

# The Turks & Caicos Islands A Positive Canadian Caribbean Influence



MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT



PETER GOLDRING

In January 2004, Peter Goldring, Member of Parliament, visited the Turks and Caicos Islands to talk with Islanders about their future aspirations and to gauge their interest to discuss a more formal social economic union with Canada.

With the recent involvement of Canadian troops in Haiti, perhaps there is yet another dimension that merits consideration when addressing whether Canada should have a more formal relationship with the Turks and Caicos Islands. While Canadian peacekeeping expertise is called for in the Caribbean, the home base of any operation is extremely remote. If the Turks and Caicos were Canada's 11<sup>th</sup> province, Canada would be in a position to more readily offer assistance. For example, Canada could have facilities on the islands for a 100 member rotated security and patrol force involved in tropical training exercises supported by a long range search and rescue helicopter and coastal patrol boats. This force would, of course, include members from the islands who have chosen to join Canada's security forces and would be readily available for natural disasters and emergencies. The

Turks and Caicos would benefit from this sovereignty reinforcement in the regulating of offshore fisheries, territorial waters, sea and air security.

Some have argued that if the Turks and Caicos were to become Canada's 11<sup>th</sup> province, the islands would become inundated by asylum-seekers from the Caribbean, as well as by Canadians wanting to move to the Turks and Caicos permanently. The natural beauty and ecosystem of the islands could become degraded through overpopulation. The unique situation of the Turks and Caicos calls for the general recognition that exceptional measures must be taken with Provincial regulation of immigration and residency to preserve its unique culture from being inundated with immigrants, while at the same time encouraging investors and tourists.



Ralph Higgs, of the Turks & Caicos Islands Development Organization, and his son

## History

The Islands were initially inhabited by the Lucayans, from Hispaniola and Cuba, and later inhabited by Bermudians. European influence commenced in 1678 after their discovery by Columbus in 1492. The British arrived later to establish a salt-panning indus-



try. During this period, African slaves were transported to the islands to work on British salt industry interests. Slavery was abolished in Britain in 1833 and emancipation of slaves on the Turks and Caicos soon followed. From 1848 to 1873, the Turks and Caicos were a non-aligned British Crown Colony, having a direct relationship with Great Britain.

### Government

For nearly a century, from 1874 until Jamaican independence in 1962, the Turks and Caicos were aligned with Jamaica. As of 1962, the Turks and Caicos once again became a non-aligned British Crown Colony. From 1965 to 1973, the Turks and Caicos were governed by the Bahamas; after 1993, the islands were accorded their own Governor. Current Governor Jim Poston is advised by the Legislative Council of 13 elected members, 6 appointed members and an elected speaker. Chief Minister Michael Misick is the head of the elected Government.

### Geography and Climate

The capital of the Turks and Caicos Islands, Cockburn Town, is located about 90 miles north of the Dominican Republic and some 2,000 air miles south of Ottawa. This is approximately the same 2000-mile distance west of Ottawa to where I live in Edmonton, the capital of Alberta. Many other Canadian cities, such as Victoria,

Yellowknife and Whitehorse, are much further in distance from Ottawa than are the Turks and Caicos Islands.

The six principal islands and several cays that comprise the Colony of the Turks and Caicos Islands are approximately 500 square kilometres in area and contain nearly 400 kilometres of coastline. The islands geographically are an extension of the Bahamas chain and are of similar composition. Elevations are no more than 50 metres.

The islands, surrounded by coral reefs, have a warm, pleasant and rather dry climate, ranging in seasonal temperatures from 24 to 32 degrees Celsius. The annual average rainfall is 56 centimetres.

### Population and Social Issues

The islands have a population of about 24,000 people, of which a third are actually in

the labour force. The unemployment rate is about 15%. The official language is English, and the colony follows the British legal system, though its currency is in U.S. dollars.

