hawked by a small boy near the Post Office.<sup>12</sup> A Seditious Publications Act was passed in 1919 (9 and 10 Geo. 5), to be in force for five years. A number of Bahamians continued to receive *The Negro World*, sent through the post in plain envelopes from New York.<sup>13</sup> One intercepted copy was for A. F. Adderley.<sup>14</sup> The verdict of the colonial administrators was "though it may not be a seditious publication within the meaning of the Seditious Publication Act of 1919 yet its circulation in a mixed community may have a mischievous effect by fostering a spirit of unrest and discontent".<sup>15</sup> Still the Administrator asserted there was no evidence of discontent in 1920 as work was plentiful and wages

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<sup>10</sup>Dupuch, *Friend and Foe*, 100.

<sup>11</sup>Viscount Milner to Officer Adminstrating the Government of The Bahamas. secret, 10 September 1919, CO23/285.

<sup>12</sup>William Allardyce to Viscount Milner, secret, 11 November 1919, CO23/285.

<sup>13</sup>E. E. Turner, Police Commandant, to Acting Colonial Secretary, 13 May 1920. He named Postman Brown, C. C. Smith, Gardiner, Dr. Knight and Sergeant Jordan. C. C. Smith was a coloured merchant and Dr. Knight a West Indian physician.

<sup>14</sup>Post Master to Colonial Secretary, 7 July and 14 July 1920.

<sup>15</sup>Post Master to Colonial Secretary, 14 July 1920.

high.<sup>16</sup>

Garvey's movement in the United States inspired the middle class black and coloured intellectuals and political agitators during the 1920s. Some Bahamians had been directly involved in the movement in the United States; S. C. McPherson had been a vice-president in the United Negro Improvement Society in Miami. The FBI claimed there were one thousand members in Nassau, compared to six hundred in Miami, but this seems a very high figure.<sup>17</sup> It also stated that Nassau members had bought heavily into the steamship line. In 1923 three Bahamians petitioned the Postmaster to lift the ban on *The Negro World*, which they said conveyed "the sentiments of the most advanced peoples of the world for the benefit [*sic*] of all communities".<sup>18</sup> A few committee members of the local branch of the UNIA are known from an article in *The Negro World* in 1927: S. W. Johnson (President); Samuel Gibbs (Treasurer); Charles Duncan (Secretary); P. J. C. Davis (ex-President); McDonald (ex-President); L. W. Young; Dr. C. H. Knight and S. A. Dillett.<sup>19</sup> When the Executive Secretary of the Detroit branch visited Nassau he met the Dupuch brothers, L. W. Young and Sankey Toote. He spoke at the People's Theatre in Blue Hill Road "to an overwhelming audience", in "one of the biggest churches" and at an open-air meeting in Fox Hill.<sup>20</sup> The American noted that "the then prevailing sentiment of Nassau was that Garveyism is an organization attempting to foster the disruption of the British Government, so much so that the fear complex of many outstanding Negroes of Nassau compelled them to remain aloof from the association because of the belief that their licences to practice law and medicine would be taken away from them". A. F. Adderley and T. A. Toote were probably

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<sup>16</sup>H. E. Grant to Viscount Milner, secret, 27 November 1920.

<sup>17</sup>Enclosure with Howard P. Wright, Bureau Agent in Charge, Miami, to Lewis J. Baley, 11 March 1921 in Robert A. Hill, ed., *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers*, (Berkeley: University of California, 1984), 3:247. A Bahamian, Rev. R.H. Higgs, led the UNIA in Coconut Grove, Miami at this time. He left Miami in July 1921 after a whipping by four masked men of the KKK and an order to leave the US within 48 hours. Oscar Johnson, the Financial Secretary, left on the same boat. See Hill, *Marcus Garvey*, 3:513.

<sup>18</sup>R. P. Barnswell, Richard Barnett, Samuel Gibbs to C. O. Anderson, 8 May 1923. Gibbs was the treasurer of the Bahamians branch of UNIA in 1928 (*The Tribune*, 21 November 1928).

<sup>19</sup>*The Negro World*, 2 April 1927.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.* Samuel McPherson and Young also spoke.

among those to which he referred. Once more the most articulate of the Bahamian blacks stood aloof from the political debate.

On 18 November 1928 Marcus Garvey arrived in Nassau while on route from Canada to Jamaica. The Governor found he had no statutory power under the provisions of the Immigration Act of 1920 to prevent his landing as he was in transit on a through ticket. There were no restrictions put on his movements but police kept a careful watch.<sup>21</sup> A big reception was held at Liberty Hall in Lewis Street and then he proceeded to talk to the crowd at the Southern Recreation Ground.

Not all the non-white supporters of reform welcomed Garvey's visit. Etienne Dupuch made it clear that he did not rate Garvey highly: "In our opinion, Marcus Garvey has done more injury to the cause of Negro progress than any other man who ever lived".<sup>22</sup> Dupuch favoured the philosophy of Booker T. Washington, emphasising the need to educate and train the masses, but also admired W.E.B. Dubois. Dupuch avoided stirring up racial antagonisms that might lead to social unrest and he considered it was folly to talk of an Empire in Africa, making many sarcastic references to it in his newspaper. His editorial writings would have left a negative impression of Garvey's ideas on readers. *The Tribune* did give full coverage of Marcus Garvey's visit though. It estimated a couple of thousand people gathered at the pier to catch a glimpse of him.<sup>23</sup> Despite the rain, it also considered that the crowd that gathered that evening was the greatest ever witnessed at the Southern Recreation Ground. Dr. C.H. Knight chaired the meeting and the first speaker was S. A. Dillett. He was followed by Garvey, who was "not long in captivating the audience" and "delivered one of the best and most forceful speeches that has ever been made on a platform in the Bahamas". The paper made some criticisms but generally it praised his language, diplomacy and learning. Garvey was able to keep his audience in good spirits and was cheered back to his seat.

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<sup>21</sup>C. W. Orr to L. S. Amery, confidential, 25 November 1928, CO23/318/391. The Commandant and two inspectors were present at the meeting; a large body of plain-clothed men were on duty and a reserve was placed at the barracks. The Commandant reported that there were no arrests and all was orderly (C. J. Whebell to Colonial Secretary, 23 November 1928).

<sup>22</sup>*The Tribune*, 10 November 1928.

<sup>23</sup>*The Tribune*, 19 November 1928.

L.W. Young followed Garvey on to the podium; the first signs of disrespect were apparent. There were murmurings and snide remarks; car engines were started and horns hooted; many people left; there was no clapping after he had spoken. The ambiguous position of Young did not escape the audience. In many ways, Young represented the antithesis of Garvey's message: alliances with white politicians and businessmen and rank breaking with black Bahamians. Ironically he and his wife were the hosts of the Garveys. Marcus Garvey went on to Liberty Hall for refreshments with his large admiring audience. Etienne Dupuch took pleasure in reporting that there would be a few "Knights of the Nile" in Nassau after this visit! However, although Garveyism was significant in The Bahamas for its emphasis on black pride and self-reliance and for development of organisational skills, the Colony lacked any effective structure, similar in kind to the Trinidad Workingmen's Association or the Barbados Democratic League, to turn black and class consciousness into political and social action.

#### The Ballot Box Party

The only alliance formed to push for reform in The Bahamas was the Ballot Box Party. This was a group whose aspirations were typical of the Bahamian middle class. Strictly advocating constitutional and gradualist reforms, they desired to make an assault on the hegemony of the white elite, but in order to gain power for themselves. Once they and similarly enlightened individuals had a share of the Government, then they would seek educational and social reforms on behalf of the lower classes. The party held its first public meeting on 25 September 1924 at the People's Theatre, which was reportedly attended by "a large and enthusiastic number of citizens", despite the inclement weather.<sup>24</sup> L.W. Duvalier was in the Chair for the meeting, although Stephen Albert Dillett was Chairman of the Party. On the platform were W.E.S. Callender, R.M. Bailey, Gerald Sweeting, L.L. Lunn, Lilly Weir, Gladys Bailey and Leon Dupuch. Bert Cambridge's Orchestra played the music. These were some of the most articulate and energetic of black and coloured Bahamian society, but not one of them was a current member of the House. Noticeable also was the prominence of two women in a Colony where no woman had the vote.

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<sup>24</sup>*The Tribune*, 27 September 1924.

Stephen Albert Dillett had spent many years in the Lighthouse Service but was also a writer, orator, political candidate, Temperance reformer and musician. He had edited *The Freeman* for a while; had been assistant editor of *The Strombus* magazine and had contributed to both the *Nassau Guardian* and *The Tribune*. He had been active during the First World War, both as a member of the Recruiting Committee, accompanying the trainees to Jamaica, and in charge of the fleet scouting the Bahamian waters for enemy submarines, men o' war and mines, losing an eye in the process. He was one of the most respected men in Nassau, "straightforward, plain spoken and fearless to a degree".<sup>25</sup> L.W. Duvalier was born in Inagua and had been a stevedore and lighthouse keeper. He had owned and edited the first newspaper in that island between 1907 and 1908. He had then worked for the *Jamaica Times*, returning to Inagua in 1911. From 1915 he had lived in Nassau, first working in the Customs Department (1916-1920) and then as news editor for *The Tribune*.<sup>26</sup> Leon Dupuch, son of the former member of the House, was the manager/owner of that newspaper and brother of Etienne, the editor. L.L. Lunn was the editor and proprietor of *The Observer*. Thus journalists were playing a key role in urging reform of the Legislature. Notable by absence was anybody from the conservative *Nassau Guardian*. The black Barbadian tailor Robert M. Bailey had also written for *The Tribune*. Because he had many politician customers (white and non-white), his shop was often a place of keen discussion between this well educated and intellectual man and his clients. He did make one unsuccessful run for the Assembly, but his influence was extra-parliamentary. Gladys Bailey was his eldest daughter. The coloured Guyanese attorney, W .E. S. Callender, had wholeheartedly supported electoral reform in the House in the first decade of the century. The accomplished musician, Bert Cambridge, was also an aspiring politician.

At the meeting Dillett outlined the plan of campaign and explained the method of voting by ballot. Bailey described the evils resulting from the viva voce system of voting and complained that, although the Benefit Societies voted by ballot, the House "had the audacity to say that the people were not ready for the ballot".<sup>27</sup> The meeting decided a petition would be presented to the House. A public meeting was held at the Sponge

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<sup>25</sup>*The Tribune*, 27 September 1924.

<sup>26</sup>*The Tribune*, 24 November 1924.

<sup>27</sup>*The Tribune*, 27 September 1924.

Exchange on 30 September, where the same speakers addressed a wider audience. Dillett declared that “the old viva voce system had developed a state of Political Slavery in this Colony under which men feared to vote, to speak or even to be seen at a meeting in the interest of the people”.<sup>28</sup> Bailey urged the necessity of petitioning until they got the secret ballot, but speculated that if the Colony changed to Crown Colony status it would get it anyway. Duvalier reminded the people: “If we are to have fair and honest and square dealing at the polls it is the only way”.

With 1925 being an election year, the Ballot Box Party used the occasion to make the people aware of its opinions. It took out a full page advert in *The Tribune* to remind readers of its platform: the ballot box system of election of members of the House of Assembly; a reasonable literacy test for future electors; higher education available for all classes and competitive examination for entrance to the Civil Service of the Colony. The second item is confirmation of the moderation of their politics. The party also urged electors to vote for those candidates who supported the secret ballot, namely L.W. Young, Herbert J. Russell, R.W. Sawyer, W. P. Adderley, A. K. Solomon, A. F. Adderley and A. C. Burns (former members who had a record of support for the measure); S. C. McPherson, E.J. Dupuch. S. Knowles, W.E. Callender, C.H. Knight, Fernley Rae and R.J. Bowe (candidates at this election who supported the reform).<sup>29</sup>

The 1925 election would again expose the unfairness of open elections. An inhabitant of Cat Island, where Callender was challenging the old representatives, wrote to *The Tribune*: “There is a rumour around town that a number of men with more money than brains or morality are subscribing money and uniting their forces to defeat Mr. Callender at Cat Island”.<sup>30</sup> An observer from the Eastern District reported to *The Tribune*: “War was almost declared yesterday afternoon on a candidate for the East after threatening the jobs of certain young men”.<sup>31</sup> There the two black candidates, Young and Cash, did prevail. But the attempt at electoral reform did not.

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<sup>28</sup>*The Tribune*, 1 November 1924.

<sup>29</sup>*The Tribune*, 27 May 1925. Note the support of merchants Herbert Russell and R. W. Sawyer, who took a different stand to his father. A. C. Burns was the British Colonial Secretary. S. C. McPherson was black; E. J. Dupuch, W. E. Callender, Dr. Knight, R. J. Bowe were coloured.

<sup>30</sup>*The Tribune*, 30 May 1925.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*

The issue reemerged during the elections of 1928, with views being expressed in letters to *The Tribune*. One read: "If all reports are true, it is usual for a candidate for the House of Assembly to try to secure his election by a discreet use of money...It is to be feared that what many of the members do represent is wealth". The writer continued: "Corruption would seem to be so widespread that it is difficult to resist the conclusion that the Constitution, which so many are so anxious to preserve, is nothing but an illegal plutocracy masquerading as a democracy".<sup>32</sup> These elections revealed some blatant instances of corruption. *The Tribune* wrote in disgust: "The brazen and reckless manner in which the Election was carried out in the Fox Hill section of the Eastern District on Friday last has caused honest-minded men to pause for reflection, and Bahamians of sterling worth have expressed their horror over the methods which prevailed at Fox Hill".<sup>33</sup> Noting the remarkable number of unopposed candidates, the paper believed money was spent and pressure brought to bear to discourage opposition. It likened some Bahamian constituencies to the rotten boroughs of eighteenth century England – but worse! It considered there were hundreds of "well-thinking" electors who refused to vote under such a system. Also, a number of honest men would offer themselves for service in the Assembly if the system were reformed. *The Nassau Guardian* was also censorious. It declared: "The open method of voting seems to have many obvious evils and is open to every conceivable form of corruption and intimidation...The presence of a howling mob surging up and down the polling booth would not be tolerated in England and it cannot be approved here."<sup>34</sup> The Governor was sure that if the secret ballot was introduced nearly every constituency would return black or coloured members. L. Freeston commented: "The step would be resisted vehemently by the white population, whose political ascendancy rests, to no small degree, upon the influence which they are able to exercise over the present arrangements; and, even if the secret ballot could be constitutionally introduced, the resulting fear of black and coloured ascendancy would lead to an immediate demand for Crown Colony

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<sup>32</sup>*The Tribune*, 28 July 1928.

<sup>33</sup>*The Tribune*, 11 July 1928. The irregularities were at the Sandilands division with E. Y. V. Sutton, J.P., the presiding officer.

<sup>34</sup>*Nassau Guardian*, 7 July 1928.

Government”.<sup>35</sup> Thus the Ballot Box Party, once they had control of the Legislature, would also have to resist pressure for its abolition.

Another political society supported by moderate middle class non-whites was the Citizens Union. C.O. Anderson had founded it and its president by 1928 was House member T. A. Toote. Its aim was “to foster economy and independence among the mass of the people”.<sup>36</sup> This society involved shareholding and held regular monthly meetings. It had a capital base of ten thousand dollars and engaged in a restricted form of banking, designed for working people who did not have the means to borrow from the Royal Bank at its high rates of interest.<sup>37</sup> It was also a debating society, with such motions as: “In the opinion of this House, a Government does not properly represent the people unless all sections of the community have a voice in its council”.<sup>38</sup> Generally it aimed at being morally uplifting and educational, rather than political per se. It had speeches and musical items in its programmes and in 1930 the Citizen’s Union Adult School began. The Society probably had more effect through teaching illiterate people to read and write than delivering a political message.

#### “The Handwriting on the Wall”

In 1931 the various non-white middle class political hopefuls decided to challenge the white elite in a by-election, caused by the death of R. J. Bowe, the member for Exuma. “The caucus of the dominant crowd”<sup>39</sup> had chosen Edwin C. Moseley, an insurance broker and part of the family that owned the *Nassau Guardian*. The opposition had nominated the non-white tailor, Arnold J. Kemp. *The Tribune* noted that at the beginning of March many people in Nassau were asking: “Who is this Kemp boy?” and “tilted their noses a degree higher”.<sup>40</sup> They had thought the election was a foregone conclusion. The newspaper reported that after Moseley had toured the District, he returned to Nassau “not so radiant and not so confident”. It cited a sponge merchant in Nassau who had received a letter from a

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<sup>35</sup>Colonial Office dispatch no. 56318, 1928, CO23/390/2.

<sup>36</sup>*The Tribune*, 6 October 1928.

<sup>37</sup>*The Tribune*, 27 October 1928.

<sup>38</sup>*The Tribune*, 7 November 1931.

<sup>39</sup>From a letter, signed “A Reformer” in *The Tribune*, 28 March 1931.

<sup>40</sup>*The Tribune*, 28 March 1931.

Moseley supporter in George Town, urging him, “for God’s sake” to come down to Exuma and bring reinforcements. A cable from the Moseley camp, described as an SOS, followed this. The City naturally rallied to his assistance. A boat left with about forty businessmen and members of the House, led by Allan Kelly and Carl Brice, and including Eric Solomon, O. H. Curry, A.H. Sands, Charles R. Arteaga, Stafford Sands, Basil Burnside, Tracey Knowles, Francis Smith, H. Newell Kelly, A.H. Rae and Kenneth Butler. With tongue in cheek, the newspaper suggested that the election would probably relieve the unemployment problem in Exuma and people would be “flush”. In contrast, some of the islanders were helping to finance Kemp’s campaign.

Kemp carried the election by 255 votes to 148. The reporters for *The Tribune*, present in Exuma, suggested the people had refused to be bribed.<sup>41</sup> L.W. Duvalier wrote a letter to the newspaper proclaiming: “It was the most glorious victory ever won by any candidate for the Assembly in the Bahamas”.<sup>42</sup> Etienne Dupuch predicted it was “the handwriting on the wall”.<sup>43</sup> He considered the non-whites were realising their “natural and legitimate aspirations”. It had been a long time coming but there was now a “situation which cannot be handled by the old methods of intimidation”. He hoped that the responsible men in the City would take “an inventory of their conduct and attitude generally on race relationships”.

Dupuch had high hopes for the fall-out from this electoral turn-up. However, on the same day that the election triumph was reported, was the news that the House refused, by a majority of 13 to 9, to agree to A. F. Adderley’s motion for a Select Committee to consider the secret ballot. The hopefuls were to have to wait another two years before the majority agreed to a committee and, even then, it failed to report.

What is more, just one month later, in another by-election in a ‘Black area’ caused by the resignation of James E.B. Williams, coloured member for Crooked Island District, the hopes of the political reformers would be dashed. Ralph Collins, wealthy Bay Street merchant, was to be opposed by L.W. Duvalier. The District was very difficult to canvass as the mail boat could not anchor at the two bigger islands, Crooked Island and Acklins, only at

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<sup>41</sup>*The Tribune*, 4 April 1931.

<sup>42</sup>*The Tribune*, 8 April 1931.

