

Celebrating Independence

The elation and celebrations which accompany the attainment of independence from the British Government, will always be registered as a cherished moment in time for every former British colony that has gained its sovereignty and right to self-govern itself. This decisive step which was taken by the then government of Barbados under the leadership of the then Hon. Errol Walton Barrow, now known as the Rt. Excellent, Errol Walton Barrow and the Father of Independence, is now fifty-five years on. For most it has been hailed and celebrated as a progressive political maneuver.

For most, the attainment of independence has been seen as the first step in changing out the direct political influence wielded by the British Government over its colonial territories and subjects. With the attainment of independence, nations which have acclaimed their sovereignty, find themselves entering into a new state known as neocolonialism. The definition of neocolonialism, tends to suggest that the shackles of the former colonial powers are still indirectly being exerted. The definition speaks to the use of economic, political, cultural or other pressures to control or influence other countries especially former dependencies. Based on the influence exerted by the super powers of the world which are included in the world's largest economies, it is clear that their dominance overrides that of sovereignty. The power wielded by the United Kingdom, United States of America, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and the European Union, is enormous. It is not to be forgotten that China and Russia also hold a bastion of power in their hands.

With this being the case, it would appear that the initial value associated with political independence rest with the country having the scope to address its domestic and foreign policies, albeit that their intentions maybe constrained by the policy shifts and influence brought to bear by those who as the pipers, call the tune.

The political intrigue is further accentuated by taking a look at both neocolonialism and the process of decolonization. Neocolonialism has been described as 'the often long, tortuous and violent process by which colonies achieve their national aspirations for political independence from the metropolitan power. Decolonization is understood to be the final phase of colonialism. Implicit in the notion of neocolonialism, is the idea that decolonization was incomplete. The inference here is that decolonized nations remain subject to some form of hegemony or dominance by the imperial power.

This contention is supported by the statement of Lord Home, the then British Foreign Secretary, when he addressed the United Nations, October 1961, on the subject of neocolonialism. He

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commented that with the end of formal control over most of the empires, scholars and activists still perceived a decisive degree of control exercised by the metropolitan powers through economic, technological and cultural dominance (Crozier, 1964). It can be drawn from this comment that the possibility exists that the political, economic and cultural influences can be brought to bear on the choices and decisions of lesser powerful independent nations by virtue of the dominance of the imperial powers.

Accepting the power and influence continues to reside in the hands of the imperial powers, this raises questions about the ability of former colonies to seriously dictate the pace of their own destiny, after having attained political independence. It is at this juncture that there is a need to address how to become a strong independent nation. This process starts with having a strong government that focuses on the common good and which places its energies on overcoming the obstacles that impede the nation's economic, political, social development and advancement. This is to be buttressed by a strong commitment to restructuring and modernization, and finally, the removal of the basically ceremonial monarchy.

The change to a Republican status in Barbados, will bring an end to the ceremonial presence of the British monarch within the political structure. The appointment of a President as the Head of State will add value to the true meaning of independence. Going forward, it is required that the systems and operations of the nation are grounded in the preservation and practice of democratic principles, respect for the constitutional rights of citizens including the right to vote, maintaining a strong governance system that is based on participatory democracy, respect for law, order and rules, the promotion of transparency and accountability, consultation, dialogue, and respect for human, civil and workers' rights.

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