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DEFENCE AND OVERSEA POLICY COMMITTEE

ST VINCENT: INDEPENDENCE

Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs

1. The St Vincent Government have asked us to grant independence with effect from 27 October 1979. Under the West Indies Act 1967, an Associated State can itself terminate the status of Association after obtaining the approval of two-thirds of the votes in a popular referendum; or it can ask the British Government to terminate association by Order in Council. Grenada in 1974, Dominica in 1978 and St Lucia this year became independent by the second method. The policy of successive British Governments has been to move an Order in Council when satisfied that the majority of the people of the State want independence and that the new constitution is a democratic one.
2. We wish to bring Associated Statehood to an end as soon as possible. They already have full internal self-government. We are responsible only for external affairs and defence: this amounts to responsibility without power and on occasion has caused us international embarrassment.
3. The independent Commonwealth Caribbean Governments support independence for the remaining Associated States (St Vincent, St Kitts-Nevis, Anguilla and Antigua). In the light of the current instability in the region, the States wish to set up their own regional security arrangements, with help from us and to develop their political and economic cooperation. The Associated States can only play a full part in this process when independent. Also, after independence, they are able to look for aid elsewhere as well as from us.
4. The St Vincent Government, who won 10 of the 13 seats and over 69% of the popular vote at the 1974 election on a platform which included independence, have a clear mandate. The opposition parties also endorsed the principle of independence.
5. The St Vincent Government consulted the people on the constitutional

issues before last September's Constitutional Conference. The Conference Report and the draft constitution were then published in St Vincent. The House of Assembly approved the draft constitution in February. There has been little public interest in independence and no evidence of popular opposition to it.

6. The two opposition parties, however, are now opposing independence and trying to force an election (due anyway by March 1980). They boycotted the Constitutional Conference, made no constructive contribution to the House of Assembly debate in February, but subsequently suggested amendments to the draft constitution. These were at first rejected by the St Vincent Government. The Minister of State, Nicholas Ridley, who visited St Vincent last month asked the St Vincent Government to reconsider this since it would be preferable presentationally for the constitution to reflect the views of all the Parties. After further consideration the St Vincent Government agreed to the three Opposition amendments which Mr Ridley considered most important.

7. Although the recent volcanic eruption on St Vincent has delayed independence, the St Vincent Government are confident they will be ready for it in October. The alleged economic damage inflicted by the volcano has caused Mr Cato to seek to renegotiate the level of British aid after independence, but we have not conceded any increase: this problem should not be insurmountable.

8. I believe that we should agree to the St Vincent Government's request for independence. Although the opposition parties may continue to oppose it, they will probably confine themselves to peaceful action. The St Vincent Government anyway have an efficient police force which should be able to cope with any disorder. I think the Opposition will support us in Parliament although we may face criticism from individual MP's. I therefore seek my colleagues' approval that I should inform the St Vincent Government and Opposition that the British Government are willing to recommend to Parliament that St Vincent's status of Association be terminated by Order in Council. This will mean that parliamentary time for a short debate on an affirmative resolution in both Houses will have to be found before the recess. Unless I hear to the contrary by 26 June I will assume that my colleagues agree.

Foreign and Commonwealth Office
20 June 1979