<sup>43</sup>*The Tribune*, 22 April 1931.

the small island of Rum Cay, and about thirty small settlements could only be reached by miles of walking. Collins was unknown to the inhabitants, but Williams electioneered on his behalf. Duvalier had lived and worked in Crooked Island and in his Inaguan newspaper, *The Searchlight*, he had fought on behalf of the labourers of the area. Fired by the recent victory, Dupuch politicised in *The Tribune*: “There is a narrow, insular group among the classes who believe that because they have money they can bully the people into submission... It must be clearly understood that the day of the ‘big boss’ in this community has long since drawn to a close... [Some men in the city] seem to think that because they have money they should be able to control the coloured man’s independence and honour”.<sup>44</sup> The independent thinking of these island people was emphasised. The slogan coming out of Crooked Island was “Sidetrack Mr. Collins. Duvalier on the main line”.<sup>45</sup> But even Dupuch and his reporters started to tone down their confident predictions. They realised the islanders were wily: “On the one hand, the people of the district, when discussing the election, will wink a knowing eye, refer to one of the candidates as ‘a fat bud [bird], and whether they mean to pick him clean now or to come back for the bones as well later on, is something that election day alone will determine. On the other hand they refer to the other candidate as ‘we boy’”.<sup>46</sup> There was also some underhandedness: Williams and L.W. Young, on behalf of Collins, chartered all the boats at Long Cay. Duvalier had plenty of boat-owning friends from around the islands and, much to Young’s surprise, wherever Young went, Duvalier followed. Young also tried to prove that Duvalier’s papers were not technically correct, but to no avail. There were allegations from the Duvalier camp of fraud in registering men who were assuming the names of dead men or those working abroad. Collins’ men were giving registered voters work. They were also using C. E. Bullard, a public school teacher with considerable influence in the area. *The Tribune* commented: “This election is perhaps the most interesting and fascinating one we have ever witnessed. Its chief feature of interest is that Mr. Duvalier, a poor but popular man, has caused Nassau’s wealthiest man and all his friends to extend themselves to the utmost to win”.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup>*The Tribune*, 13 June 1931.

<sup>45</sup>*The Tribune*, 17 June 1931.

<sup>46</sup>*The Tribune*. 20 June, 1931.

<sup>47</sup>*The Tribune*. 27 June 1931.

R. G. Collins emerged an easy winner; Duvalier lost his deposit. *The Tribune* commented with resignation: “The political humidity which has stifled this community ever since a freak election at Exuma created the ‘bogey’ of a black House of Assembly, has been dispelled, city folks breathe more freely, they smile again and are obviously happy that the bogey has been routed”.<sup>48</sup> House member Ronald Symonette stressed that “not a shilling passed on election day”. Duvalier stated that Collins himself behaved decently but felt Collins would have been ashamed of some of the methods of his lieutenants and “the asinine abuse” levelled at him and his sympathisers.<sup>49</sup> Collins, naturally, had his influential merchant supporters (Symonette, Asa Pritchard, Carl Brice, W. C. B. Johnson), but he also had support from the non-white group, namely L.W. Young, T. A. Toote, J. C. B. Williams and Dr. C. H. Knight. Once more split ranks among the non-white group aided the elite. In the 1935 election Collins did not even have to contest the seat (although there were question marks over irregularities in procedures prior to nomination of candidates). A. J. Kemp, so recently the hero, withdrew from the fray in Exuma in 1935, not desiring to compete with standing member Eric Solomon and newcomer and wealthy white merchant, George Murphy. “The handwriting on the wall” had soon been erased.

The 1935 election again brought forth adverse comments from the supporters of electoral reform. As *The Tribune* editorial reminded Bahamians even in some of the constituencies where there was no contest the men were returned, not because their constituents approved of them, but because of “the system”.<sup>50</sup> The only contest that commentators felt sure did not involve “rum and rice” was in the Southern District, where all the candidates had publicly deplored open voting and the corruption it encouraged.<sup>51</sup> After the election the majority of members professed the need for change, but they then allowed the issue to die in committee.<sup>52</sup>

But what was even worse for the non-white reformers was that they were reduced to

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<sup>48</sup>*The Tribune*, 8 July 1931.

<sup>49</sup>*The Tribune*, 15 July 1931.

<sup>50</sup>*The Tribune*, 29 May 1935.

<sup>51</sup>The victors were Kenneth Solomon (466) and newcomer Dr. C.R. Walker (444) over R.J. Robertson (340). S.C. McPherson withdrew just prior to the contest.

<sup>52</sup>Even the *Nassau Guardian*, 8 June 1936, deplored this failure.

six non-whites in the House (from nine in 1928)– A. F. Adderley (Western District); L. W. Young (Eastern District); Etienne Dupuch (Inagua); Leon Dupuch (Long Island); Dr. C. R. Walker (Southern); A. R. Braynen (Cat Island). Moreover Adderley was elevated to the Legislative Council in 1938. However, the election consequent on his appointment to the Council proved to be the turning-point for electoral reform.

#### Secret Ballot for Nassau

It took a scandalous election to force the issue; as H. Beckett of the Colonial Office commented: “I don’t believe it can be silenced”.<sup>53</sup> The local rumour already alleged Adderley’s appointment to the Upper House was to make room for Canadian millionaire, Harry Oakes.<sup>54</sup> This allegation probably had no basis since Governor Charles Dundas considered Oakes’ candidacy ill-advised since the seat in the Southern District had long been held by a non-white and its capture by such a wealthy white man was likely to cause racial animosity.<sup>55</sup> At first T. A. Toote, in Mary Moseley’s opinion “an excellent negro candidate rather of Mr. Adderley’s type”<sup>56</sup>, proposed to stand for the seat, but he removed his name once Oakes announced his intentions. Instead, Milo Butler, “a coloured person of small means and standing”<sup>57</sup>, decided to oppose Oakes. Butler was an ill-educated island boy (Rum Cay), now a Nassau grocer and part owner of the Zanzibar nightclub, a stump politician to whom the lower classes could relate. He was much less to Miss Moseley’s liking and she accused him of endeavouring “to stir up colour feeling”.<sup>58</sup> Etienne Dupuch was also very critical of those who persuaded Butler to stand and revealed something of his own class snobbery.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>53</sup>H. Beckett, Colonial Office note, 4 May 1939, CO23/659/12-13.

<sup>54</sup>K. E. Robinson, Colonial Office note of conversation with Mary Moseley, 25 July 1938, CO25/653/2-4.

<sup>55</sup>Charles Dundas to Cosmo Parkinson, 11 July 1938, CO23/653/42-49. Oakes owned large tracts of land in the Western District and employed hundreds of men at a time in road building and other developments there, paying a shilling a day above the norm and providing free dinners.

<sup>56</sup>K.E. Robinson, Colonial Office note of conversation with Mary Moseley, 25 July 1938, CO23/653/2-4.

<sup>57</sup>Charles Dundas to Cosmo Parkinson, confidential, 11 July 1938. CO23/653/42-49.

<sup>58</sup>K.E. Robinson, Colonial Office note of conversation with Mary Moseley, 25 July 1938, CO23/653/2-4.

<sup>59</sup>*The Tribune*, 6 July 1938.

Oakes was in England for the duration of the election campaign, which was under the management of his agent, House and Executive Council member, attorney Kenneth Solomon. This was despite Dundas' express request, on account of all the gossip concerning projected bribery, that no Council member should be concerned in this election. The election would obviously be a David and Goliath affair. Not only was Butler a poor man, but the whites had contrived to get his credit at the bank stopped.<sup>60</sup>

During the election, held on 4 July, a large number of electors, well primed with liquor, arrived at the polling station. There was a fracas with the police during which two policemen were injured. As far as the Governor and Colonial Office were concerned it was Oakes' party that was responsible. Beckett, in charge of the West Indian Department, categorically stated: "The person responsible for the scandal was Kenneth Solomon, K.C., Leader of the Government in the House of Assembly".<sup>61</sup> The two men arrested, though, were Butler's supporters and they were prosecuted the next day, receiving six months' imprisonment. Even the conservative *Nassau Guardian* (but not its editor, Mary Moseley, who made her views known in London) believed the sentence excessive. Governor Dundas agreed and shortly after released them for good behaviour. Besides his opinion that the assaults were trivial, Dundas thought it ironic that the punished men were partisans of Butler, which meant that the law was being set in motion against the "aggrieved side".<sup>62</sup>

Butler had received barely ten percent of the votes and had lost his deposit. He complained bitterly about the tactics of the opposing party and announced his intention, if it proved necessary, to lodge a complaint with the Secretary of State. The other side asserted his real cause of complaint was that he was outdone in bribery, but this did not ring true as it was well known he was short of funds. The police got two depositions of persons testifying that they were bribed (an unusual admission) but, since one did not vote and the other voted for Butler, it was not likely to lead to anything. However, as Dundas wrote, "That money and other gifts were distributed freely is scarcely disputed by anyone".<sup>63</sup> Dundas announced in the Executive Council his intention of proceeding with the introduction of the secret ballot

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<sup>60</sup>Charles Dundas to Cosmo Parkinson, confidential, 11 July 1938, CO23/653/42-49.

<sup>61</sup>H. Beckett, Colonial Office note, 4 May 1939, CO23/659/12-13.

<sup>62</sup> Charles Dundas to Cosmo Parkinson, confidential, 11 July 1938, CO23/653/42-49.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid.

at the next session of the Legislature. In this special meeting of the Council, election malpractices were not disputed; on the contrary unofficial members admitted that there was scarcely an election where they did not occur and the only difference in the recent election was the extreme largesse. The councillors agreed that he should press for the secret ballot, but thought the qualifications for the franchise should be raised. Most white Bahamians endorsed such restrictions. Mary Moseley told Robinson at the Colonial Office that such “a revolutionary move...necessitates a stringent upward revision of the franchise qualification”.<sup>64</sup> The Governor, though, cleverly used the white elite’s own argument to reject this saying they should hold to their “ancient constitution” and seek only to eliminate the corrupt features.

Simultaneously with Dundas’ efforts there commenced a popular movement in support of political reforms. Butler accompanied by about forty others “rather excitedly voiced” his grievances to the Colonial Secretary. The latter informed Butler that the Governor had ordered a police investigation into the conduct of the election, to which he could give evidence. Surprisingly, Butler never did. An unofficial Council member told the Governor that Butler had had his credit at the bank restored. Oakes’ attorney, Solomon, also informed Dundas that Butler, “polite and pleasant”, had been to see him and assured the Governor that he would hear no more from Butler concerning election malpractices.<sup>65</sup> The Governor received, what he considered, “a reasonably framed and courteous petition” from Milo Butler, demanding the introduction of the secret ballot, the establishment of a Court of Appeal and fair representation of non-whites on the public boards and in the public service. The Government had already decided upon the first two items anyway. Dundas reminded the petitioners that there were six non-white members of boards, one being on two boards, and that he had already publicly declared that he would have no more racial discrimination in the public services.<sup>66</sup>

The Governor was invited to a large gathering at Fox Hill on 1 August, where an annual Emancipation Day celebration took place. He reported that he received the utmost courtesy and cordiality. In Nassau Butler organised a procession of between seven and eight

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<sup>64</sup>K.E. Robinson, Colonial Office note of conversation with Mary Moseley, 25 July 1938, CO23/653/2-4.

<sup>65</sup>Charles Dundas to Cosmo Parkinson, confidential, 11 July 1938, CO23/653/42-49.

<sup>66</sup>Charles Dundas to Malcolm MacDonald, confidential, 9 August 1938, CO23/653/31-33.

hundred people, who paraded with banners, nearly all bearing slogans demanding the Secret Ballot or “Box”. There were speeches, but the Governor reported good behaviour and anticipated no trouble, except in the event of the House rejecting or shelving the Secret Ballot Bill.<sup>67</sup> During the passage of the Bill, there were occasional shows of public support. In May 1939 (the deadline given by Dundas for passing the Bill) there was a parade, with band and banners, from Grant’s Town through the City to the Eastern District. Etienne Dupuch admonished the organisers: “Demonstrations of this kind will not help at this time”.<sup>68</sup> He attracted a reply from Oscar Johnson, a former UNIA member, who assured him their approach was “wise, judicious, unthreatening, orderly, without malice and not bullying”.<sup>69</sup>

Since the white elite cited illiteracy as a bar to the majority of black voters being able to use the ballot system, the Colonial Office researched to find the comparative rates of literacy in other regions. It found the rate in The Bahamas was not much lower than in British Guiana and British Honduras, about the same as in Trinidad and much higher than in Fiji and Mauritius, all of which used the secret ballot.<sup>70</sup> Thus the Colonial Office was adamantly against a tightening up of the qualifications to vote as a condition for the introduction of the secret ballot.

In the event that the white majority should resist the Secret Ballot Bill, the Governor was prepared to force an election on this issue. Dundas also intended to dissolve if the House did not accept the Government amendment to delete the increased qualifications for voters.<sup>71</sup> He was confident that this was the one issue that would rally the non-whites to the point of resisting bribery and returning men pledged to the ballot. As Beckett pointed out, an election would also cost the present House a lot of money, “the real whip in the Governor’s hands”.<sup>72</sup> Beckett considered that, after the Oakes election, it was impossible for the Secretary of State to do anything other than insist on a secret ballot. He did not relish the

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<sup>67</sup>Ibid.

<sup>68</sup>*The Tribune*, 3 May 1939.

<sup>69</sup>*The Tribune*, 9 May 1939.

<sup>70</sup>A. Poynton, Colonial Office note, 25 November 1938, CO23/659/4-5.

<sup>71</sup> Charles Dundas to Secretary of State, telegram, 12 May 1939, CO23/659/23.

<sup>72</sup> H. Beckett, Colonial Office note, 4 May 1939, CO23/659/12-13.

alternative. “Let it be supposed for the moment that we are all anxious to let the present gang in the Bahamas continue to run the show. On that basis emotions may be compared with those of the Duke of Wellington – ‘But, by God, they frighten me!’ ”

The bill to introduce the secret ballot would only apply to Nassau (and for five years only). Some in the Colonial Office felt there was no justification for this limitation but, in the light of local political difficulties, they would not press the issue for fear of wrecking the prospects of any progress. The general view, as expressed by Parkinson, was: “If we get the secret ballot for Nassau, that will be a pretty thick end of the wedge shoved in – the rest will follow in good time”.<sup>73</sup> The Ballot Bill (3 Geo.VI c.40) passed its third reading in the House in June 1939. There was unanimous voting at all stages. The Act made no change to the qualifications to vote, but provided for a Revising Barrister to prepare a new register of voters. Another ploy to buttress white supremacy was the suggestion to raise the property qualification to qualify to stand as candidate for the Assembly. This would have required amendment of the General Assembly Election Act, but the amending bill was rejected by the Legislative Council.

As Beckett commented: “Sir C. Dundas appears to have managed this ticklish matter well”.<sup>74</sup> Dundas lamented that in some ways it was a compromise measure, but he regarded it as a “signal gain”.<sup>75</sup> The Governor described the struggle:

Its passage has entailed a somewhat wearing contest against almost the whole House of Assembly, and even some members of my Executive Council, and though the institution of the Ballot had many supporters outside, and even some within the House, I am not at all sure that it would have been achieved by recourse to Dissolution, though I was prepared to resort to that if the House proved itself adamantly opposed thereto.

Dundas had to endure “immoderate and personal criticism”; two members were permitted by the Speaker “to make offensive, not to say insulting remarks”. Dundas regarded it as “the snarls of a defeated faction, which had not the courage to openly oppose the measure”. He summed it up: “Thus has ended the first and most important stage of a struggle for Electoral

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<sup>73</sup>Cosmo Parkinson, Colonial Office note, 28 November 1938, CO23/659/6-7.

<sup>74</sup>II. Beckett, Colonial Office note, 25 July 1939, CO23/680/4.

<sup>75</sup>Charles Dundas to Malcolm MacDonald, confidential, 10 July 1939, CO23/680/57-61.

Reform after more than forty years of repeated effort to remove a political anachronism and a cause of grave corruption and reproach to the Colony”.<sup>76</sup>

The political elite considered the Governor had overstepped the constitutional boundaries and acted in an unacceptably dictatorial manner in the way he had introduced electoral reform. Even the proposer and seconder of the motion (A. R. Braynen and G. W. Higgs) lashed out at Dundas, implying the House was already dealing with the reform when the Governor threatened them with dissolution if it did not pass a measure forthwith.<sup>77</sup> That was contrary to the facts as the House had allowed the discussion on reform to lapse. Oscar Johnson, in a letter to *The Tribune*, defended the Governor and stated that he welcomed Braynen’s call for a committee to inquire into the constitutionality of the Governor’s actions, believing it might open a Pandora’s Box and reveal the iniquities of House members. He also hoped the “unthinkable” extension of the ballot to the Out Island might become “thinkable”.<sup>78</sup>

The first election by Secret Ballot was held, appropriately, in the Western District, after Sir Harry Oakes was appointed to the Legislative Council. The Government had undertaken a thorough scrutiny of the registers, resulting in the reduction of the number of registered voters in the District from 1,112 to 501. Of the former number registered, only 608 had actually voted in 1938, while 455 voted in 1939. Dundas commented that it became obvious that in the past unscrupulous candidates obtained the registration of a number of persons unqualified to vote and many of these were “uninterested riffraff”. With satisfaction he noted “the whole system of Election has been cleansed in more ways than one”.<sup>79</sup> Indeed, people described this election as one of the most decent and orderly ever seen in The Bahamas, with no indication of bribery or treating. Only twelve people ‘declared’ their votes on grounds of illiteracy; of these three were blind. The successful candidate was Milo Butler.

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<sup>76</sup>Ibid.

<sup>77</sup>*The Tribune*, 2 June 1939.

<sup>78</sup>*The Tribune*, 7 June 1939. Dupuch also defended Dundas (*The Tribune*, 15 July 1939).

<sup>79</sup>Charles Dundas to Malcolm MacDonald, no.222, 29 September 1939, CO23/680/11-12.

“Government of the People, by Bay Street, for Bay Street”

To safeguard the passage of the secret ballot, Dundas had found compromise necessary and he considered that it would be diplomatic to leave its extension to the Out Islands to be brought up by the members themselves and then to give it Government support. By this time, World War Two had broken out and W.B.L. Dowson commented that Colonial Office policy ought to be to attempt to deal as smoothly as possible with the Bahamas Legislature.<sup>80</sup> The House had already shown some obstreperousness in attempting to refer a Trading with the Enemy Bill to a Select Committee, illustrating, commented Beckett, the House’s “worthlessness”.<sup>81</sup>

Dundas, the villain of the piece, continued to suffer abuse in the House. Arthur Braynen shouted across the floor: “They promised to send us good governors if we raised their salaries. And look what we have!”<sup>82</sup> In the same session Eric Solomon referred to the Governor as “stupid”. Christie, in a more general dig at imperial officials, called them “thieving public officials” and “incorrigible thieves”, specifically calling the name of Colonial Secretary Jarrett. In a letter sent by an irate American complaining of ill treatment by the Governor and Lady Dundas (also American) there were allegations that the “people of Nassau” (meaning the white elite) resented dictation by Government House. He claimed Dundas was obsessed with the words “His Majesty’s Representative” and used them to suppress free speech in the House. He mentioned names of people who felt as he did, but these were mostly winter residents, with the notable exceptions of Mary Moseley and representative, R. H. Curry.<sup>83</sup> The Colonial Office had no sympathy for the complainant, quite the opposite in that they perceived just what the Governor had to endure. Dowson wrote: “Its political conduct combines the worst features of American individualism and British pre-Reform Act institutions, and if Nassau is to model itself on the US it might do the job properly and have a ‘new deal’”.<sup>84</sup> However, Dundas had little success with his

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<sup>80</sup> W.B.L. Dawson, Colonial Office note, 23 October 1939. CO23/680/7.

