



Development Planning Unit

Government of the British Virgin Islands

## Review: Social/Cultural Sector

---

*by Ermin Burnett*

In this short paper I examine the inter-relationship between the state, government and people as certain social welfare services were introduced during the first twenty five years of Ministerial Government

One may look at the State from three perspectives:

individuals in pursuit of their psycho-economic and political interest assign to the state mainly the tasks of defence, judicial administration and certain public works.

in society the individual can only be seen in terms of social and economic relationships, the dominant of these being the mode of production;

human nature can only be fulfilled within a community, that political authority is vital, that the state must be interventionist and strong.

A summary of these viewpoints defines the state as the social, economic and political organization which establishes the basis for civil government, order, functioning and productivity within its national boundaries, and directs its relationships with similar international organizations.

The state is, therefore, something more than Government. It is that socially accepted, ever existent, self-sufficient authority which manifests itself in laws, bureaucratic form and machinery, custom; it is that force of domination and control which justifies its existence and actions as rooted in its philosophic and ideological concept of how human social, economic and political organization should be.

As an international personality, the state must have a permanent population, a defined territory, a government, and the capacity to enter into relations with other states. (Clearly the Virgin Islands cannot be defined as a state since it must depend on Britain to exercise its capacity to enter into, on its behalf, relations with other states).

An analysis of development in the Virgin Islands from Emancipation to date suggests that Virgin Islanders perceive the state as needing to be strong and interventionist. In other words, that Virgin Islanders tend to opt for organic-statism in the colonial relationship with Britain, and indeed, tend to extend that perception of the body politic to its Ministerial Government.

Perhaps to date, the greatest demand made by Virgin Islanders on their State, was that of requesting Ministerial Government--that established system of political administration which prescribes that personal discretion is not allowed in administrative acts on subject matter that has been designated to the elected individual.

A Ministerial system, Virgin Islanders expect, would help them to realize their psycho-economic and political needs, aspirations, and identity. Indeed, this to a great extent has been the case in the social/cultural sector.

To date, the responsibility for the social/cultural sector has fallen to three different Ministers.

When the Ministerial system was introduced in 1967, the Virgin Islands had, for a few years, been enjoying an economy into which tourism dollars had begun to flow. This increased level of affluence, the greater flow of visitors and immigrant workers and the new sophistication the society was developing, forged to bring to bear on the Minister' for Social Services a demand for social services unheard of in the Virgin Islands. A prototype of the inter-state-ministerial-citizen interaction to respond to such societal demands can be sketched as such:

1. about the time that the Ministerial system was introduced, branches from international civic service clubs were coming alive in the Virgin Islands, and actively were identifying from the private sector perspective social issues which they hastened to solve through their financial and organizational initiative. Such clubs were wellbalanced in their composition of native and immigrant members.
2. the civic service clubs involved the Minister for Social Services in a social service project by supplying information on the concept, implementation and achievement. Therefore, the organic-statism approach to social problem-solving was expressed through organized and socially accepted avenues in the private sector. Projects such as Christmas parties for the elderly and children, construction of houses for the indigent and overseas health care was undertaken.
3. birth was given to a Department within the Public Service to carry out policies in regards to social development.
4. staff from the Department would meet with various youth, civic and church organizations to help identify services youth and the general citizenry wished.
5. the express wishes of the citizen would be conveyed to the Ministerial Cabinet, and when necessary, to the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. Budgetary allocations would then be made for the introduction of the requested programme.
6. citizens would be encouraged to visit the Minister to express their concern on social issues and to propose solutions.
7. concerned citizens were invited to mobilize into self-help groups to attack identified social problems.
8. professional staff of the Department formulated plans for social services in response to the needs identified from a professional perspective.
9. professional staff of the Department would work with other professionals involved in any aspects of social development so that an inter-disciplinary approach to social planning could be used.

By use of the organic-statism approach, social services innovation became the order of the day in the public sector.

Here are a few examples:

- the annual summer project to teach young people about tourism
- the annual course on Leadership
- the employment workshop for Handicapped youth
- the farmer skills project for Rastafarian youth
- the reforestation project on Gorda Peak, Virgin Gorda

- self-help projects such as the erection of the Carrot Bay Community Centre, the market place on Virgin Gorda, the fisherman's cooperative on Jost Van Dyke the recording of Virgin Islands architecture from Emancipation to the 1980's the training of youth in craft work such as batik, jewelry- making and sewing
- training courses in music and drama
- participation in CARIFESTA

Today all of these projects are vibrant in some form.

And yes, the inter-state-ministerial-citizen interaction extended to Social Work. Counselling services for every social ill were started, a home for the elderly and handicapped was established, the prison administration and human services were improved. Citizens and elected representatives ensured the passing of a law which assists any indigent.

### Conclusion

Native Virgin Islands society still holds a strong hegemonic bond, and seems to have transmitted to the people who have come to live and work within the society, its views on how the state and ministerial government should be involved in the life of the citizenry.

The Ministerial form of government has serviced the organic-statism approach rather well to date, perhaps mainly for these reasons: the population base is still small, personal and inter-personal social intercourse is still rather fluid for class rigidity has not yet solidified, the general perception of the citizenry seems to be that the standard of living for all has improved thanks to cooperation between state, government and citizen, be he immigrant or native.

The prototype described was an excellent tool for attaining the objectives desired. I recommend its refinement and continued use in all aspects of Virgin Islands development.