There are social problems that are common to both countries. Canada and the Turks and Caicos have immigration and illegal drug trafficking difficulties—coincidentally of considerable concern to their shared neighbouring country, the United States. A common immigration and anti-drug strategy by both regions would be beneficial to help



January 2004—The Turks & Caicos Islands Chief Minister, the Honourable Michael Misick, meets with Member of Parliament Peter Goldring, on Grand Turks





resolve, or at least minimize these difficulties.

**Economic Dimensions**

Virtually all essential goods and foods are imported, mostly from the United States. The primary industries of the Turks and Caicos are tourism, fishing (mainly lobster and conch) and offshore banking. Understandably, there is a great interest in economic diversification, to offer a much broader range of employment and business opportunities for the islanders.

The possible benefits to both countries are numerous and very exciting. Among the many potential benefits could be the following:

**For the people of the Turks and Caicos:**

- A diversified economy, with many islander jobs in the skilled trades, and the professions by establishment of regional head offices
- Development of deep water ports for international trade
- Revitalization of a deep sea fishing industry to a 200 mile limit
- Inter-island causeway connections, with improved roadways
- Direct air travel to major Canadian points of entry
- Development of the islands for film industry jobs and opportunities
- Greater regional stability and security, through direct political participation and by leading by example
- Post-secondary education and hospital care

- Coast Guard, fishery patrol and security force integration
- Ecological reclamation of old island waste sites.

**For the people of the rest of Canada:**

- Secure vacation and retirement destinations and business investments
- New markets for Canadian manufactured goods and farm product distribution for the Caribbean and South America
- Olympic and other sports year-round training possibilities.
- A deep water port for Canada Steamship Lines to dock in Canada.



Governor of the Turks & Caicos Islands Jim Poston and Canadian Member of Parliament Peter Goldring conclude a very cordial meeting

- \$2 billion in new trade potential of Central American markets
- Caribbean port for Canada's naval training exercises
- Revenue from a new "have" province to confederation partners.
- Help rebalance our international vacation travel deficit.
- Assert Canada's influence in the Caribbean through the

government of the Province of the Turks and Caicos Islands

In short, the confederation of the Turks and Caicos as Canada's 11<sup>th</sup> province would create economic enhancements for both regions. It would be a natural social fit for our multicultural nation. It would also provide the Turks and Caicos Islands with provincial autonomy, and enhance their status and influence in the Caribbean.

The people of Canada and of the Turks and Caicos will, in the near future, speak for themselves on the acceptability of a union between the two countries, but for now, it's time for the people of both regions to examine the balance sheet of benefits that could result. We must carefully and critically evaluate the proposal that will impact many people's lives. Then, perhaps someday soon, adequately informed people of both countries will have an opportunity to vote on the issue.

I want to thank the Turks and Caicos Islands Governor Jim Poston for taking the time to talk to me about the islands and government. I also want to thank Chief Minister The Honourable Michael Misick for his assistance, direction and understanding. It also is important to await Cana-

dian election results in order to determine which Canadian political party might be best able to advance these ideas, in the capacity of being the Canadian government from mid-2004 onward.

At this time, populist initiatives are being undertaken by a number of committed Canadians and Islanders, including petitioning the Canadian government to address the issue. Their efforts may be reviewed on at least two websites: [www.aplaceinthesun.ca](http://www.aplaceinthesun.ca) and [www.4caribbeandream.com](http://www.4caribbeandream.com).

**Update:** On a wave of great public interest, businessmen Richard Pearson, Brad Sigouin, and Member of Parliament Peter Goldring are proceeding to formalize a committee of private businesses and Members of Parliament to address this issue. Member of Parliament Massimo Pacetti has added his much welcomed support.

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*This brochure series is intended to highlight special issues that Member of Parliament, Peter Goldring, has been involved in. If you wish to comment, please take a moment and fill out the survey below, write or call to the address above.*

**Your Opinion Matters...**

**Question #1** Do you believe that Canada can do more to encourage the trade of Canadian made goods and farm products in the Caribbean and South America?

Yes       No

**Question #2** Do you think that Canada and the Turks and Caicos Islands should continue exploratory talks for a possible union to be ratified by all citizens of both countries?

Yes       No

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_  
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