<sup>81</sup> H. Beckett, Colonial Office note, 9 October 1939, CO23/688/4. Jarrett, the Administrator, outmaneuvered them by using powers granted in the Emergency Powers Act.

<sup>82</sup>*The Mirror*, 13 June 1939. Reported in England to show how awful the Bahamian ruling class were.

<sup>83</sup> Guy Murchie, Trinidad, to Sir Cosmo Parkinson, 4 April 1940. CO23/703/7.

<sup>84</sup>W.B.L. Dowson, Colonial Office note, 3 May 1940, CO23/703/7

social reforms, not managing to persuade the House to introduce a development and welfare programme. The Legislative Council refused the small sum required for a survey of the educational system by an expert. Poynton at the Colonial Office declared in exasperation: “The Bahamas legislature evidently just don’t want to do anything, and won’t do it”.<sup>85</sup> It even drained funds from the Civic Centre, which Lady Dundas had established ten years before to provide courses of instruction in such areas as domestic science to enable Bahamians to fill posts in hotels and private residences, previously filled by imported labour. About two days after Lady Dundas had made a public appeal for the Centre, “the enlightened & gallant legislators cut the vote for that Centre”.<sup>86</sup> Beckett noted “the Bay Street gang” distrusted efforts to improve the conditions of blacks. Arthur Mayhew suggested: “Bahamas (and Barbados) really need – and deserve – a dictator”.<sup>87</sup>

Instead of a dictator The Bahamas got the Duke of Windsor as Governor. At the end of 1940, the Duke wrote that he had decided, with the advice of the Executive Council, that the present circumstances of the Colony did not justify any application for assistance under the Colonial Development and Welfare Act.<sup>88</sup> This must have been music to the ears of the Councillors! It did not go down so well in the Colonial Office. It was noted that the Bahamian politicians have “unquestionably” regarded themselves as the “Opposition” since “ever”, “though in fact there is nothing to oppose in a system under which the Executive is in a minority”. The memorandum continued: “Thus a fundamental fact which it is necessary to recognise is that there is no Government in the Bahamas competent to decide upon and carry out a policy of development and improvement”.<sup>89</sup> Dowson remarked in Colonial Office correspondence that the Bahamas House of Assembly “represents nobody but the ‘merchant princes’ of Nassau”. It “is elected in a manner reminiscent of the worst excesses

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<sup>85</sup>A. Poynton, Colonial Office note, 21 February 1939, CO23/649/10.

<sup>86</sup>H. Beckett, Colonial Office note, 28 April 1939, C.O.23/682/9-10. Beckett, on his visit to The Bahamas, had been impressed by the Civic Center. There may have been other underhand goings on. Beckett “heard in Nassau that one reason why the House of Assembly cut the votes for the Dundas Civic Centre was that it had been taken out of the hands of this select circle” i.e. the Bahamas Chapter of the Imperial Order of the Daughters of the Empire (H. Beckett, Colonial Office note, 24 August 1939, CO23/686/2).

<sup>87</sup>A. Mayhew, Colonial Office note, 22 February 1939, CO23/649/10.

<sup>88</sup>Duke of Windsor to Lord Lloyd, confidential, 23 December 1940, CO23/712/13.

<sup>89</sup>Memorandum on Constitutional, Financial and Economic Position in Relation to Development in the Bahamas, CO23/712/16-22.

of the unreformed Parliamentary system of this country in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and in performance shows itself to be irresponsible, crass & malignant”.<sup>90</sup> Beckett wrote in the margin in the same file: “Govt. of the people, by Bay Street, for Bay Street”.<sup>91</sup>

### Attack on Bay Street

The working classes suffered several impediments to successful organisation. Not the least, was the preoccupation with earning a living in a country where mere subsistence was the norm. Many Bahamians could only succeed in this by emigration, mainly of a temporary nature, either abroad or to other islands. Labour organisations were slow to form in The Bahamas because of the lack of communications between workers in different islands, the casual and uncertain nature of employment and the lack of charismatic leadership. When working men and women did organise it was more likely to be in a Benefit Society or a Lodge. To form a labour union was difficult because of the lack of modern trade union legislation, workers having to still operate under the nineteenth century Combination Laws and Friendly Society legislation. Cyril Stevenson, a white, more radical commentator, pointed out in 1935 that the reason for the poor economic condition of most labourers was the lack of “organised labour”, but he emphasised that they needed protective legislation.<sup>92</sup>

One of the earliest unions in The Bahamas had been formed in Inagua in 1934. This was organised by Theodore Farquharson, the son of a storekeeper originally from Acklins Island, who had lived in the USA for about fourteen or fifteen years, but had returned to Inagua in 1928. According to the Acting Attorney General, sent to the island after an outbreak of disorder in early 1936, Farquharson was “an orator of the Hyde Park tub thumper type with somewhat more education than the rest of his coloured brethren in Inagua”.<sup>93</sup> He had led a strike in 1934 against local coloured merchant Arthur Symonette,

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<sup>90</sup> W.B.L. Dowson, Colonial Office note, May 1940, CO23/712/3-5.

<sup>91</sup> H. Beckett, margin note, 16 May 1940, CO23/712/7.

<sup>92</sup> Cyril Stevenson, letter, *The Tribune*, 18 September 1935.

<sup>93</sup> Report by Acting Attorney General, G.W. Henderson, on Disorder of January 1936, CO23/638/126-131.

who had begun to rework the salt pans in a small way. Symonette notoriously exploited the workers, paying only one shilling per day and practically compelling people to take up stores from his shop. He was also the agent for the Royal Netherlands Steamship Company, again using a credit and truck system that left the stevedores and seamen with little, if any, money at the end of their voyage. The Acting Attorney General considered that Symonette, who was also the Justice of the Peace, feared Farquharson and the Union. He sensed “an undercurrent of feeling” in 1936. The disorder that had caused his presence that January was connected with the hiring of stevedores, controlled by Symonette. Farquharson had called a union meeting to prevent the hiring of Theo Mullings, a foreman from Turks Island, whose services had been specifically requested by the company. Employers in Inagua usually preferred the Turks Island labourers as they found them more reliable and hard working. Mullings and the foreman at the salt pans were particularly resented. Two men were slightly injured in the disorder and eight subsequently prosecuted. This first attempt at labour unionism came to a swift end in Inagua when Farquharson unsuccessfully sued the new owner of the salt pans, Josiah Erickson, for defamation of character. But it was a sign of the need for labour representation on an island known for its unemployment problems, low pay and credit and truck systems. It also demonstrated the ability of employers to divide labourers and the difficulty unions faced due to illegality under the Combination Laws and an unsympathetic Government.

That labour in The Bahamas needed leadership could not be denied. Cyril Stevenson had identified the two problems as unemployment and low wages, although underemployment could be added. Stevenson claimed in 1935 that eighty percent of the population was unemployed; fifteen percent employed with wages so low that they could barely exist and the remaining five percent was favoured. He pointed out that the employers benefited by the competition for jobs and low waged workers were often working in hazardous conditions.<sup>94</sup> Evidence of the desperate search for jobs in Nassau came in July 1935 when between three and four hundred men turned up seeking work on the construction of the Prince George Hotel; when it became obvious most would be disappointed, a disturbance broke out, which the police had to disperse.<sup>95</sup> A similar occurrence took place

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<sup>94</sup>Cyril Stevenson, letter, *The Tribune*, 18 September 1935.

<sup>95</sup>*The Tribune*, 15 July 1935.

later the same year when eight hundred turned up for forty advertised jobs at Fort Charlotte.<sup>96</sup>

Percy Christie, brother of the powerful merchant and estate agent, Harold Christie, formed a labour union in Nassau in 1936. At a meeting of the newly formed union in Grant's Town in October members decided to protest the minimum wage paid to labour in Nassau.<sup>97</sup> By 1937 the Union had about eight hundred members.<sup>98</sup> The annual membership fee was one shilling and there was a weekly subscription of one penny. However, the skilled labourers were uninterested in joining the Union and unskilled labourers may have found the subscription rates high. In June 1938, at a meeting of the Bahamas Labour Union, Dr. C. R. Walker chided members for their apathy. Governor Dundas had been invited to speak and he claimed the Government was alive to the situation of Labour. He reminded members of what the Government had already achieved: a Labour Wage Board; Minimum Wages Act (1936), which established a rate of four shillings per day for unskilled workers in Government employment; Labour Department under a senior officer; a strong Welfare Committee. He also acknowledged the difficulties of Labour, particularly the problem of organising so many casual workers. He welcomed the Union since he realised there had been a lack of leadership of the people. Another speaker was attorney and House member, Kenneth Solomon, who was surprisingly sympathetic, advocating shorter hours, higher wages and better living conditions. He blamed "trouble" on employers, who lacked sympathy. He believed the Union should make itself heard if Labour was underpaid, but he exhorted the Union to carry out its aims with respect for constituted authority.

Also, in 1938, two acts to protect young workers were passed: Employment of Children Prohibition and Employment of Young Persons Acts. But a measure for Workmen's Compensation was sorely needed. There was an official grant of ex-gratia payment by Government to employees who had met misfortune, but this was not a definite right and it did not cover those in private employment. Dundas had intended to introduce a Workman's Compensation Bill in 1939, but he felt it would receive strong opposition from

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<sup>96</sup>Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream*, vol.2, 270.

<sup>97</sup>*The Tribune*, 23 October 1936.

<sup>98</sup>Percy Christie's evidence, *Inquiry into Disturbances in the Bahamas, June 1942*, 15. Department of Archives, Nassau.

the House and the time was “inopportune” for bringing forward non-urgent contentious issues.<sup>99</sup>

Major Orde-Browne, in his survey of labour conditions in The Bahamas, acknowledged that trade union organisation was at present in an embryo form and that a trade union law must be adopted to bring the Colony into line with new legislation elsewhere in the West Indies.<sup>100</sup> Dundas had realised the giant obstacle in his way to securing this vital legislation. The Duke of Windsor “noted with interest” the strenuous opposition of the Leader for the Government in the House to the suggestion that the Colony should pass trade union legislation on the lines of the existing law in Jamaica.<sup>101</sup> That gentleman was the “sympathetic” Kenneth Solomon!

The Bahamas Labour Union struggled on, with a change in leadership from the white Percy Christie to Charles Rhodriguez, a black merchant. Skilled workers by 1942 were also keen to start a union and in May a Federation of Labour was proposed. The formation of the Federation, however, was overtaken by the events of the Burma Road Riot of 1942.

#### The Inagua Disturbance, 1937

In August of 1937 a disturbance occurred in Inagua.<sup>102</sup> As it happened, it did not have any connection to Farquharson’s Labour Union, which seemed to have dissolved. Two brothers, George and Willis Duvalier, went on a shooting rampage, wounding the island’s Commissioner, Dr. Arthur Fields; a Nassau detective, Corporal Edey; and the owner of the West India Chemical Company Limited, Josiah Erickson. These three and a few American employees of the Ericksons were forced to take refuge in the Ericksons’ residence. The two brothers murdered a local employee of the Company, regarded by them as an informer to the Ericksons. They set afire the Wireless Station, the Ericksons’ store, the salt house and the Commissioner’s Residence. During the 20 and 21 August, after the Commissioner and his

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<sup>99</sup>Charles Dundas to Malcolm MacDonald, no.217, 25 September 1939. CO23/682/21-22.

<sup>100</sup> Report of Major Orde-Browne on Labour Conditions in the West Indies: The Bahamas, 1939, CO23/682/31. Unions were legalised in Jamaica in 1919 and the law modernised in 1938. They were legalised in 1932 in Trinidad.

<sup>101</sup>Duke of Windsor to Lord Lloyd, confidential, 23 December 1940, CO23/712/13.

<sup>102</sup> See Report of the Events at Inagua Prior to and Subsequent to August 19<sup>th</sup>, 1937, CO23/618/33-39; a letter from D. Arthur Fields, Commissioner, to Colonial Secretary, 6 September 1937, CO23/618/39-55 and newspaper reports in *The Tribune*, 20 August to 4 September 1937. See also Gail Saunders, “The 1937 Riot in Inagua, The Bahamas”, *New West Indian Guide* 62(1988), 129-45 (subsequently republished in Gail Saunders, *Bahamian Society after Emancipation* (Kingston: Ian Randle, 1990). 92-103).

party had left Inagua,<sup>103</sup> the Duvaliers controlled Matthew Town demanding food, ammunition etc. They terrorised inhabitants, holding up people for money. Eventually they too left the island; they were arrested in Haiti in October.<sup>104</sup>

At first this disturbance does indeed look, as the Acting Colonial Secretary believed, “the work of the two men Duvalier alone”.<sup>105</sup> The Acting Governor, Jarrett, agreed that the disturbance was entirely “due to the activities of two persons named Duvalier, and these two persons were at no time actively assisted by any others of the inhabitants of Matthew Town”.<sup>106</sup> There did not appear to be any organisation behind the disturbance; it appeared “to have occurred merely haphazardly”.<sup>107</sup> As for the suggestion, mainly of the world press, that a riot had occurred, the Government categorically denied this. The Acting Colonial Secretary emphasised that it was “a case of the two men Duvalier running amok” and the Police Commandant, who had also been among the relief party, firmly stated: “There had been no riot or labour disturbances”.<sup>108</sup> Thus, it would seem to be difficult to make a case for this disturbance to be a symptom of discontent among Bahamians. Yet, there was evidently more to the incident than met the eye. The week after the events Dr. Fields wrote: “While it is true that there was no actual riot it is equally true that had the Duvaliers been killed or dangerously wounded there would have been a riot and the hitherto passive band of terrors would suddenly become very active”.<sup>109</sup> The Band of Terrors was a local gang, to which the Duvaliers had belonged. The presence of such a gang and the threat it could pose

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<sup>103</sup>The Erickson party had proceeded out to sea in a launch in the hope of meeting a steamer and being able to get a further message to Nassau. No steamer had come by so towards afternoon they had turned back to Inagua. The boat’s engine had broken down and they had drifted away, arriving in Cuba four days later. There they were arrested and imprisoned. They were not released until 30 August, by which time the Acting Colonial Secretary was in control at Inagua and the settlement was returned to normal.

<sup>104</sup>The Duvaliers were brought back to Nassau on 12 October; convicted of the murder of John Munroe; sentenced to death on 3 November and duly executed on 22 November

<sup>105</sup>The Report of the Events at Inagua, CO23/618/33-39.

<sup>106</sup>J. Jarrett, Administrator, to W.G.A. Ormsby-Gore, 17 September 1937, confidential, CO23/618/189-201.

<sup>107</sup>Memorandum in Reply to Letter dated 25 October, 1937. Mr. A.W. Erickson Sr. to Secretary of State for the Colonies & Enclosures, CO23/638/60-74.

<sup>108</sup>Charles P. Bethel, Acting Colonial Secretary, Report on Disturbances at Inagua, CO23/618/204-214; Report of R.A. Erskine-Lindop, Commandant, CO23/618/225-228.

<sup>109</sup>D. Arthur Fields to Colonial Secretary, 6 September 1937, CO23/618/39-55.

was evidence of the degree of lawlessness in Inagua. Fields had deliberately not ordered the Americans to shoot the Duvaliers, even though he knew them to be murderers, armed and dangerous, because of his fear of a riot. He pointed out to authorities that while the inhabitants had shown no willingness to help the Duvaliers, they had made no effort to stop them. The violent rampage and the negative assistance were evidence of a general malaise in Inagua in the late 1930s.

A letter from Miami, published in *The Tribune* in September 1937, described the situation there:

I left my home at Inagua some years ago because nothing seems to go straight there. From information I have been able to gather from Inaguans who come to Miami from time to time, all the old grievances -and a few more- still render the people unhappy in the midst of all the rosy prospects you describe in your editorial on the "riot". The Government has persistently closed its eyes to the situation and I hope that this unhappy event will result in a thorough investigation...As little as I like America I would far rather live in this country than at British Inagua under the conditions that forced me to leave home.<sup>110</sup>

The disturbance registered the serious social tensions and the Government's lack of concern and intervention. Some of the tensions were attributable to the presence of the West India Chemical Company, owned by the American Erickson family, which had begun operations in January 1936. "The presence of the Ericksons was viewed with some degree of suspicion and hostility by Inaguans of prominence for the reasons that the new enterprise was taking from such persons their monopoly as employers with consequent loss of influence".<sup>111</sup> In turn the Ericksons complained of "local feudal practices" dominated by a handful of local "bosses".<sup>112</sup> The main local boss was Arthur Symonette who controlled job opportunities on the steamships and, for a short while, on the salt pans. Contrary to the law, he perpetrated a truck system, whereby "the victims suffer simply this: 'You want my job? Buy from me, regardless of the price' ".<sup>113</sup> Theo Mullings, a foreman on the steamships, gave a signed statement describing how all stevedores were required to become indebted to Symonette.<sup>114</sup> As a consequence of the debt peonage, pilfering from the ships' cargoes was

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<sup>110</sup> "Inaguan", Miami, Florida, letter, *The Tribune*, 4 September 1937.

<sup>111</sup>J. Jarrett to W.G.A. Ormsby-Gore, 17 September 1937, confidential. CO23/618/189-201.

<sup>112</sup>Account of J. Erickson, President and Treasurer of West India Chemicals Limited, 23 October 1937, CO23/618/77-113.

<sup>113</sup>Cyril Stevenson, letter, *The Tribune*, 18 September, 1935. See page 316.

<sup>114</sup>Sworn Statement of Theodore Mullings, September 1937. CO23/618/64-66.

commonplace as the only way to make profit on the trips. Symonette was one of the receivers of stolen goods. The Ericksons were resented because they offered alternative employment. Moreover, the Ericksons set up their own store, charging lower prices and giving limited credit to some employees (although they paid strictly cash wages). Early in 1937 there was a series of strikes, according to the Ericksons, instigated by the old leaders, resentful of the Company's intrusion.

At first, the Company employed mainly Inaguans, but Erickson claimed they showed reluctance for regular work and he replaced them by men from nearby islands, finding them more hard-working.<sup>115</sup> Dr. Fields wrote that some "natives" expressed unwillingness to work for the Ericksons because the wages were too low, whereas unskilled labourers from Acklins, Long Cay and Mayaguana accepted such rates. The Inaguans incited the migrants to strike for more pay, but the islanders would not listen, whereupon locals began to threaten the "visitors" to go home. Fields implied that the Inaguans were irritated because their own opportunity for employment had faded away.<sup>116</sup> Tension between Company employees and individuals associated with Arthur Symonette had culminated in a fight and, in the end a free for all, between the respective supporters of George Duvalier and Charles Kaddy, an American Company employee, in December 1936. Employees were threatened, but were too frightened to make any formal accusations.

Does the 1937 disturbance in Inagua fit into the pattern of labour uprisings taking place in the British West Indies at the end of the 1930s?<sup>117</sup> After all, the months of July and August had also witnessed riots in Trinidad and Barbados. Certainly, economic and social pressures were at the root of all of the protests. During the previous two decades there was unemployment and underemployment in Inagua. The island had never recovered from the blow of the interruption to the shipping trade in World War One. Only the Royal Netherlands Steamship Company had resumed its hiring of stevedores at Matthew Town. Agriculture was difficult in the arid climate of Inagua and the sisal industry had almost disappeared. The salt industry had lain dormant for years, until the mid-1930s. The only

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<sup>115</sup>Account of J. Erickson, President and Treasurer of West India Chemicals Limited, 23 October 1937, CO23/618/77-113.

