

OPINION & INSIGHTS

AS I SEE IT

By Rahym R.
Augustin-Joseph

Republicanism in Saint Lucia: What and who are we waiting for?



Prime Minister of Barbados, Mia Mottley and King Charles. (Photo Credit: NAARC)

From the moment Barbados Prime Minister Mia Mottley made the historic shift to a parliamentary republic—jettisoning the titular head of state, the Queen of Britain, and replacing her with a locally elected President—the Caribbean has witnessed renewed interest in republicanism. After all, Barbados, long known as "Little England" for its centrality to the British colonial empire, had taken the bold step. The question rippling through the region was clear: If Barbados could do it, what's stopping us?

This interest only intensified after the death of Queen Elizabeth II. Globally, people questioned whether the time had come to remove the British monarch as head of state, or if it signalled the end of the monarchy altogether. Last year, Jamaica reignited our collective anti-colonial consciousness

by introducing a bill to remove the King as head of state.

So the question for Saint Lucia is: What are we waiting for? Our nation has never been one to wait on its neighbours for seismic change. We didn't wait to produce two Nobel Laureates, nor for an Olympic gold medal. And since the conversation on constitutional reform has persisted since replacing the Privy Council, the next logical step in finalising our political independence is removing the monarch as head of state.

Kamau Brathwaite's words resonate: "It is not, it is not, it is not enough, to be pause, to be hole, to be void, to be silent, to be semicolon, to be semicolon." The fundamental truth is that an independent country should not swear allegiance to a foreign head of state. For Saint Lucia, this is even more egregious as the monarchy is a direct reflection, reminder

and endorsement of our colonial past.

Some may dismiss the issue with a cynical "so?", as if to suggest that not everything from colonialism was bad, as if, in Gonsalves' metaphor, we could tally colonialism's "assets and liabilities" on a balance sheet. But the answer is simple: We should have a homegrown head of state, shaped in the image and likeness of Saint Lucians.

Dispelling colonial myths

Even with this rationale, we must confront the colonial myths which, ironically, outlive the colonial sympathisers themselves—about why we shouldn't "bother" removing the King. The arguments echo those against the CCJ:

"There are more pressing issues—crime, cost of living—why waste time on this?"

"The King doesn't affect us anyway."

And the extreme: "If we do this, Britain will withdraw support, tourism will suffer, and our dollar will collapse."

To the first point: There will never be a "perfect time" for decolonisation. Small nations must always walk, chew gum and punch above their weight. Countries, like people, are never without challenges. If we wait for the "right time", when will that be? Who decides? And will it hinge on economic conditions that may never be ideal?

Those peddling this argument will always move the goalposts on decolonial matters because they don't see colonialism as a problem as long as it isn't holding a gun to our heads.

Yes, bread-and-butter issues matter. But a nation is not a single-issue project. We must address economic struggles and the institutions that define our sovereignty. A society is more than survival; it's also about identity, legacy and the invisible ties that bind us.

As for the King's irrelevance, that's precisely the point. If the country is swearing allegiance to someone who does not have our interests at the top of their mind when they wake up, does it mean we should retain them indefinitely?

And on tourism and aid: Has Barbados suffered since becoming a republic? No. UK tourism and support remain strong. Fearmongering doesn't hold up to reality.

What's required?

A referendum is necessary. It is a recommendation not plucked from thin air but from Saint Lucia's 2011 Constitutional Reform Commission Report. The report advised:

- Replace the monarchy with a locally elected President, chosen by a majority of the House of Assembly after consultation between the Prime Minister and Opposition Leader.
- The President should be a Saint Lucian by birth, resident for at least 10 years before nomination, aged 35–75, and not have held office in a political party or stood for election as a candidate within the same period.
- Serve no more than two seven-year terms, with removal procedures mirroring Dominica's.
- Section 41(2) of our Constitution states that amending sections related to the Governor-General's office requires:
- A three-quarters parliamentary majority (both houses).
- A successful referendum with majority public support.

But history shows referenda on such issues often fail in our region. Take Grenada, St Vincent and the Grenadines, Antigua and Barbuda, and the Bahamas. To avoid this, we need sustained public education in a form that people can understand.

Saint Lucia in 2025 must heed Errol Barrow's warning: The Caribbean must not "loiter on colonial premises after closing time."

The question remains: What, and who, are we waiting for?

Rahym R. Augustin-Joseph is a 24-year-old Saint Lucian pursuing his Bachelor of Laws at UWI Cave Hill, after earning first-class honours in political science and law. The current Commonwealth Caribbean Rhodes Scholar and a former UWI valedictorian, he is dedicated to using law and politics to transform Saint Lucia and the wider Caribbean.