<sup>116</sup>Dr. Fields to Colonial Secretary, 6 September 1937, CO23/618/39-55.

<sup>117</sup>See Bolland, *On The March*. He includes The Bahamas in his study, 128-131.

other way to make money was by smuggling rum, tafia and other goods from Haiti and Cuba.<sup>118</sup> The population had fallen dramatically; according to the Census, the population in 1931 was only 667, compared to 1,453 in 1901(not including workers temporarily absent abroad, approximately 1000 more). With prospects so gloomy, many residents had left Inagua to seek employment elsewhere, but there were less employment opportunities abroad, especially in Panama, Cuba and the USA. The advent of the Ericksons' salt company had actually improved the situation in Inagua over the previous eighteen months, although some local men had spurned jobs there.

There was the suggestion that the Ericksons did not pay enough and some Inaguans were refusing to work for such rates. Low rates of pay were a common complaint of workers in events leading up to disturbances in other islands. There is some contradiction in the Government papers as to the validity of this claim. Jarrett emphasised in his despatch to the Secretary of State that labour requirements were not met locally because of the low wages offered by the Company.<sup>119</sup> Josiah Erickson, on the other hand, claimed that his Company had increased the prevalent local rates of pay by sixpence to two shillings per day. Nor did the Company indulge in paying off labour "in kind" or any system of unorthodox reductions; there was full cash payment at the end of each week.<sup>120</sup> Charles Bethel wrote in his report that there appeared to be no agitation in respect of wages and the only dissatisfaction appeared to be with regard to payment of overtime, which was paid at the same rate as in the regular day.<sup>121</sup> Extra pay was given at the Company's discretion and there was a system of piecework where men could sometimes earn as much as six shillings per day.<sup>122</sup> But this was uncertain and subjective. Bethel also mentioned that Inaguans preferred to work as stevedores, where they received food in addition to their two shillings per day and they had the opportunity to pilfer from the cargo. Significantly, after the August

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<sup>118</sup> Reginald Alexander, leader of the Band of Terrors, was a runner to Haiti, buying local rum for 1s a gallon, selling it to a local saloonkeeper for 5s a gallon, who sold it to the public for 3s a pint. Alexander, probably backed by Symonette, decided to set up a rival saloon, leading to feuds between the local 'bosses'.

<sup>119</sup>Jarrett to Ormsby Gore, 17 September 1937, CO23/618/189-201.

<sup>120</sup>Account of J. Erickson, 23 October 1937, CO23/618/77-113.

<sup>121</sup>C. Bethel, Report on Disturbance at Inagua, CO23/618/204-214.

<sup>122</sup>Account of J. Erickson, 23 October 1937, CO23/618/77-113.

disturbance, the Ericksons agreed to pay the recognised Government wage of two shillings and sixpence per day.<sup>123</sup>

What is evident is that there were limited employment opportunities in Inagua but there had been prospects of more with the advent of the Ericksons. Consequently there was disappointment in what was offered by the Company. Bahamians from other islands and Turks Islanders were more willing to accept the conditions and this further aggravated Inaguans. Moreover, despite Erickson's claim to be paying wages above local rates, both his Company and the Royal Netherlands Steamship Company paid low rates of pay at two shillings per day and it must have been difficult to make ends meet for most families. Major Orde-Browne, in his investigation of labour conditions in the West Indies, estimated that the cost of living in the Out Islands was about eleven shillings per week.<sup>124</sup> Thus Inaguans employed by these two companies were barely earning enough to cover costs. Moreover, since Orde-Browne's calculations were based on subsistence farming being practised, difficult in Inagua, and since most local stores charged high prices and a blatant truck system was in operation there, depressed living conditions must have resulted.

Unemployment, underemployment and encouragement of smuggling and pilfering bred lawlessness, particularly among the young men. This state of affairs was furthered by weak application of the law and order by a succession of Commissioners, who were apparently manipulated by the local gang members.<sup>125</sup> The unemployed idled away their time at local stores or bars. George and Willis Duvalier were typical. The Police Commandant wrote: "The Duvaliers were of an uneducated type, did practically no work, spent their time shooting wild pigs, ducks etc. They were given to bullying people, and were of a surly nature".<sup>126</sup> A conscientious police constable had kept these young men in check until 1937 when Constable Saunders replaced him. The latter proved incompetent, inactive and in collusion with the local law-breakers. Thus, there was a general laxity in the

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<sup>123</sup>J.A. Hughes, Report on Inagua Disturbances and Present Conditions, 23 February 1938, CO23/638/30-40.

<sup>124</sup>Report of Major Orde-Browne on Labour Conditions in the West Indies: The Bahamas, 1939, CO23/682/23-35.

<sup>125</sup>Reginald Alexander had threatened Fields' predecessor, Commissioner Bartlett, with retribution from his gang if he did not receive mild punishments for misdemeanours.

<sup>126</sup> Report of Erskine-Lindop, CO23/618/225-228.

observance and enforcement of law in Inagua. Dr. Arthur Fields combined the offices of Medical Officer and Commissioner and had no administrative or judicial experience. However, both the Ericksons and John Hughes considered he was resented by the local criminals because, under his jurisdiction, there was a general tightening up in the handling of judicial cases and stiffer penalties imposed.

The island society was clearly unstable and local leadership unsavoury. The advent of the Ericksons, eager to take up the role of benevolent, but dominant, bosses, with local administration being played to their tune, made the situation more complex. There was an anti-American sentiment in the scenarios played out in 1936 and 1937. These could have also been anti-white reactions. Mary Moseley had discussed the question of race with Robinson at the Colonial Office; she agreed that some degree of colour prejudice on Josiah Erickson's part might have been involved, but she attached little importance to it.<sup>127</sup> Whether there was a race element in the bad blood between the Duvaliers and the American employees, there is no evidence one way or the other.

Erickson had used the threat of replacement by machinery as a means to stop industrial action. The advent of industrialisation and modernisation was one reason for discontent in the workplaces of the British West Indies. Beckett of the Colonial Office made an astute observation of the Inagua situation: "The impact of modern business methods on a community used to, and set in, old fashioned ways (however inefficient and corrupt) is liable to produce an explosion".<sup>128</sup> The Ericksons were not sensitive to island sensibilities or worker demands. They had probably expected to run Matthew Town on the lines of a company town of the New South. In the 1935 election Erickson put up Charles Sargent, an employee, to stand against Etienne Dupuch. He told Dupuch he wanted his "own man" to "represent him".<sup>129</sup> The Ericksons also appeared to expect to be able to dictate to the Government the manner in which the administration of Inagua was to be conducted. Beckett alluded to the character of the American businessman, "of whom the Ericksons are quite a good type", who "expects as a matter of course that Govt. will do what he tells them in any

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<sup>127</sup>K.E. Robinson, Note in Connection with the Disturbance at Inagua, CO23/618/318-319.

<sup>128</sup>H. Beckett, Colonial Office note, 4 June 1938, CO23/638/4-5.

<sup>129</sup>*The Tribune*, 5 June 1935. Interestingly, he had the support of Theo Farquharson, the union leader.

particular”.<sup>130</sup> On Governor Dundas’ visit the next year he notably commented that the people of Inagua saw the benefits of “an efficient and monied commercial concern”.<sup>131</sup> He was satisfied both parties had learnt their lessons.

The Colonial Office saw the negligence of the Government as a contributory factor to the disturbance.<sup>132</sup> However, the Commissioner was giving an impression of peace and quiet in his periodic reports.<sup>133</sup> The interests of the Out Islands were more or less ignored in the House of Assembly. Ironically the representative for Inagua in this period was Etienne Dupuch, but he was not making a special case for the island and painted a somewhat idyllic picture of the prospects for Inagua under the Ericksons’ company in an editorial of 25 August 1937. Instead Dupuch drew attention to the sowing of seeds of discord and dissension among working people by communist propagandists.<sup>134</sup>

Arthur Lewis wrote in 1938: “Undoubtedly each occasion [of social disturbance] has had its own special features acting as the immediate spur to activity. But underlying it all have been certain factors common to all islands”.<sup>135</sup> Inagua had certain common experiences with other islands, but its uprising was so different that contemporary commentators, like Lewis, and the especially appointed Royal Commission, headed by Lord Moyne, did not include The Bahamas in their surveys.

The Inagua “riot” was an isolated phenomenon, in so far as it was not immediately

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<sup>130</sup>Ibid. After the disturbance the Company dictated a number of demands to the Colonial Government for immediate sanction. If the Government failed to act, it threatened immediate closure of the plant and discharge of all workers. J. Erickson to C.E. Bethel, 3 September 1937, CO23/618/57-58. The Colonial Government refused to be bamboozled and would not concede the right of the Company to make such demands on administrative matters. C.E. Bethel to J. Erickson, 7 September 1937, CO23/618/174-176. In the event, the Company remained in operation.

<sup>131</sup>Charles Dundas to Malcolm MacDonald, confidential, 23 August 1938, CO23/638/9-10.

<sup>132</sup>Colonial Office memorandum, CO23/618/178-181 and A. Poynton, Colonial Office note, 1 June 1938, CO23/638/2-4.

<sup>133</sup>After the disturbance Fields claimed that there had been a state of unrest in Inagua from the time he had taken up his position, but he claimed not to have learnt of this until much later, some from hearsay, and he did not think conditions warranted special recommendations at the time. He denied having received any representation from the Ericksons suggesting a situation regarded by them as dangerous to themselves and their property. D.A. Fields to [no name], 17 September 1937, CO23/618/56.

<sup>134</sup>*The Tribune*, 25 August 1937.

<sup>135</sup>Arthur Lewis, “The 1930s Social Revolution” in Hilary Beckles and Verene Shepherd, eds., Caribbean Freedom: Society and Economy from Emancipation to the Present (Kingston: Ian Randle, 1993), 376.

followed by disorder in other islands and not taken up by a leader of any political or labour movement. This can be accounted for by the remoteness of Inagua from other centres of population, particularly Nassau, and the poor communications throughout the archipelago. Moreover, as seen above, labour organisation was weak even in Nassau and middle class or inspirational leadership was lacking. It was not a riot or a labour rebellion comparable to those concurrently happening elsewhere in the region. Beckett exclaimed: "What a small teacup to have all this storm in!"<sup>136</sup> But the incident was more than a lawless rampage. Bolland summarises the event thus:

Perhaps this incident is best understood, then, not merely as a clash of personalities, but as a microcosm of social change and social tensions, and that the conflict broke out between these particular people because they embodied those tensions.<sup>137</sup>

The Bahamas was experiencing those tensions in the 1930s in common with the other islands of the British West Indies.

#### Unrest in Other Parts of the Colony

Signs of distress had been faintly apparent in the 1935 disturbances among unemployed men seeking work. Evidence that the Inagua incident was not a wholly isolated event and the same worker discontent was present in other islands came in Robert M. Bailey's letter, dated 30 August 1937 and placed on the front page of *The Tribune*.

There seems to be a great deal of under cover unrest in our Colony. Burglary and incendiarism at Bimini; rioting and murder at Inagua; a seething cauldron in New Providence that any untoward circumstance might overturn.<sup>138</sup>

Yet, in June of the next year, Governor Dundas could still state assuredly: "I can discover no indication of any subversive movement or positive discontent".<sup>139</sup> He emphasised that the Inagua disturbance had had no influence in forming such a movement as it "was the outcome of a purely personal animosity". Perhaps Dundas was being too complacent or he did not have his finger on the pulse of community feelings. One month later he was expressing concern about just such discontent. He wrote of "persistent rumours of impending disorders

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<sup>136</sup>H. Beckett, Colonial Office note, 4 June 1938, CO23/638/4-5.

<sup>137</sup>Bolland, *On The March*, 128.

<sup>138</sup>*The Tribune*, 30 August 1937. The troubles in Bimini were not commented on by the Government.

<sup>139</sup>Charles Dundas to Cosmo Parkinson, 14 June 1938, CO23/652/75-79.

and even serious riot in the last few days". He then stated: "There is in Nassau a mob of perhaps 1,000 who may be potential hooligans if incited by mischief makers", consisting of "young loafers, criminals and riff raff of that type".<sup>140</sup> He contended this was the result of a constant influx of islanders seeking work in Nassau. He could have added that it was their frustration at not being able to find such work and the consequent idleness of these men that was a potential powder keg.

The disorder that ensued in September 1938 was mild. A crowd, eventually numbering nearly two hundred, gathered at Grant's Town Police Station in Nassau after the arrest of David Munnings of Meeting Street for drunk and disorderly behaviour. Stones and bottles flew and the crowd apparently enjoyed seeing policemen, including the Commandant and his Deputy, dodge missiles. It was judged to be "in festive rather than malicious mood". Only slight injuries resulted.<sup>141</sup> Was it coincidence that one of the regular columns (Here and There) of *The Tribune* featured "Dark Inagua Rumbblings" on the same day as the report on the Grant's Town incident? The writer warned that "we are not satisfied that conditions on the island are as smooth as they appear on the surface" and the Government should discover the cause of unrest.

In October Commander Langton Jones, Inspector of the Imperial Lighthouse Service in The Bahamas, filed a report regarding the security of establishments under his charge. He perceived unrest among the black population and a desire on their part to set up machinery to deal with labour discontent. He considered: "It is an indisputable fact that the labour unrest in Jamaica, Trinidad and British Guyana is reaching here".<sup>142</sup>

Major Orde-Browne's report on labour conditions came to a different conclusion. However Beckett of the Colonial Office, who also had first-hand experience of Bahamian conditions, believed Orde-Browne painted too rosy a picture of the position of labourers in the Colony.<sup>143</sup> Orde-Browne stated that the standard of living, particularly in housing, was

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<sup>140</sup>Extract from a Semi-Official Confidential Letter from Governor of the Bahamas to Sir Cosmo Parkinson, dated 11 July 1938, CO23/652/64.

<sup>141</sup>*The Tribune*, 21 September 1938.

<sup>142</sup>Extract from a Report dated 11 October 1938 received from Commander Langton Jones, R.N., Inspector of the Imperial Lighthouse Service, Bahamas, CO23/653/25-26.

<sup>143</sup>Report of Major Orde-Browne on Labour Conditions in the West Indies: The Bahamas, 1939, CO23/682/23-35. H. Beckett, Colonial Office note, 28 April 1939, CO23/682/9-10 and 13-14. Beckett

decidedly higher than that obtaining in the West Indies, and was enthusiastic about some of the low-cost houses that he had seen in Nassau, although he admitted there was some overcrowding in the shanty areas. Beckett, on the other hand, described Grant's Town as at least an eyesore, if not a slum. Other areas on the outskirts of Nassau, such as The Pond, and many Out Island settlements, such as those of spongers in Andros, suffered from haphazard planning, poor housing, and insanitary and over crowded conditions. Orde-Browne had limited overall, first-hand experience of The Bahamas and concentrated on Nassau.

He commented on the high birth rate and the high numbers of migrants from Out Islands crowding into Nassau. Governor Dundas was attempting to address the latter problem, but failed to get sufficient backing from the Legislature. Orde-Browne was also concerned about the high infant mortality rate in The Bahamas: in 1937 it was 143 infant deaths per 1,000 births for New Providence and 242 per 1,000 for the rest of the islands. The latter figure is testimony to the unhealthy conditions, as well as lack of adequate medical facilities in some islands. The prevalence of syphilis was a factor for high mortality rates. Diseases prevalent in The Bahamas were often a result of dietary deficiencies, yet Major Orde-Browne stated that the Bahamian labourer was well fed, although he admitted his diet was ill-balanced and lacking in essential vitamins.

He also described employment as fairly regular, yet other witnesses, including Government officials, frequently mentioned the casual nature of much employment, and he himself stated that those employed in tourism have three months of "good wages and liberal gratuities" followed by nine months' return to agriculture, fishing "or something". He dismissed unemployment as "not a serious problem in the Bahamas". One surmises a lack of thorough research into the numbers of unemployed and into the continuity of employment, as his statements do not seem to coincide with the general picture. The situation worsened from 1938. In 1938-9 the sponge beds suffered a catastrophic blight, which would have most serious effects on the spongers of Andros and Abaco. Even Orde-Browne acknowledged that when the public works that were in progress finished then a large number of workers would suffer. The outbreak of World War Two further damaged

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conceded his own experience of Bermuda might have coloured his comparisons, while Orde-Browne's experience was in the Caribbean islands.

building projects and adversely affected the tourist industry. This collapse “exacerbated the already serious unemployment problem”<sup>144</sup>, of which Orde-Browne seemed unaware.

There is not much in the report on the working conditions of Bahamian labourers. He did mention that catering to the tourist trade led to long hours, especially in shop-work. However, he did not consider it would need regulation since the majority of businesses were small concerns, employing predominantly family members. In fact, most of the shops that tourists would frequent were owned by white Bahamian or immigrant families (Greek, Chinese, Lebanese) and, outside of family, they employed, for the most part, white lower middle class women. The prospects for lower class, particularly black, assistants were negligible.<sup>145</sup> Orde-Browne made no comments on working conditions and hours for domestics and their ilk in hotels. Similarly, no consideration was given to work on sponge schooners or at salt pans.

Wage rates were supposedly higher in The Bahamas than the rest of the West Indies.<sup>146</sup> According to his figures, skilled workmen could earn considerably higher rates of pay, anywhere between six shillings and twenty-five shillings per day. This would be consistent with the scarcity of skilled labour in The Bahamas. There were slight differences between rates of pay for unskilled workers in Nassau and the Out Islands, but probably not as much difference as in the cost of living. Orde-Browne estimated the cost of living in New Providence to be about nineteen shillings per week and in the Out Islands to be about eleven shillings. The difference was probably insufficiently realised by the job seekers that flocked to Nassau, with consequent feelings of discontent. Although Governor Dundas was generally sympathetic towards the lower classes and was addressing the problem of the Out Islands’ underdevelopment, the Colonial Government was authoritative in dealing with the unemployed and “idlers” that it felt were a menace in Nassau. A more stringent Vagrancy Act was introduced into the autumn session of the 1938 House. Dundas wrote in explanation that the tourist trade had been conducive to “parasitical ways of earning a

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<sup>144</sup>Saunders, *Bahamian Society after Emancipation*, 105.

<sup>145</sup>*Ibid.*, 31. A few light-skinned coloured women found employment in downtown shops.

<sup>146</sup>Average rates of wages paid in various industries are to be found in Appendix I of Orde-Browne’s Report.

living”, added to which was the surfeit of work seekers coming from the Out Islands and creating “a floating population of loafers in the Town”.<sup>147</sup>

Orde-Browne would seem to have been over-sanguine about labour conditions in The Bahamas. Beckett agreed: “In general I put the danger of labour trouble in New Providence somewhat higher than does Major Orde-Browne”.<sup>148</sup> He believed that the fact that everybody was dependent on tourist traffic was a restraining influence, as well as the fact that no “inspired leader” had emerged. However, he warned: “Given a tourist slump and a Bustamante I wouldn’t be too confident”. In 1938-1939 neither materialised and The Bahamas was spared serious labour uprisings as experienced elsewhere in the British West Indies. There was labour discontent, generally for the same reasons as in Inagua: unemployment and underemployment; high cost of living and low pay; increasing race and class-consciousness; government negligence; lack of machinery to voice discontent. Tensions existed in Nassau, potentially dangerous to good order because of the large population, increased by migrants from out-lying islands desperate for work. In 1942 the spark was eventually ignited.

#### The Burma Road Riot, 1942

The riot started as a result of a labour dispute on “the Project”, an American scheme of work to build an air base in New Providence, that had commenced on 6 May 1942. Bahamian workers, expectant of a commensurate wage with workers on the American base at Exuma who had earned eight shillings per day,<sup>149</sup> were dissatisfied with 4 shillings per day. The Imperial and American Governments had apparently fixed this rate. The Bahamians had decided that the employers were passing them a “squeezed lemon”.<sup>150</sup> On Sunday afternoon of 31 May there was an outbreak of violence at the construction site at Satellite Field in the west of the island and the men went on strike. A little later there was a demonstration at Oakes Field and the police had to be summoned to restore order. In the

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<sup>147</sup>Charles Dundas to Malcolm MacDonald, no.178, 29 July 1938, CO23/655/8-11.

<sup>148</sup>H. Beckett, Colonial Office note, 28 April 1938, CO23/682/13-14.

<sup>149</sup>This may not have been the case. R.M. Bailey stated that workers at Exuma were also paid four shillings per day, which had disgruntled them too. Since this seems to have been Government policy, Bailey was probably correct. He too emphasises discontent at the wage rate but compared it to the wage paid for Bahamian workers in South Carolina in World War One. See Bailey’s account in “Riots in The Bahamas”, Special Supplement, *Colonial Fabian Bureau*, January 1943, 9.

<sup>150</sup>Randol Fawkes, *The Faith That Moved The Mountain* (Nassau: Nassau Guardian, 1979), 21.

evening there was a conference between representatives of the Pleasantsville Contractors, labour leaders (Charles Rhodriguez and Dr. C. R. Walker), and two representatives, A. F. Adderley and Harold Christie, at the home of John Hughes, the Labour Adviser and Senior Commissioner. After talks it was decided the workmen would report back, pending further conferences.<sup>151</sup>

The next morning, 1 June, Adderley and Rhodriguez addressed labourers from Satellite Field at "The Guns", West Bay Street, while Dr. Walker addressed those at Oakes Field. At eight o'clock Adderley reported to Hughes that workers at Oakes Field refused to work. They started to walk through the Southern District to Bay Street. A large crowd of hangers-on followed the workers, including women and children. A member of the Defence Force, writing in a private letter, commented: "All might have been arranged satisfactorily if the better type of workmen had not been accompanied by several hundred of the opposite type – rather a bad lot."<sup>152</sup> It started out quietly enough, but by the time they had reached town (between Frederick and Charlotte Streets) "the looters, who were armed with sticks, bottles and cutlasses, had worked themselves up to quite a pitch and started to destroy everything they could lay their hands on". Randol Fawkes, standing with his father to watch the procession of workers, reported they were shouting "Burma Road declare war on the Conchie Joe, Do nigger, don't you lick nobody, don't lick nobody".<sup>153</sup> They broke every store window in Bay Street and looted the merchandise. Two or three cars were damaged; a Coca-Cola truck was looted and its bottles either used as missiles or broken in the streets. Liquor stores were looted and drunkenness added fuel to the fire. The mob swept up and down Bay Street. Various citizens, mainly labour leaders, addressed a crowd mid-morning at the Southern Recreation Ground, trying to restore calm and order. (L.W. Young attempted to speak but was assaulted.) However, Milo Butler probably did more to further incite the crowd than pacify it.

There was delay in reading the Riot Act (not until after midday), but the police and British forces (Cameron Highlanders) finally maintained order at the point of the bayonet. The mob, numbering about two thousand, made its way to Grant's Town. They burned the

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<sup>151</sup>*Nassau Guardian*, 1 June 1942.

<sup>152</sup>E. Brownrigg, member of Nassau Defence Force, to B. Brownrigg, Trinidad, 5 June 1942. Records No. MI-32459, Confidential United States of America National Censorship, 28 July 1942, CO23/731/93-95.

<sup>153</sup>Fawkes, *Faith that Moved the Mountain*, 22.

Police Station there, a fire engine and an ambulance and they looted five bar rooms, the Post Office and Library and Cole's Pharmacy. Two rioters were killed and several badly injured.

The Defence Force patrolled Bay Street with fixed bayonets and had to keep constant control of the suburbs. Two emergency squads, with two tommy guns on each truck, loaded guns and fixed bayonets, were on constant alert. Martial law was declared and the whole island was under military control. There was a curfew; everybody had to be off the streets by eight o'clock. These measures eventually succeeded in keeping people indoors. But the actions angered the National Council for Civil Liberties in London, who felt strongly that the keeping of order on British territory should not depend on the use of the military.<sup>154</sup>

The Duke of Windsor was off the island, but *The Tribune* praised his calm efficiency on his return from Washington.<sup>155</sup> He held conferences day and night and evolved a policy, which he announced in a radio address on the Monday evening.<sup>156</sup> Work had resumed on the Thursday morning and since there had been no acts of violence for several days, the curfew was lifted. But there was still a ban on meetings or processions in public places, except with permission of the Police Commandant. The Governor reported that the Bahamas Federation of Labour had submitted proposals to the Government on 27 May 1942 and these were now being discussed. Labourers were to be given another shilling per day and a daily meal on the site. He declared his intention to secure a Commission of Enquiry from outside the Colony, as it would be able to "pass impartial and unbiased judgment". He told his listeners: "Now I have to sift out and disentangle what may be legitimate grievances from what may be the work of agitators who are, I believe, in great measure responsible for the mob violence".

The House of Assembly did not approve of an outside Commission of Enquiry. It believed it would whitewash the facts and Government officials would not be brought to book. Milo Butler reasonably suggested that if the House was not satisfied with the Commission Report, then it could appoint a committee, but not before. He believed the House was to blame as much as anyone, as on receipt of a message from the Governor last

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<sup>154</sup>Report of Meeting between National Council for Civil Liberties and Harold Macmillan. Under Secretary of State, CO23/731/102-104.

<sup>155</sup>*The Tribune*, 13 June 1942.

<sup>156</sup>Text of broadcast of 8 June 1942, telegram from Duke of Windsor to Secretary of State, 10 June 1942, CO23/731/144-147.

session asking them to set wages proportionate with changed living conditions, Speaker Kenneth Solomon had said it was not in the interests of the Colony to raise wages. But the Government was defeated over the Commission/Select Committee issue and the House appointed a Select Committee to make its own investigation.<sup>157</sup> An unpleasant situation arose as the Governor proposed to refuse to permit Government officials or secret papers to be made available to the House Committee before the official enquiry had opened, on the grounds that it would be prejudicial to the latter.<sup>158</sup>

The Duke did in fact change his original intentions as to the composition of the Commission, partly as he did not realise that an Act of The Bahamas required a commission of not less than three persons. Sir Allison Russell, K.C. (former Chief Justice of Tanganyika) was its president, but two respected local businessmen, Herbert McKinney and Herbert Brown were also appointed. The Commission began its enquiry on 5 October 1942; it held thirty-three sessions, hearing ninety-nine witnesses. The Select Committee held twenty meetings and heard twenty-one witnesses. The Colonial Office showed disdain towards the Report of the Select Committee and decided the best attitude was to ignore it.<sup>159</sup> Its signatories were Stafford Sands, F.H. Christie, Asa Pritchard and R.T. Symonette, all of whom had been part of a deputation which had demanded immediate declaration of martial law on the morning of the riot, and Percy Christie, the labour leader, whose store was left untouched in the riot. R.W. Sawyer, who had been forced against his will to join the Committee as a Government representative, refused to sign. As did T. A. Toote, the only non-white member of the Committee (if one discounts Symonette). The House adopted the report by fifteen votes to nine.

There were further incidents just after the riot. About sixty percent of the workers had returned to work and American soldiers were guarding these. There were insistent reports that American workers were creating discontent among native workers. On the evening after payday, two weeks after the riot, tempers grew very ugly in a drinking saloon

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<sup>157</sup>*The Tribune*, 11 September 1942. The only supporters of the Government were G. Higgs (leader of Government in House); R. Collins; R. W. Sawyer and M. Butler.

<sup>158</sup> Colonial Office note, 15 September 1942, CO23/731/14.

<sup>159</sup>Report of Select Committee of House of Assembly, 1 March 1943. CO23/734/39-51.

of doubtful reputation, although there was no serious trouble.<sup>160</sup> A week later a truck employed by the American contractor failed to stop on being challenged by the American sentry posted at the airfield and wounded two black men, one seriously.<sup>161</sup> Then a serious fire broke out in the commercial centre of town in the middle of the night. Considerable damage was done to stores and arson was suspected.<sup>162</sup> In the midst of all this, a general election took place, but no disorder occurred. The Duke of Windsor did anticipate possible trouble in Inagua and a plane was ready to take reinforcements there during the election if it was required.<sup>163</sup> On 11 September 1942 employees of the British Colonial Hotel went on strike for more wages, but returned to work with their demands not granted.<sup>164</sup> Thus, at the time the Commission and Select Committee were sitting tension was high.

Of course, the main cause of the riot was grievance felt by unskilled labourers as to wages, which the *Nassau Guardian* considered all sides felt was a legitimate grievance.<sup>165</sup> The editorial of the newspaper said there had been considerable evidence of such dissatisfaction, growing steadily over the previous ten days. Thus it felt the authorities had badly handled the matter. The Select Committee claimed Bert Cambridge had called on Labour Officer, John Hughes, and informed him that trouble was in the making.<sup>166</sup> The Duke of Windsor denied such knowledge, saying neither the Army Engineer nor the contractors had given the Government any indication of discontent.<sup>167</sup> Before the riot he had believed the employment of so many unskilled workers at four shillings a day “an unhoped

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<sup>160</sup>Telegram from Officer Administering the Government to Secretary of State, 17 June 1942, CO23/731/140.

<sup>161</sup>Telegram from Duke of Windsor to Secretary of State, 24 June 1942, CO23/731/123.

<sup>162</sup>Telegram from Duke of Windsor to Secretary of State, 28 June 1942, CO23/731/125. As it happened, the fire had no connection with the disturbances, being set by a white merchant who wanted to collect on his own insurance, *The Tribune*, 26 August 1942 (trial of Glen Rogers).

<sup>163</sup> Telegram from Officer Administering the Government to Secretary of State, 20 June 1942, CO23/731/130. There was also a strange cipher telegram to the War Office warning that a subversive group, Axis sponsored, might cause riots, combined with some kind of submarine activity, during the elections. Extract from Cipher Telegram from British Army Staff, Washington, to War Office, 12 June 1942, CO23/731/138.

<sup>164</sup>*The Tribune*, 11 September 1942.

<sup>165</sup>*Nassau Guardian*, 1 June 1942.

<sup>166</sup> Report of Select Committee, 1 March 1943, CO23/734/39-51.

<sup>167</sup>Duke of Windsor to Oliver Stanley, 30 January 1943, no.15. CO23/733/41-47.

for blessing". It was widely reported that some American foremen employed by the contractors had informed labourers that their wage was too low and the contractors would pay more if the local government would permit it.<sup>168</sup> This, understandably, caused a lot of unrest among those working at "The Project". Moreover, the Government made no clear statement on how the wage rates had been arrived at. There were a number of labour meetings in May, which make the Duke's claim of ignorance rather difficult to comprehend. On 20 May Samuel McPherson had presided over a labour meeting held to express dissatisfaction. On 22 May there was another one presided over by Charles Rhodriguez, the president of the Labour Union. It was decided there that representatives of various trades would prepare a statement to the Government on the question of wages. On 26 May a number of labour representatives met at A. F. Adderley's Chambers and then went to Hughes' office to discuss the matter. He asked them to put their demands and suggestions in writing and a letter was delivered on 29 May, two days before the outbreak of violence.<sup>169</sup>

The Russell Commission did emphasise the immediate cause of the disturbance was discontent over wages, particularly ignorance of the manner in which the rate of wages was fixed, but it also discussed the underlying economic causes.<sup>170</sup> The cost of living had risen over fifty percent since the war had begun.<sup>171</sup> The Select Committee preferred to ignore economic and social conditions and accused labour leaders of fomenting discontent. Its Report stated that the discontent was "fanned by the agitation of persons holding themselves out to be the friends or leaders of labour, but who were obviously seeking some personal advantage in this matter".<sup>172</sup>

In the broadcast that he made on 8 June, the Duke of Windsor had said: "I deplore certain actions and statements which have tended to turn what is purely a labour question into an attempt to stir up racial animosity".<sup>173</sup> Yet he had written on 4 June that there were

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<sup>168</sup>Duke of Windsor to Secretary of State, 4 June 1942, CO23/731/159.

<sup>169</sup>Report of Select Committee, 1 March 1943, CO23/734/39-51.

<sup>170</sup> Report of the Commission appointed to Enquire into Disturbances in the Bahamas in June 1942, 26 November 1942, CO23/732/34-111.

<sup>171</sup> Duke of Windsor to Viscount Cranbourne, no.87, 20 November 1942, CO23/756/19.

<sup>172</sup> Report of the Select Committee, 1 March 1943, CO23/734/39-51.

<sup>173</sup> Text of broadcast of 8 June 1942, telegram from Duke of Windsor to Secretary of State, 10 June 1942, CO23/731/144-147.

“strong racial feelings on both sides”.<sup>174</sup> The Russell Commission did not emphasize the “dangerous question of racial animosity”, which the Duke found understandable. However, he was quite forthright on the matter:

Discrepancy between American and the Bahamian wage rates was only an excuse to make a vigorous and noisy protest against the local white population. Regret to say the flame of local race antagonism is still fanned by certain section of Bay Street on the one hand as an excuse for the continuation of reactionary policy, and by negro agitation on the other hand, which, but for the presence of a large military force and considerable fire power would not hesitate to incite the negro population to further rioting of larger, better organised and more dangerous scale.<sup>175</sup>

A. F. Adderley disagreed: “In my view, the people of the Bahamas would never riot on the question of colour. There are differences but there is no hostile feeling. All Bahamians feel that they are equal in the island and we have here an excellent example of British justice in this colony. I would deprecate any thing to suggest that this trouble was a race question”.<sup>176</sup>

Dr. C. R. Walker concurred that this was “not a question of race, but wages”.<sup>177</sup> The Select Committee used the fact that the mob looted stores owned and operated by both white and black people without reference to race or colour as proof no racial hatred was evident.<sup>178</sup> However, Fawkes, a young black witness to events, wrote that everything that represented the white man’s wealth was assaulted. Alfred Stubbs burned the Royal Family in effigy and Napoleon McPhee destroyed the Union Jack, later saying: “I willing to fight under the flag. I willing even to die under the flag, but I ain’t gwine starve under the flag”.<sup>179</sup>

The Commissioners made a number of suggestions to remedy the widespread discontent and social and economic ills. They recommended passage of labour legislation, increased taxation, development of the Out Islands, fostering of education, instruction in birth control and extension of the secret ballot. The Duke basically agreed with the findings of the Commission, but expressed a few differences over the suggestions.

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<sup>174</sup> Duke of Windsor to Secretary of State, 4 June 1942, CO23/731/159.

<sup>175</sup> Telegram from Duke of Windsor to Secretary of State, 9 December 1942. CO23/732/32-33.

<sup>176</sup> A. F. Adderley ‘s evidence, Inquiry into Disturbances, 159.

<sup>177</sup> C. R. Walker’s evidence, *ibid.*, 475.

<sup>178</sup> Report of Select Committee, 1 March 1943, CO23/734/39-51.

<sup>179</sup> Fawkes, Faith That Moved the Mountain, 24.

F. A. Norman, Labour Adviser to Sir Frank Stockdale, the Comptroller of Development and Welfare in the West Indies, had been dispatched from London very swiftly to advise on the general labour situation. He reported that the Colony needed a properly developed trade union movement, combined with enlightened public opinion.<sup>180</sup> He had broadcast to the Bahamas' population before his departure exhorting "A fair day's work for a fair day's pay" as the basis for employment. He reminded listeners that so far the working classes in The Bahamas had not found it possible to express their hopes and aspirations in a manner that carried any weight in the Community. Thus he hoped for the development of reasonable trade unionism to allow collective bargaining to secure an "equitable and peaceful settlement of all outstanding issues". Trade unions would need proper organisation, appropriate rules, fixed dues paid regularly, discipline and wise and reliable leaders. The strike would then be the last, not the first, resort.<sup>181</sup> The Executive Council felt the Labour Advisory Board, appointed to deal with questions of labour on 'The Project', should become a permanent body and would meet the requirements of industrial and conciliation machinery.<sup>182</sup> The Executive Council agreed, in principle, to legislation for trade unions, Workmen's Compensation and limitation of shop assistants' hours of work. The Governor agreed to new labour laws too, but the Governor reminded the Secretary of State that there were no staple industries. He also made a gratuitous racist remark regarding the framing of Workmen's Compensation, saying employers had to be protected "from abuses such as self-inflicted injuries of which the Bahamian negro is likely to take advantage".<sup>183</sup> The House felt there was no choice in the matter of legalising trade unions and strikes and The Trades Union Act and Workmen's Compensation Act were duly passed in 1943. The Minimum Wage Act of 1936 had fixed wages for unskilled labourers in the building trade at four shillings per day; this was now raised to five shillings. One positive aspect of the 1942 Riot is that the House of Assembly was driven to pass things members would normally not have done. The Duke thought there was hope that members might be setting their house in order. In a conversation with the Speaker about the necessity of

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<sup>180</sup> F.A. Norman, Report on the Labour Position in the Bahamas (Nassau: Nassau Guardian, October 1942), CO23/756/21-28.

<sup>181</sup> Reported in *The Tribune*, 24 August 1942.

<sup>182</sup> Duke of Windsor to Oliver Stanley, no.15, 30 January 1943, CO23/733/41-47.

<sup>183</sup> Telegram from Duke of Windsor to Secretary of State, 9 December 1942, CO23/732/32-33.

amending obsolete legislation concerning the ballot and labour, he came to the conclusion: “Although a reactionary die hard and blindly averse to change in principle, [he] is very slowly but surely beginning to see reason”.<sup>184</sup> On the other hand, he emphasised members would still use every excuse to resist change. Moreover, the House would also pass the minimum legislation acceptable to the Imperial Government. For instance the Trades Union Act had several shortcomings: domestic servants and agricultural and horticultural workers were excluded from forming trade unions and funds of a trade union could not be applied in the furtherance of any political object. The Bahamas was still ineligible for assistance under the Colonial Development and Welfare Act of 1940 and the legislation was far short of satisfying “modern” standards. The Secretary of State warned that opposition to further amendment to bring in line with other Colonies would call into question whether the existing Constitution was appropriate.<sup>185</sup> There were other deficiencies in legislative provisions. The Workmen’s Compensation only offered a maximum of one hundred pounds in the event of death. The Old Age Pension Act only offered two shillings per week for those over seventy-five years. The Shop Assistants’ Hours Act fixed forty-five hours per week for women and fifty-nine hours for men and there was no protection against overwork.<sup>186</sup>

The majority of the Council favoured income tax, but an influential section of the House virulently opposed it. In September 1942, the Duke of Windsor, in his opening speech to the Legislature, called for consideration of direct taxation. House member Frank Christie immediately gave notice for a committee to consider ways and means of increasing the revenue, interpreted as a move to head off the plan.<sup>187</sup> The House Committee preparing the reply to the Governor’s Speech did not agree that the economic future of the Colony was insecure, the ‘usual head in the sand’ attitude. *The Tribune* warned the House that the days of the Aladdin’s lamp were gone. There was also always the tendency to devise Revenue policy that pushed up the cost of living with no visible plan in sight for large-scale

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<sup>184</sup> Extract from the Duke of Windsor’s letter dated 24 January 1944, CO23/734/10-11. For problems of passing progressive legislation see also Duke of Windsor to Oliver Stanley, private, 10 August 1943, CO23/734/20-22.

<sup>185</sup> Oliver Stanley to Duke of Windsor, no.60, 23 June 1943, CO23/734/24-25.

<sup>186</sup> *The Manchester Guardian*, 21 July 1943.

<sup>187</sup> *The Tribune*, 1 and 8 September 1942. The cost of living would have risen considerably under the House plan (estimated to 25% – 30% by Dupuch). Dupuch compared the situation to Barbados where the

employment for people in the future.<sup>188</sup> The lessons seem not to have been learnt.

In an effort to assist Out Island residents, the commissioners recommended cultivated lands in the islands should be reserved for Bahamian cultivators and safeguards provided against real estate dealers. The Duke considered land speculation by real estate firms had been overstated and in New Providence it had been beneficial to tourism. But in the Out Islands, and on Crown Lands generally, there would be no more sales unless there were definite guarantees of improvement.<sup>189</sup> The legislators had voted funds for Out Island development and he had established an Out Island Economic Advisory Committee to correlate plans to make islands self-supporting. Since development of Agriculture went hand in hand with Out Island development, an Agricultural Expert was appointed in 1942 and the House approved the appointment of a Director of Agriculture for five years' duration. To encourage inhabitants of Out Islands to stand for election to the House the commissioners considered a subsistence allowance be paid while they were in attendance at the House and travelling expenses be refunded. However, the Duke thought they should first find out if Out Islanders wished to be represented by their own residents and no reform emerged here.

The Duke stated while he was personally in favour of birth control from a humane and social welfare viewpoint, "negroes ignorantly view this beneficial measure as a subtle way of gradually exterminating their race." This suggestion was not pursued.

The majority of the Executive Council agreed the secret ballot should be made permanent in New Providence and extended to the Out Islands as soon as possible. They unanimously agreed the life of the House should be reduced to five years. To strengthen the Government's hand in the Assembly, the Russell Commission had suggested the Colonial Secretary or Attorney General or Treasurer should be an ex-officio member of the House without a vote. Most Council members agreed, but felt it would not be welcomed in the House. The House members would also be at their most resistant over extending the secret ballot to the Out Islands. They might tolerate Eleuthera and Abaco as an experiment

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income tax was at about the same level as in England at the outbreak of war. Other taxes were levied there but the cost of living was low as there was no tax on necessities and a rigid war time price control.

<sup>188</sup> *The Tribune*, 9 September 1942.

<sup>189</sup> Duke of Windsor to Oliver Stanley, no.15, 30 January 1943, CO23/733/41-47.

because of their substantial white populations. The Duke considered the question “delicate and fraught with difficulties” and he did not want to jeopardise his Out Island Development Scheme.<sup>190</sup> The secret ballot was declared permanent in New Providence in 1942; its extension to the Out Islands was not decided until 1946 and it did not come into effect until 1949.

The 1942 Riot can be compared more directly to the various disturbances in the West Indies of the late 1930s. The underlying causes of all the incidents were related to the distress being felt by the working classes; a more confident working class ready to voice grievances; inadequate mechanisms for negotiations between employer and employees and the unrepresentative colonial hierarchies. Grantley Adams defined the key problems of Barbados after the 1937 riot and strikes as “unemployment, low wages and rising prices”.<sup>191</sup> These were identical to the difficulties of Bahamian workers of the 1930s and 1940s, but they did not find expression in The Bahamas until the workers’ hopes of better wages were dashed in 1942. The Government had some sympathy with the complaints of Bahamian workers, in the same way that the Government of Trinidad felt workers involved there in the riots of 1937 had “legitimate grievances”, viz. the rise in the cost of living with no commensurate wage increase; blacklisting of workers; racial discrimination.<sup>192</sup> Also, despite the existence of the 1932 Trade Union Ordinance in Trinidad, its shortcomings meant there was no effective machinery for collective bargaining. Adams cited the lack of labour organisations for workers to air grievances in Barbados.<sup>193</sup> The same scenario was apparent in The Bahamas.

In Trinidad the employers, a la Bahamian legislators, blamed agitators. In fact, more militant radicals now led the labour movement there and they did succeed in politicising the class contradictions, more noticeable in Trinidad because of the presence of the oil

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<sup>190</sup> Extract from the Duke of Windsor’s letter dated 24 January 1944. CO23/734/10-11.

<sup>191</sup> Bolland, *On The March*, 119.

<sup>192</sup> Howard Johnson, “The Political Uses of Commissions of Enquiry (1): The Imperial-Colonial West Indies Context, The Forster and Moyne Commissions”, *Social and Economic Studies* 27,3 (1978):258. Also, Bolland, *On The March*, 95.

<sup>193</sup> Bolland, *On The March*, 119 -20.

industry.<sup>194</sup> The lack of industry and consequent proletarianisation of the working class in The Bahamas did not facilitate such agitation. The retardation of class consciousness and socialist responses to grievances in the Colony can be attributed to its economic structure.

While British officials held a fairly liberal attitude, they still ruthlessly suppressed the disorder at the same time as they sought to reform the situation. After the disturbances, Labour Departments and Advisors were recommended in the colonies and trade union advisors from England helped to establish moderate trade unions. The most significant result of the labour rebellion in Trinidad was probably the rapid development of trade unionism, quietly encouraged by the British authorities as a safeguard against extremism. Despite the new labour legislation in The Bahamas, trade unions took some time to develop into a significant force for change.

For Barbados it was the formation of the Barbados Progressive League under the moderate leadership of Grantley Adams that was the most significant consequence of the labour rebellion. The colonial government approved its stance and it worked, within constitutional limits, to reduce the power of the merchant-planter elite. Again The Bahamas did not immediately gather the momentum to form political parties to counter the white oligarchy. The leaders of the political parties leading the drive to responsible government and independence, such as Alexander Bustamante and Norman Manley in Jamaica, emerged from the 1938 struggles. No such leaders emerged in The Bahamas until the 1950s.

The main criticism of the Moyne Report from West Indian political activists was the failure to recommend far-reaching political reforms, the nature of which “involved nothing less than the self-determination and democratic governance of West Indian societies”.<sup>195</sup> The League of Coloured Peoples “made it clear that they held the ruling, predominantly white local political leadership responsible for existing conditions and had little confidence in their capacity for reform”.<sup>196</sup> To delay the inevitable demands for decolonisation the Imperial Government passed the Colonial Development and Welfare Acts of 1940 and 1945, designed to modernise social services in the West Indies. But the social changes unleashed

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<sup>194</sup>See Malcolm Cross, “The Political Representation of Organised Labour in Trinidad and Guyana: a Comparative Puzzle” in Cross and Heuman, Labour in the Caribbean.

<sup>195</sup>T. C. Holt, The Problem of Freedom: Race, Labour and Politics in Jamaica and Britain, 1832-1938 (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1992), 394.

<sup>196</sup>*ibid.*, 395.

by the various labour rebellions could not be contained by policies of economic and social transformations. Political change would be demanded. The Bahamas, under the rule of the merchants, did not draft development plans nor apply for assistance. No black leader had yet come forward to demand political change. British socialists favoured a different policy to tackle Bahamian problems.

Arthur Creech Jones of the National Council for Civil Liberties put forward the plea to Harold Macmillan, Under Secretary of State, that “in view of the continuous opposition of the Legislative Assembly to progressive labour legislation, consideration should be given to a revision of the constitution”.<sup>197</sup> Some within the Colony were coming to a similar conclusion. Etienne Dupuch lamented that after two hundred years of parliamentary government the Colony had little to be proud of. He lambasted politicians who wasted all their efforts shouting their heads off about rights and privileges. He concluded: “As time wears on and the problems of the Colony become more acute, the conviction must become more widespread that Crown Colony government would be preferable by far to a government controlled by pretentious, supercilious and selfish Bahamians”.<sup>198</sup> On another occasion he said that he saw the riot as “the natural outcome of the narrow economic, political and social policies pursued by a small but dominant political group in the colony during the last quarter century”. R. M. Bailey stated similar sentiments in the same publication: “In the last 25 years not ten constructive measures for the good of the people had emanated from the floor of the House of Assembly”. The Fabian Society publication gloomily predicted: “The situation is in fact almost incurable so long as the obsolete constitution, based on its present narrow franchise, continues.... The Bahamas will continue to be governed by a clique living in the artificial atmosphere of a luxury tourist resort, while the rest of the population is left to drag out a miserable existence with the very minimum of social services, economic encouragement or common amenities of life”. It challenged the idea that Britain could do nothing because of the nature of the constitution of The Bahamas – “there is nothing sacrosanct about colonial constitutions” – and demanded its revision.<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> Report of Meeting between National Council for Civil Liberties and Harold Macmillan, CO23/731/102-104.

<sup>198</sup> *The Tribune*, 27 June 1942.

<sup>199</sup> “Riots in The Bahamas”, Special Supplement, *Colonial Fabian Bureau*, January 1943. 9-12.

But no constitutional changes resulted from the 1942 Riot. In fact, the legislative changes were just enough to ensure the continuance of Bay Street rule.

But perhaps, there was some impact on the young black Bahamians, who were to form the vanguard of the movement for change in the 1950s and 1960s. Doris L. Johnson, the first black woman senator, wrote:

“Did that band of disgruntled labourers – Bahamian labourers – realize that their actions virtually constituted a declaration of war against the white minority in power? Did they foresee that this vigorous revolt against one of many practices of inequality would cause stirrings in the hearts of the poor and the not-so-poor Bahamian, in the young and the not so young Bahamian – in the people who were destined to change the course of the colony’s history? Could they know, as they protested that particular discrimination, that they had taken hold of a power – the power – of political awareness – which would eventually enable them to shape their own destinies?”<sup>200</sup>

In 1942 The Bahamas just needed someone to direct the political energy unleashed by the disturbances and confront the Nassau oligarchy. There was no-one yet willing or politically and educationally equipped to fulfil that role. The first challenge, although not coming until 1956, was against racial discrimination and politics in The Bahamas inevitably was polarised on colour, not class, lines.

### Racial Discrimination

That there was blatant racial discrimination in The Bahamas nobody could deny. However, the day to day and institutional separation of the races did not receive the same amount of comment as in the USA. Partly this was because the Bahamians did not erect signs and other concrete proof of an apartheid system. Partly it was because there were non-whites in the House, Councils, Government Offices and Law Courts, which lessened the impact of institutional racism. Partly it was because there were not the middle-class groups that there were in the United States battling against discrimination. Consequently the challenge in the 1930s to racial barriers was a muted one.

An important area of racial discrimination was in education. The majority of House members had no desire to educate the masses. Thus the rejection of an education expert in 1939, since he was likely to recommend something they had no desire to hear, was not

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<sup>200</sup>Doris L. Johnson, The Quiet Revolution in The Bahamas (Nassau: Family Islands Press, 1972), 15.

surprising. Beckett put it more bluntly: “The Governor does not mention the real ‘logic’ of the House. The House consists of Bay Street (after dinner). It is scared to death of educating its niggers to a point at which they would decide to overthrow the present oligarchy. It is so scared, in fact, that it does its best to close up all reasonable channels as pave the way for violence”.<sup>201</sup>

Non-whites did not have the option of a secondary education until the establishment of a Government High School in 1925. Even then the non-white pupils might have suffered slights from the first English headmaster, Albert Woods. Randol Fawkes remembers his sister, Coral, coming home from school from GHS to complain that Woods had insulted her by calling her a duffer – “You cannot learn. This is typical of you and your breed”.<sup>202</sup> Fawkes maintained: “Mr Woods’ main preoccupation was extolling the Englishman’s accomplishments and lampooning the cultures of Africa”.<sup>203</sup>

The school was struggling to keep its head above water in the 1930s, which led to Governor Clifford viewing the idea of a single secondary school open to all as more desirable. Queen’s College, run by the Methodist Church, was the best secondary school on the island at that time and able non-white students would have received more benefits in that school. It did not have a written colour bar but in practice it did not accept non-white students. The Governing Committee examined each application for admission on its merits “and the word ‘merits’ has a close reference to the question of colour”.<sup>204</sup> The headmaster informed the Acting Governor in 1941 that while there were no children “of pure negro blood”, the school population contained about eight percent who are not regarded as white children.<sup>205</sup> G. E. Hickman Johnson, General Secretary of Methodist Missions, acknowledged this state of affairs, shared the objections of Governor Clifford and pledged to support any efforts Clifford made to remove this discrimination. However, control over QC policy was vested in a local committee and not in the Methodist Church authorities. Thus

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<sup>201</sup> H. Beckett, Colonial Office note, 19 April 1939, CO23/675/5.

<sup>202</sup> Fawkes, *Faith That Moved the Mountain*, 1.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>204</sup> Davidson, Colonial Office note, 25 November 1941, CO23/722/13-14.

<sup>205</sup> Acting Governor, W.L. Heape, to Lord Moyne, 22 October 1941, CO23/722/29.

there was no prospect of a change.<sup>206</sup> What particularly irked the Colonial Office was that QC received a grant from the Colonial Government that amounted to thirty-five percent of its total cost in 1939.

There were also two Roman Catholic secondary schools, set up “for the purpose of providing a secondary education for white children of the better class”.<sup>207</sup> On application, the Bishop only approved those he regarded as suitable. He did add that in the past the admission of “dark coloured” children had been tried, but with the result that there was an immediate decrease in attendance of whites and a loss of fees, which the schools could not afford since they received no government grant. At present “some slightly coloured” children to whom there was no objection attended the school. Otherwise it too was all white.

It must have caused some raised eyebrows or amusement when Charles Bethell announced that the Nassau Theatre, recently destroyed by fire, was to be rebuilt as an “open” theatre. A letter from “Thumbs Down” soon appeared in *The Tribune*, complaining “Why don’t the proprietors of our places of business have the courage of their convictions and display signs designating to what class, creed or race they are catering?”<sup>208</sup> He claimed it would save the embarrassment that he had obviously experienced. To which “Old Timer” retorted that he must be a newcomer to Nassau, otherwise he would have known better. He mentioned the various advertisements appearing in the newspaper of the different hotels, restaurants, ice parlours etc. that are “open to the public and yet not opened”.<sup>209</sup> The principal theatre in Nassau, the Savoy, also owned by former House Member Bethell, was also ‘whites only’. Even Rutledge on a tour of the West Indies for the British Council could not deliver his lecture there, otherwise black Bahamians would have been deprived of the experience.<sup>210</sup>

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<sup>206</sup> Bede Clifford to J.H. Thomas, confidential, 15 February 1936, CO23/540/15-21.

<sup>207</sup> Acting Governor, W. L. Heape, to Lord Moyne, 22 October 1941, C.O.23/722/29.

<sup>208</sup> Thumbs Down, letter, *The Tribune*, 27 October 1937.

<sup>209</sup> Old Timer, letter, *The Tribune*, 28 October 1937.

<sup>210</sup> Extract from Rutledge’s Report to the British Council on His Tour in the West Indies, CO23/722/23.

A letter from A. F. Adderley, on behalf of Nassauvians “who still maintain pride for place and pride of race”, complained that a fund raising event of the Nassau Improvement Association, which he had at first supported, practised segregation.<sup>211</sup> This event was held in the New Colonial Hotel, which, along with the other large hotels designed for tourism, had a whites only policy. (They did not welcome Jews either.) Visitors were entertained by all black orchestras and bands, such as Bert Cambridge’s Orchestra and The Chocolate Dandies. The only entertainment halls where mixing of races occurred was in the nightclubs over-the-hill, such as the Zanzibar and Silver Slipper. Talented Bahamian musicians George Symonette and Blind Blake did satirize the social scene, but not in the sharp manner of the Trinidadian calypso, and they remained very popular among whites.

Sporting activities were similarly segregated, both for the sake of the local elite and tourists. The Nassau Lawn Tennis Club, the golf course at the Bahamas Country Club and the Royal Nassau Sailing Club provided top-notch facilities for their members. Ironically the ‘not-quite-white’ sailing enthusiasts were not welcome at the latter, leading Roland Symonette to form the Nassau Yacht Club, itself discriminating against the ‘definitely not white’!

While women’s roles did expand in The Bahamas after the First World War, there was colour discrimination in job opportunities. Only white women could learn shorthand and typing from Mrs. Percy Lightbourne and thus become qualified to work in the civil service or Royal Bank of Canada.<sup>212</sup> Those catering for American tourism, such as Bay Street storekeepers, also satisfied the preference for white staff. The only area where tourists tolerated black women was in selling local craft ware. Asa Pritchard had advised Randol Fawkes’ father to encourage his eldest daughter to become a domestic servant rather than a chemist in the general hospital as “the commercial and professional fields are too small to accommodate both white and black.”<sup>213</sup> A few light-skinned women did overcome the discrimination, entering such fields as nursing, civil service and retailing.<sup>214</sup>

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<sup>211</sup>A.F. Adderley, letter, *The Tribune*, 4 March 1931.

<sup>212</sup> Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream*, vol. 2, 252.

<sup>213</sup>Fawkes, *Faith That Moved the Mountain*, 1. She became the first female pharmacist in The Bahamas (Ibid.,9).

<sup>214</sup>Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream*, vol.2, 253 and 255.

Residential segregation was visible, even if not decreed. The 1920s development of The Grove, west of Nassau, did specifically spell out in its contract that it was a white suburb.<sup>215</sup> More infamous was Collins Wall, built by Ralph Collins to surround his property, stretching from Shirley Street to Wulff Road. This ten-foot high wall came to have symbolic meaning, preventing eastward expansion of Grant's Town and a barrier to black Bahamians having access to the white areas.

It boiled down again to discrimination based on skin colour and the monopoly of political, economic and social power that the small group of inter-related white Bahamians held. H.J.E. Moore, refused permission to operate a garage on his premises in Charlotte Street, wrote to *The Tribune*: "In a family government such as we endure, 'justice standeth afar off, and equity cannot enter'." He had appealed from the Board of Public Works, under Chairman Kenneth Solomon, to the Executive Council, with member Kenneth Solomon. He commented wryly: "If you happen to be one of the 'clique', *you are fortunate*".<sup>216</sup> (He does not mention colour and he may have been white.)

After the 1930s the influence of the white mercantile class increased, while that of the coloured and middle classes diminished, and racial discrimination seemed to increase along side the increase in tourism. "The discriminatory policies which permeated the entire society pushed coloureds nearer to blacks."<sup>217</sup> However, the established non-white leaders found it too difficult to identify with the black lower classes and would not condone violence or radical solutions. It would take a new generation of non-whites, young witnesses to the 1942 riot, to lead the fight against the 'Bay Street Boys', as they had come to be known by then. And one legacy of this formative period was that race would be more significant than class in shaping political conflict from the 1950s onwards.

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<sup>215</sup>Ibid. quotes the conveyance document: "No lot or any part thereof or any interest therein in the Vista Marina Subdivision of the GROVE estate shall be sold, leased or otherwise conveyed to any person other than a full-blooded member of the Caucasian race" (247).

<sup>216</sup> H.J.E. Moore, Letter, *The Tribune*, 25 February 1928.

<sup>217</sup> Saunders, *Bahamian Society after Emancipation*, 11.

## CONCLUSION

The Bahamas, in the nineteenth century, was an insignificant and unremunerative colony of the British West Indies, itself a remnant of an eighteenth century empire, no longer of any great economic or other significance. There were not, by that time, any serious European 'great power' rivalries in this part of the world and during the "Age of Empire"<sup>1</sup>, when a new kind of imperialism developed, attention was focused elsewhere. The Bahamas, as a marginal, non-plantation colony, situated on the periphery of the Caribbean region, had little connection or identity with the rest of the West Indies. It was of little interest to the metropolitan government, as long as it remained financially self-sufficient.

Despite the fact they had no need for a pool of cheap labour and slavery was no longer profitable, Bahamian slave owners in the early 1830s viewed the emancipation of their slaves with the same reluctant inevitability as the plantation owners in the rest of the West Indies. But the slave system involved far more than economic necessity; it was an effective system of dominance based on racist ideology. The problem for the Bahamian slaveowners was how to maintain their dominance economically, politically and socially. Each of the British colonies undergoing Emancipation "experienced a bitter conflict over labor control or, as it might better be described, class formation –that is, the definition of the rights, privileges, and social role of a new class, the freedmen".<sup>2</sup>

The fact that the Bahamian slave owners had opted for a period of apprenticeship in 1834, even though there was no economic necessity for it, indicated their reluctance to

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<sup>1</sup>Eric Hobsbawn refers thus to the period 1875 to 1914 in his book. The Age of Empire 1875-1914 (New York: Pantheon, 1989).

<sup>2</sup>Eric Foner, Nothing But Freedom: Emancipation and its Legacy (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983), 10.

relinquish control over their slaves. The key factor for legislating thus was probably fear of social disorder, accentuated by recent disturbances in The Bahamas and irrational racist dread. But they also wanted to hold on to their positions of privilege and the future nature of a society without the institution of slavery was an unknown quantity. It was an odd situation: in the British colonies those who had resisted Abolition now had the power to effect it. "The British government was unwilling to sponsor a revolutionary transformation in the structure of government in the colonies to accompany emancipation, or to assume direct control of local legislation itself."<sup>3</sup> Consequently, Emancipation never challenged the political hegemony of the old slave owning class. The initial period of concern for the welfare and rights of the freedmen on the part of the Imperial Government soon waned and the Colonial Office paid little attention to the West Indian Assemblies' legislation after the 1840s.

Most former slaves on the Out Islands became subsistence farmers, either as labour-tenants, sharecroppers, squatters or workers of commonage. For the latter two categories insecurity and legal complications were the norm. Sharecropping arrangements particularly favoured the landowners resident in Nassau, who could continue to farm land that would have been hard to sell at a good price in the immediate post-Emancipation period, but without any cash transactions, which they could not afford. Where disciplined labour was still required in large numbers, particularly on the salt pans, the availability of Liberated Africans and competition for jobs ensured that the employers retained the upper hand and they could impose rates of pay and conditions of work to their advantage. In fact, wage labour was not the main form of labour organization on the Out Islands. Besides sharecropping, credit and truck systems were employed in the wrecking, sponging, salt and pineapple industries. These were all coercive labour systems that allowed Nassau merchant/landowners to dominate and control the work force. The cash economy was limited outside of Nassau, which suited proprietors in the nineteenth century because of the shortage of cash and credit. Successive Governors recognised that debt peonage and the credit and truck systems were little more than slavery, but it required an Act of the merchant dominated Assembly to modify the system. The sponge industry was not reformed until 1886 and legislation against the truck system in general was not passed until 1907. These

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 17.

owed their passage to a particularly dedicated coloured member of the House, James Carmichael Smith (in the case of the first Act) and two persistent and determined Governors, Henry Blake and William Grey-Wilson. Even then, merchants maintained their control over the industries through concessions made to them and through the ignorance of the labourers. The truck and credit systems persisted in some islands where job opportunities were few and the Colonial Government ignored their existence. On Inagua, stevedores, emigrant labourers and salt workers continued to be paid in such a way until the late 1930s. Systems of economic domination established one type of class system, replacing the master/slave relationship, but just as firmly tying the labourer to the employer and leaving the lower classes surviving at subsistence level, the only escape being emigration.

Lack of support from the Legislature meant lack of initiatives for educational development in The Bahamas. There were never sufficient schools or qualified teachers, the 'monitor system' being employed. There was no public secondary school and no permanent school for teacher training until 1926.<sup>4</sup> The continued fears of the white minority account for this; educated black Bahamians, representing the majority of inhabitants, might question their dominance. Fear of social upheaval had begun with Emancipation, although this had passed without remark. Tough laws were designed to keep the ex-slaves tied to former employers and to keep the lower classes in awe and fear of the authorities. In this they may have succeeded according to a Canadian journalist: "The blacks have a most wholesome dread of the law which is administered simply, speedily and justly".<sup>5</sup> Conversely, there were no laws enacted to protect workers.

The resident garrison of the West Indies Regiment gave assurance to the white Bahamians. Thus they viewed with great trepidation the declared British Government policy of withdrawing the regiment in the 1890s. The whites felt a locally recruited police force might prove a liability if race was a factor in any civil disturbance. To allay such fears the Imperial Government supported the creation of a new police force, military in character, recruited in Barbados, kept separate from the existing local force and segregated from local

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<sup>4</sup>In 1946 a Colonial Office note revealed the number of unqualified or underqualified teachers: thirty-nine held the Cambridge Senior Certificate; forty-four the Junior Certificate; eleven the local leaving certificate (estimated to be one and a half years below the Cambridge Junior Certificate) and ninety-five, excluding pupil teachers, monitors and sewing teachers, held no academic qualifications (Colonial Office Note on Teachers' Qualifications, CO23/873/18).

<sup>5</sup>E. B. Worthington, "A Sketch of The Bahamas", *The Canadian Magazine* (May-October 1899), 516.

inhabitants. The control of law and order was an important element of the whites' leverage of power. Another facet of this was the imposition of high qualifications to serve on juries, particularly the Grand Jury. There was not equal justice for black and white; Stipendiary Magistrate L. D. Powles attempted to introduce such a concept in 1887 and was hounded out of the country by the white elite, while Governor Henry Blake deplored the bringing up of the "colour question".

An antiquated mode of government was maintained, proudly compared to the British constitutional system by such men as Harcourt Malcolm, with the House of Assembly analogous to the House of Commons and the rights and privileges of the latter being used to justify those of the former. However, the Bahamian constitutional regime was not a responsible one. It was difficult to claim that it was even representative, especially since it retained the iniquities of the House of Commons before the passing of the Reform Acts, i.e. open voting, inequitable constituencies, a franchise weighted in favour of the propertied classes, plural voting, no votes for women. Moreover, even though there was not responsible government, the Legislative branch had enormous powers over the Executive, especially through the administrative boards and the Assembly's monopoly over the introduction of money bills. Gordon Lewis summed up the situation thus: "In practice, it was a 'rotten borough' system protecting vested interests under the guise of defending 'ancient liberties', and resisting all liberal reform measures, from income tax to electoral reorganization".<sup>6</sup> The open voting system made bribery and intimidation the order of the day. The fact that electors were given bribes "was regarded by most of the people in the Bahamas as rather a good joke" and, according to Colonial Secretary, Alan Burns, the public "regarded bribery as something rather clever".<sup>7</sup> However, in New Providence there was always a cross-section of colours and classes included on the electoral registers and these voters, from 1834 onwards, often had coloured or black middle class candidates to vote for. In the Out Islands voters, with few exceptions, had to choose from among white candidates from Nassau as islanders could not afford to spend the time to attend the House meetings. Members of the House were not paid a salary until 1967 and, given the expense of fighting an election under the open voting system, it was not surprising that candidates from the

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<sup>6</sup>Gordon Lewis, *The Growth of The Modern West Indies* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1968), 314.

<sup>7</sup>Alan Burns, *Colonial Civil Servant* (London: Aalen & Unwin, 1949), 270-271.

labouring classes failed to emerge. As Craton and Saunders comment: “Where the people had no hope of true representation in the legislature, habits of dependency and financial opportunism died hard, and votes were regarded as a commodity to be exchanged for direct payment at elections and intermittent patronage in between”.<sup>8</sup>

Power relationships in The Bahamas were based on colour. The Bahamas was typical of colonies where there were a considerable number of whites and there emerged a fairly rigid and formal pattern of race relations, more reminiscent of the southern states of America. Racial prejudice tended to be intuitive and unreflective; most whites denied that racism was an issue. Ironically, some whites were of mixed blood. Colour lines were thus not so strictly drawn as in the United States, but once accepted into white circles, the ‘not-quite-white’ were just as prejudiced towards those a shade darker. This continued down the colour spectrum so that public school teacher, Henry Taylor, found that the pupils from Pompey Bay, Acklins, who had light to dark brown complexions, refused to sit next to or play with pupils from Delectable Bay, who were generally dark skinned. In fact, the former pressured the latter not to use the front door of the school.<sup>9</sup> Colour consciousness pervaded all aspects of Bahamian life.

The white elite suffered from a sense of both racial and class superiority and expatriate writers frequently lampooned their pretensions and snobbishness. Nevertheless, the members of the Bahamian elite were not wealthy until the 1920s. The situation changed when Prohibition in the United States brought benefits to some merchants within the Colony, creating a ‘nouveau riche’ set and division among the whites themselves. More importantly, it served to increase the distance between whites and non-whites, at least in terms of wealth, and it meant that, for the remainder of the colonial era, political power and commercial wealth would be closely allied.

The agro-commercial elite generally had a very limited vision beyond its own interests. Family ties united the members and, as one coloured Bahamian complained to Powles, “The Family alliance is too great, its ramifications extend throughout every branch

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<sup>8</sup>Michael Craton and Gail Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream: A History of the Bahamian People*, vol. 2: *From the Ending of Slavery to the Twenty-First Century* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1998), 19.

<sup>9</sup>Henry M. Taylor, *My Political Memoirs: A Political History of the Bahamas in the Twentieth Century* (Nassau: by author, 1987), 34.

of the Government, Executive, Legislative, Judicial, and Revenual. There is no hope for us except through the removal of the present holders of office”.<sup>10</sup> As well as controlling the Legislature, they also dominated the unofficial seats in the Executive Council. Alan Burns noted: “As there is generally an unofficial majority in the Bahamas Executive Council, and as most of these unofficials are members of the House of Assembly, the legislature also, to some extent, controls the executive”.<sup>11</sup> The Governor was advised by an Executive Council whose advice he was, under Royal Instructions, at liberty to disregard. However, local legislation specified that decisions must be that of the Government-in-Council and “the usage, which is based on doubtful legal grounds, is for him to act in accordance with the Council’s advice”.<sup>12</sup> This was the custom probably no where else in the Empire, but it ensured Governors of The Bahamas had no room for independent action.

Burns believed the most effective control the House of Assembly had over the Executive was through the Public Boards; the Governor made the appointments, but there had to be a minimum number of House members. “Chairmanship, and even the membership, of such Boards provides openings for ambitious men and gives them considerable powers.”<sup>13</sup> The white elite dominated these Boards and hence directed policy.

The British colonial administration formed an important, although minute, sector of society and provided the link with the Imperial Government. Obviously these officers carried with them cultural and ideological baggage. However, it is difficult to assess how much political, social or cultural thought influenced an individual since administrators preferred “to describe the process of policy formulation in terms of adjustments of claims and interests, in terms of available budget and machinery”.<sup>14</sup> Governors were often forced to make their own decisions, “which frequently had little to do with any general principles of

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<sup>10</sup>L. D. Powles, Land of the Pink Pearl or Recollections of Life in the Bahamas (London: Sampson, Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1888), 111.

<sup>11</sup>Burns, Colonial Civil Servant, 80.

<sup>12</sup>Colonial Office memorandum: The Bahamas Constitution, confidential, no date, CO23/798/21-22

<sup>13</sup>Burns, Colonial Civil Servant, 78.

<sup>14</sup>Michael Freedon, The New Liberalism: An Ideology of Social Reform (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 247.

imperial policy".<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, administrators were bound to reflect the prevailing mentality of the Home Country, as did the men of the Colonial Office. As Philip Curtin put it: "Beyond the world of dispatches, there was also a world of unstated assumptions".<sup>16</sup> These assumptions were the basis of policy. Many Bahamian Governors and officers of the Colonial Office were decidedly more liberal than Bahamian whites, the officials in London frequently expressing disgust and frustration at the local whites' mentality. Differences in political and ideological outlook between Governors and local representatives could lead to deadlock in the Legislature, as demonstrated under Governors Colebrooke, Rawson, Orr and Clifford.

Generally, "the Colonial Office was seen to have a narrowly limited role to play in colonial government".<sup>17</sup> The Governor, aided by the Councils and Assembly, actually governed. Murray summarizes the position thus: "In practice in the mid-1830's the British Government relinquished the initiative in colonial government. How as a result government was to be conducted and what were to be the lines of development were matters that were to be largely worked out by colonial officials and colonists".<sup>18</sup> Although, the Colonial Office might complain and threaten at the inertia of the Bahamian Legislature, in fact it was merely bluff, as it would never interfere in a non-crisis situation. As long as The Bahamas remained financially self-sufficient, the white elite was safe. There was also a hardening of racial attitudes after mid-century, which led British politicians to doubt the ability of non-whites to govern.

Ethics and politics became more connected again with the 'new liberalism' of the late nineteenth century with its rational and planned remedying of social ills.<sup>19</sup> The Bahamas was effectively passed by, even under Joseph Chamberlain (Secretary of State from 1895), who pledged a policy of development, but essentially only in the Crown

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<sup>15</sup> Helen Taft Manning, "Who ran the British Empire 1830-1850?", Journal of British Studies V, 1 (November 1965): 108.

<sup>16</sup> Philip Curtin, The Image of Africa: British Ideas and Action 1780-1850 (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1964), vii

<sup>17</sup>D. J. Murray, The West Indies and the Development of Colonial Government, 1801-1834 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), 217.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 231.

<sup>19</sup> See Freedman, The New Liberalism.

Colonies. His ideas of contributions from private enterprise could not work in The Bahamas, not considered a good place for investment by capitalists. The financial condition of the Colony prevented large-scale programmes of public works and without these there was little chance of attracting private capital. Direct financial assistance was not pursued for The Bahamas. It was also difficult to find alternative industries to develop, although Sir Ambrose Shea made a laudable effort with the sisal industry.

Local Patronage was largely in the Governor's hands, although posts with larger salaries were referred to the Secretary of State. As the nineteenth century progressed the Bahamian elite resented the appointment of Englishmen to public office. All Englishmen were considered 'foreigners'. Sir Alan Burns wrote: "It was in the Bahamas that I realised more than in any other colony in which I have served, the local hostility to the 'imported' official".<sup>20</sup> There were several tussles over appointments and, since the Legislature controlled salary scales, undignified public disputes over money. By keeping salaries low and refusing to pay passage money, the House hoped to put off Englishmen from accepting posts. There were, of course, some very able Bahamian officers (T. V. Matthews and P. Armbrister are good examples), although some of these chose to pursue careers overseas. There were also many cases of incompetence and fraud and embezzlement, especially among junior officers. What the Colonial Office most feared was partiality by the white Bahamians, particularly on account of the inter-relatedness of most of them.

Early divisions in the House of Assembly were into pro- and anti-Government factions but these were not political 'parties'. Sectarian disputes took the foreground in the 1840s and the Burial Grounds Dispute became a bitter conflict at the end of the 1840s. During the 1850s and 1860s the Nonconformists were gathering strength in the House of Assembly. The Wesleyans, in alliance with the Presbyterians, were ready in 1868 to introduce a bill to disestablish and disendow the Established Church in The Bahamas. There had been two definite political 'parties' for the first time, although they had formed over one issue. Denominational party labels persisted in the 1870s and problems arose when the presence of leading Opposition members on the Executive Council led to clashes with Governor William Robinson. It was particularly the Sawyer clique, a closely-knit alliance of family and friends led by R. H. Sawyer, a merchant who had made good during the

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<sup>20</sup>Burns, *Colonial Civil Servant*, 89.

American Civil War, which had come to dominate the House, Councils and Board, much to the consternation of some Governors, the Colonial Office and the small number of their political foes. With the aid of their associate, Ormond Malcolm, first Speaker and Attorney-General and then Chief Justice, the ruling whites influenced the Judiciary too.

The merchant politicians guarded their own interests, particularly in regard to taxation policy. There were frequent comments on the merchants' rapacity that transposed the words of the Bahaman national motto. Sir Alan Burns wrote that those critical of the merchants read the motto as "Commerce having been expelled, piracy has been revived".<sup>21</sup> The House was concerned with the financial state of the Colony, but reducing expenditure, mainly by decreasing officials' salaries, was the limit of its solution. There were many struggles between the Legislature and Executive over control of financial policy and expenditure. The battle between Governor and merchant/representatives reached its most serious point under Bede Clifford, who insisted the Governor must be invested with Reserve Powers. The Colonial Office investigated the possibilities, but realised only the alteration of the Constitution by Imperial Act would suffice. But the initiative had to come from the Assembly, which would never have arisen in The Bahamas. Thus, in 1942, the scenario was repeated, with the Colonial Office complaining that the House was drastically reducing expenditure, but was not raising any more revenue. It looked forward to the bankruptcy of the Colony, so the British Government could intervene.

The majority of House members had identical interests, so party formation was unnecessary for them. The denominational parties had gradually disappeared in the 1880s, being redundant after religious equality was established. A so-called 'Out-island Party' was formed in the early twentieth century, but the label was fairly meaningless, except for the fact they represented Out Islands. The first party of the twentieth century was the Ballot Box Party, formed in 1924 to press for the secret ballot and led by articulate members of the coloured and black middle class, who had no voice in the Legislature. The elite had no desire to reform something that aided its dominance of the Legislative branch of government. But the corruption at elections became more and more scandalous. A by-election in 1935 was held in such notoriously corrupt circumstances that the Governor was determined to press for reform. He succeeded in passing a compromise measure,

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<sup>21</sup>Burns, *Colonial Civil Servant*, 75.

introducing the secret ballot in Nassau for a period of five years. The ruling whites felt a limited reform might safeguard their dominance of the Out Islands, from where two-thirds of the representatives were elected. The ballot was not extended to the Out Islands until 1949 and only then because of the determined pressure of the ruling Labour Party in Britain.

The very small coloured middle class served to reinforce the status quo and did not seek to lead the non-whites in efforts to gain equality or rights. They, instead, sought to assimilate themselves into white society by emulating elitist values and they distanced themselves from the black lower classes. The small number of coloured, and later black, representatives in the Assembly meant that they did not pose a threat to the white elite. They were generally conservative in their views and sometimes allied with the white elite. The most radical politician of the nineteenth century was James Carmichael Smith, but it was difficult for an individual to achieve much in the face of such opposition as the white elite offered. Most importantly, the non-whites did not attempt to form a political party, even in the post-World War periods (both First and Second) when more radical ideas were imported into the Colony. This despite the fact Bahamian society became more polarized in the 1920s and 1930s. Coupled with the growth of a moneyed class was the advent of Jim Crowism, which arrived with tourism, winter American residents and overseas investment. Race consciousness was probably heightened, though, particularly by West Indian immigrants into the Colony and by the return of more politically aware Bahamians from overseas. The Governor, the Duke of Windsor, and the American Vice-Consul saw race as a factor in the 1942 Riot. However, no leaders emerged to take advantage of the heightened awareness and social and economic discontent.

Indeed, it was difficult for blacks and coloureds to challenge the elite because of the electoral system, their lack of economic clout and the apathy of the population at large. Many of the black politicians were not able to reach out to blacks at the grass roots level. In 1945 Governor William Murphy wanted to appoint A. F. Adderley to the Executive Council as representative of the non-whites. Murphy made the telling comment that Adderley “has reached that stage in the evolution of a gentleman of colour at which his own community cease to regard him as truly representing their outlook”.<sup>22</sup> But there was as yet no black with political potential who could stir the masses.

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<sup>22</sup>W. Murphy to G. H. Hall, private, 28 November 1945. CO23/799/32-33.

The lack of party organisation enhanced the rule of the merchant elite. Dupuch wrote: “Actually there is only one party in the House – and that is the Government. There has always been some suggestion of an “opposition” but it has never taken a coherent and properly organised form because, apart from the Government, no group in the House has ever advanced a platform or enunciated a clear-cut policy based on the broad principles of enlightened Government”.<sup>23</sup> The Opposition was much more of an obstructionist nature, criticising and amending Government policies. However, this obstructionism had led to clashes with recent Governors, who considered swift and decisive executive action imperative. He correctly believed the House desired to play a more aggressive role in Government.

In this editorial, written just after the 1942 riot, he stated: “It is clear that the views of the Government and the House are as far apart as the poles on several questions”.<sup>24</sup> This was the same tape, rewound, from 1928, 1935 and various other times of more minor differences. He reviewed the Bahamian constitutional scene and once more made the case for change. An American observer remarked to Dupuch that The Bahamas seemed to illustrate the failure of the British constitutional system. He replied it was only because of “their pacifist attitude towards the selfishness of dominant groups in the Colonies” and informed him that most of the social evils observed in The Bahamas did not exist in West Indian colonies under the Crown Colony system. He maintained the British Government should not compromise with questions “that are wrong in their very essence”.<sup>25</sup>

A change of constitutional status was seriously broached in London. The 1942 Riot was not serious enough to invoke such drastic action, particularly in wartime. Financial crisis had always seemed the best chance, but the Bahamians had a faith in something ‘turning up’. It invariably did. But the Colonial Office recognised the evils of the system in The Bahamas and there was a spirit favouring socialistic reforms in the early 1940s that augured progressive changes for the colonies. A question was asked in the House of Commons in 1946 “whether, in view of the long delay in effecting reforms in the Bahamas, His Majesty’s Government will take steps to introduce the constitutional changes which will

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<sup>23</sup>*The Tribune*, 12 September 1942.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup>*The Tribune*, 24 April 1943.

ensure these reforms being adopted”.<sup>26</sup> The proposer stated that he believed that “the theory of the ‘unworkable constitution which has worked for over 200 years’ should have been exploded several years ago, at the latest”. He added: “There is no way out of the morass we are already in unless there is an authoritative Government which is prepared to take fairly drastic action”.<sup>27</sup> The defects of the Bahamas constitution and the unsatisfactory social, economic and fiscal policies of the Colony were presented to a British Government committee.<sup>28</sup> The committee felt that if the Legislature were not prepared to co-operate in working actively for the social and economic benefit of the population as a whole, it would be necessary to remodel the Legislature completely or to limit its powers.

A different solution was emanating from Bay Street. Stafford Sands, consulted by the Colonial Office as the new leader of that group, considered the Colony needed “further advances in self-government”.<sup>29</sup> He had in mind a kind of ministerial system, under which members of the Executive Council, nominated by the House, would be in charge of Department business and would have collective responsibility like a cabinet. When it was suggested to him that the system in The Bahamas was criticised in some quarters “as being a Government of the Bay Street minority”, he insisted conditions in the Out Islands were not ripe for more representative Government and that there was a new spirit among the younger generation of Bay Street, less reactionary than the previous generation. He seemed to envisage a kind of benevolent oligarchy. Sands considered a party system would undoubtedly develop; Governor William Murphy saw little prospect of that and more likelihood of a political ‘boss’ backed by the moneyed interests or an irresponsible demagogue.<sup>30</sup> As Dawes at the Colonial Office commented: “What it comes down to is that the Bay St. politicians are prepared for the moment to make a concession to the spirit of the times provided they still retain the political power”.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>Secretary of State to W. Murphy, 26 January 1946, CO23/799/28-9.

<sup>27</sup>Extract from D.G. Stewart to Rogers, letter, undated, CO23/799/26.

<sup>28</sup>Bahamas Constitution: Outline of Statement leading up to Act of Parliament for Revision of Constitution, CO23/800/112-115.

<sup>29</sup>Report of Colonial Office Discussion with Sands, 4 September 1946, CO23/800/91-93.

<sup>30</sup>W. Murphy to G. Seel, Colonial Office, secret and personal, 6 December 1946, CO23/800/44.

<sup>31</sup>Colonial Office minute, 5 September 1946, CO23/800/24.

Murphy recognised the difficulties. “The problems here are more difficult than in Bermuda, and conditions incomparably more backward in many respects than what we considered backward there. There are few men of any vision and very few of absolute integrity in public life”.<sup>32</sup> He foresaw that Sands, “this buccaneer, at whose touch everything turns to dollars”, would be the political ‘boss’ of the post-war era. “He remains the central problem of the Bahamas. He is able, physically and oratorically commanding, ruthless, and inflexibly opposed to reform except to entrench his own class”.<sup>33</sup> He considered Sands the ablest Bahamian of his generation, “certainly one of the most unscrupulous”. “He is consumed with the desire for power and money, and he uses his position in the House to further his own interests. He is in my opinion and that of many others the evil genius of the Bahamas at the present time”.<sup>34</sup>

The 1949 elections returned Bay Street to power. Racial issues were raised in New Providence but the alliance of coloured and black reformers had broken up after the passing of the Secret Ballot Act in 1942 and there was hardly any increase in non-white representation (eight members). There was wholesale bribery and corruption on the islands and accusations were particularly levelled at Sands’ group.<sup>35</sup> Alan Burns, now in charge of the West Indian section at the Colonial Office, noted that the press cuttings “tell an ugly story....The pirates would be proud of their descendants”.<sup>36</sup>

“A rigid social and political dichotomy between former master and former slave, an ideology of racism, a dependent labor force with limited economic opportunities – these and other patterns seem always to survive the end of slavery.”<sup>37</sup> It was these factors that ensured the dominance of the merchants princes of Bay Street’s ‘monopoly of state power’.

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<sup>32</sup>W. Murphy to G. H. Hall, private, 28 November 1945. CO23/799/32-33.

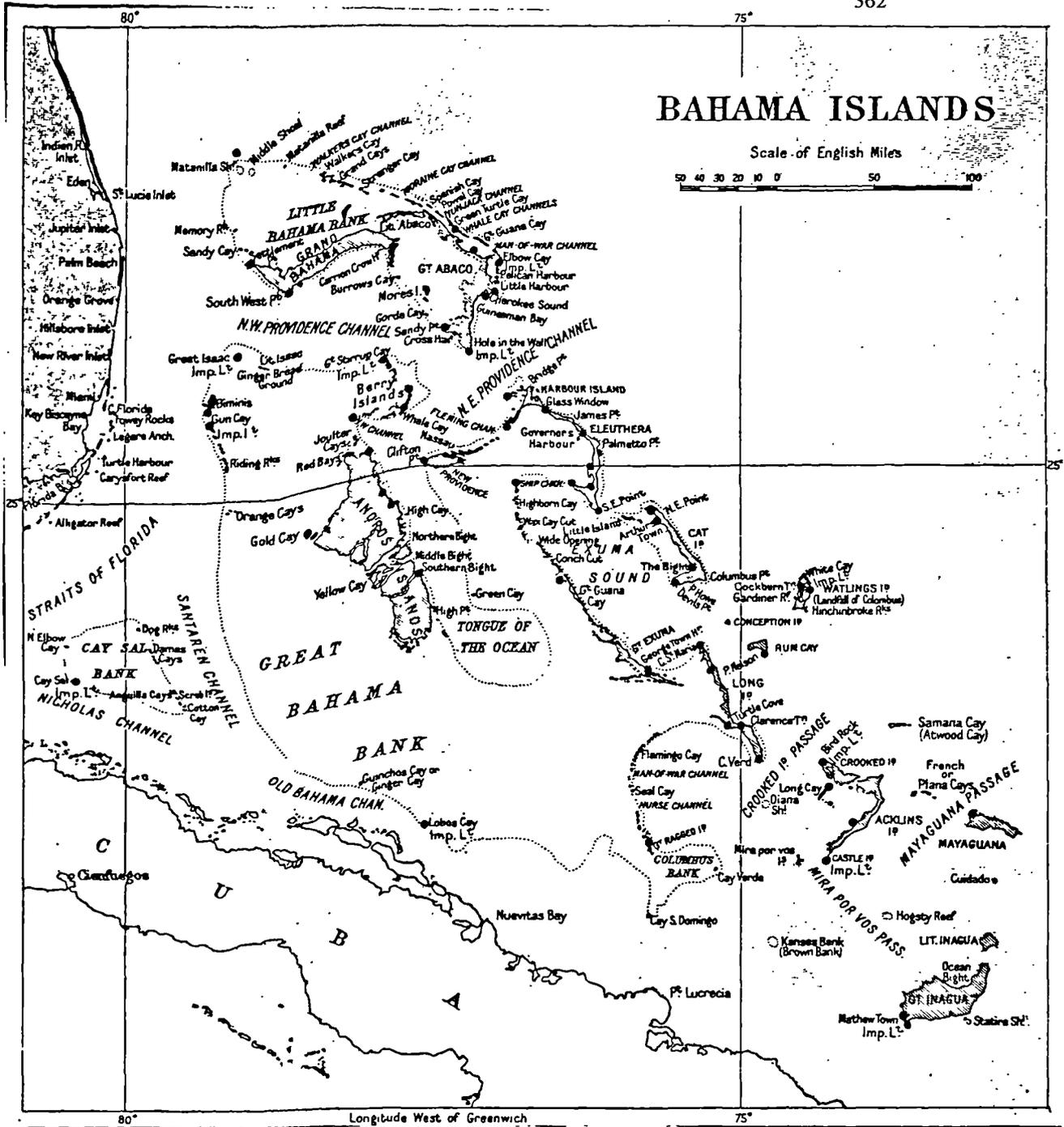
<sup>33</sup>Note on Stafford Sands’ proposals, 7 November 1949. CO23/800/21.

<sup>34</sup>Note by W. Murphy, September 1949. CO23/868/22-28.

<sup>35</sup>W. Murphy to A. Creech-Jones, no. 60, 20 July 1949, CO23/861/46-48. There was evidence that votes were bought for two pounds each in the Crooked Island District. Evidence was available against the winning candidate, Asa Pritchard, Benson McDermot, Richard Barrett, Arthur Moss, Durward Knowles, Frank Moss, Alfred Collie and Theodore Pyfrom (Report of Attorney General, 17 October 1949, CO23/861/32-37). No action was taken.

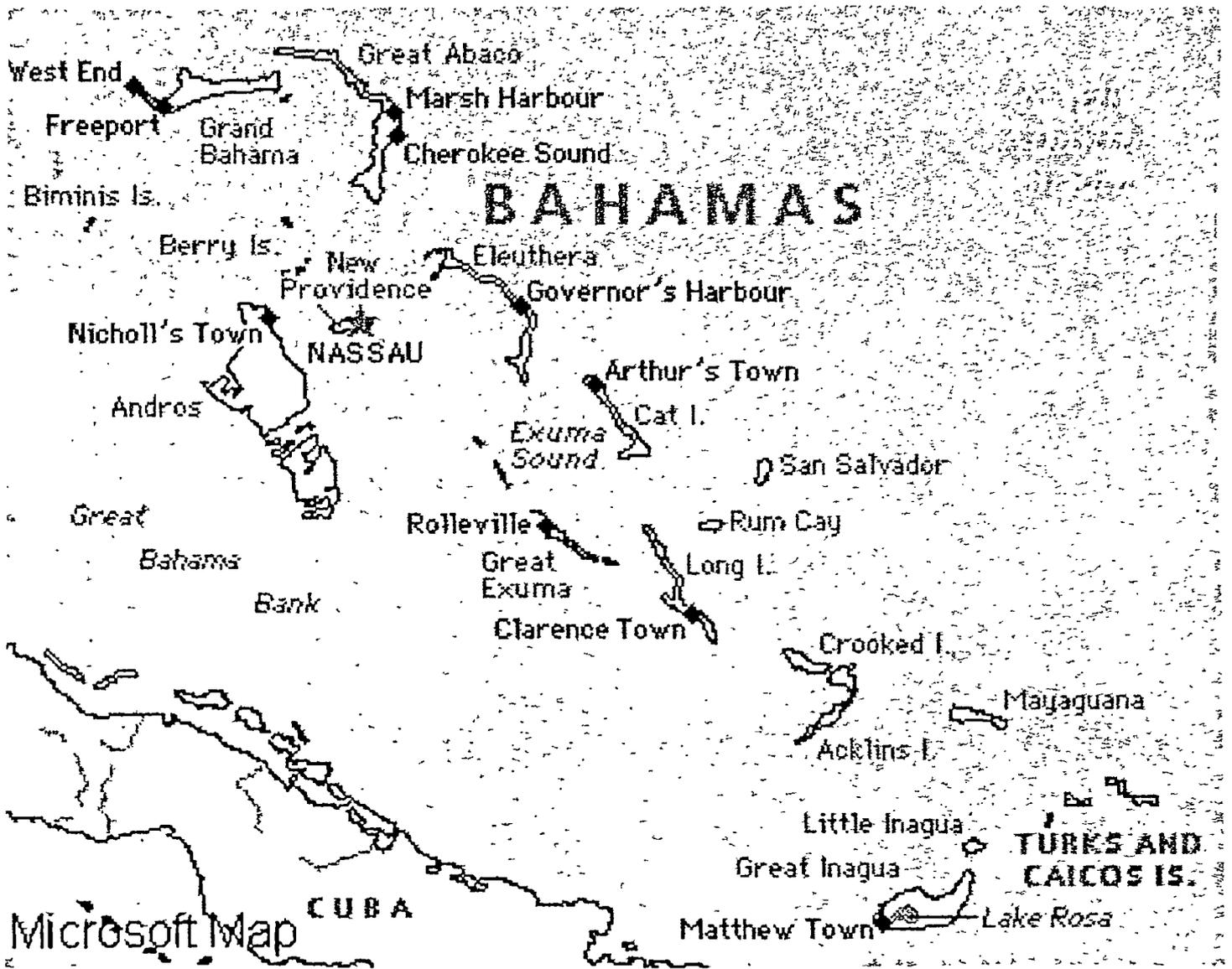
<sup>36</sup>Alan Burns to Low, private, 7 September 1949, CO23/861/38.

<sup>37</sup>Foner, Nothing But Freedom, 37.



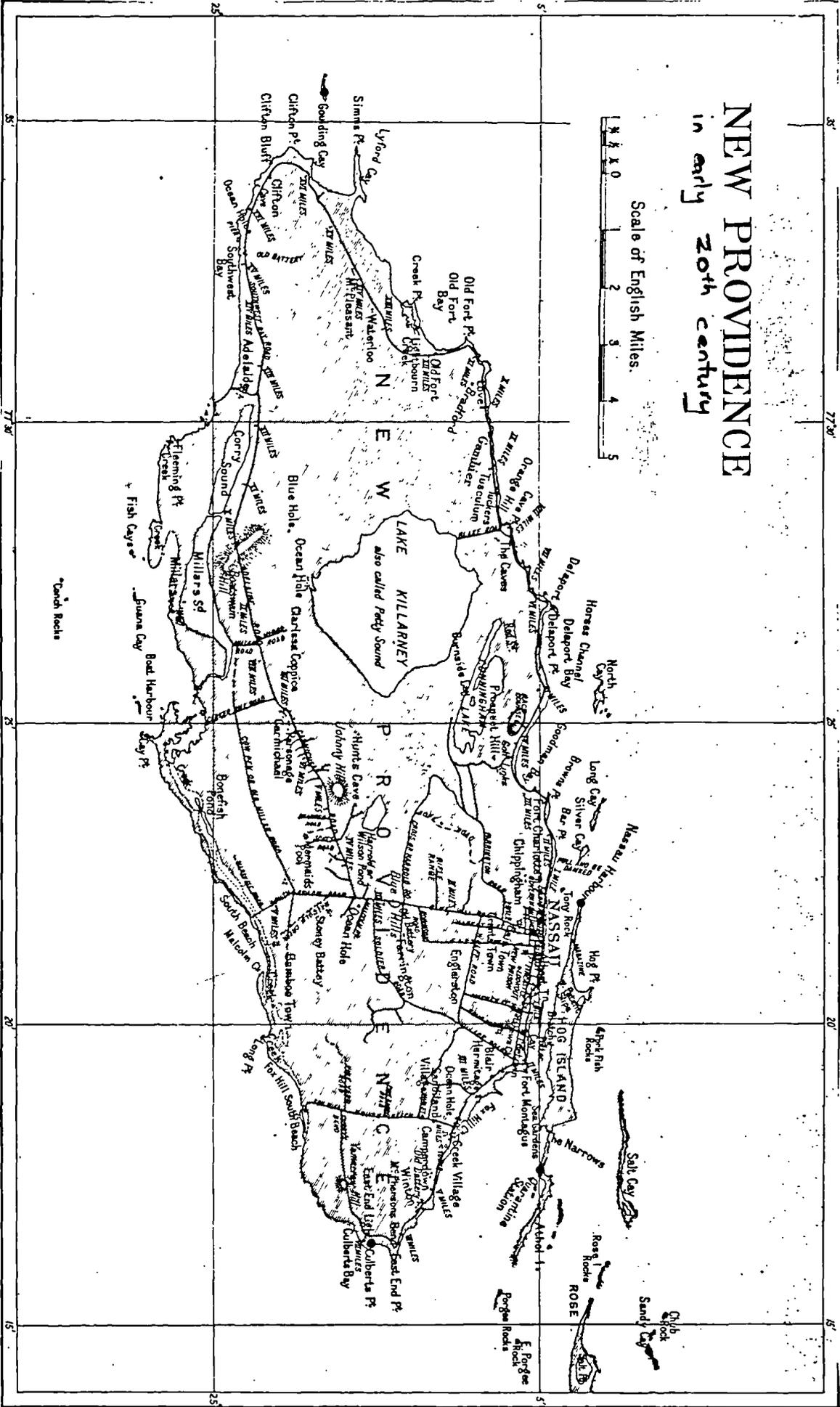
The Location of The Bahamas.

Source: The Department of Archives, Nassau.



The Bahama Islands  
Source: Encarta

# NEW PROVIDENCE in early 20th century



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