

The Last Days of the Revo'

Reconsidering the evidence presented
at the trial of the Grenada 17

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Committee for Human Rights in Grenada

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Forward

During the month of August 1983, the Central Committee of the New Jewel Movement (NJM) unanimously concluded that the Grenada Revolution was facing a serious and growing crisis as a result of both internal problems and external pressures.

At an Emergency Meeting to discuss Concerns of Party Membership, held on August 26th 1983, NJM Party Leader and Central Committee Chairman, Prime Minister Maurice Bishop, described the situation as one where the governing party itself faced disintegration and, among other points, stated that CC members should reflect on the individual strengths and weaknesses of all CC members, and also think about the specific responsibilities of CC comrades both at the party and State levels.

The Central Committee met again for three days in September 14th to 16th to discuss measures to meet the deteriorating situation facing the party and the Revolution and out of these discussions came a proposal to re-establish a joint leadership structure for the NJM. The proposal was eventually put to the vote and the result was nine members in favour, one against and four abstentions. Prime Minister Maurice Bishop, Foreign Affairs Minister Unison Whiteman and Agricultural Workers Union President Fitzroy Bain abstained, as did the People's Revolutionary Army Commander Hudson Austin on the grounds that he had been absent for most of the debate. The only vote against was from Agriculture Minister George Louison who made it clear that he was vehemently opposed.

In light of the reservations expressed by Bishop, it was decided that the Joint Leadership Proposal be put to a General Meeting of Party Members, who would be given, in advance, the Minutes of the Central Committee Meeting, so they would have the detailed arguments tabled. However, it was made clear that the proposal only related to the leadership of the party: Bishop would remain Prime Minister and Leader of the People's Revolutionary Government (PRG). The general meeting took place on 25th September 1983. It lasted for 15 hours and at the end of the long debate all but one voted in favour of the proposal for joint leadership of the party by Maurice Bishop and Deputy Prime Minister Bernard Coard. Bishop and Whiteman both voted in favour of the motion, with one abstention Chester Louison.

George Louison was absent from the meeting as he had left for Eastern Europe as the head of the advance party for a visit by Prime Minister Bishop to Hungary and Czechoslovakia. Bishop left Grenada the day after the meeting that had approved the joint leadership proposal. When he returned to Grenada in October, he advised the

other member of the Central Committee that he had changed his mind and now opposed the joint leadership proposal.

The aim of this pamphlet is to explain the tragic events that occurred between the 12th and 19thg October 1983. It is based on verbal accounts given to me by members of the PRA People’s Revolutionary Army (PRA), including members of Maurice Bishops security guards, as well as affidavits that were sworn in 1993.

Some of the interviews took place at Fort George and Fort Frederick and at Mount Wheldale where Bishop and Coard lived as neighbours at the time. A number of the people interviewed made it clear that they were happy to give an account of what they witnessed, but were not willing to have their names mentioned for fear of repercussions. What follows is purely the narrative of the individuals who witnessed the events at the time. Several referred to Fort George as Fort Rupert, as that was its original name ,but to avoid confusion I have referred to the fort as Fort George throughout.

The trip to Eastern Europe

George Louison spent a great part of the Prime Minister’s official trip to Eastern Europe seeking to persuade Bishop to change his mind and withdraw his support for the decision on joint leadership of the party and to fight it instead.

While in Hungry, he convened a meeting of all of the party members on the trip, which was also attended by Whiteman. Louison explained that Bishop had decided not to attend the meeting because he had not yet made up his mind (about the issue of joint leadership) and needed more time to think about it. Louison expressed his view that joint leadership would destroy the revolution, but at no time did he or Whiteman inform the group that at the General Meeting held on 25th September, party members, including Bishop, had voted in favour of it.

At the end of the East European trip, the delegation made an unscheduled visit to Cuba on their way back to Grenada. Whilst abroad, Cletus St Paul, the head of the Prime Minister’s personal security unit, telephoned the overall head of security in Grenada, Lt. Ashley Ram Folkes and, referring to the decision on joint leadership, indicated in very threatening language that ‘Blood will flow’. That conversation was immediately reported to St Paul’s superiors.

At the next scheduled meeting of the Central Committee on 12th October, Bishop indicated he had changed his position on joint leadership and now opposed it; this was just four days after returning from the trip.

The Rumour

On 12th October, a member of Prime Minister Bishops security team, Errol George was approached by his main security person Cletus St Paul, who advised him that the Prime Minister had a special task for him. They walked towards the Prime Minister's room, from which George Louison and Jaqueline Creft were just leaving and as they approached the room, Bishop emerged and he took them into a room that was usually unoccupied.

Bishop advised that "We have a rumour to spread". St Paul then spoke and indicated in the presence of the Prime Minister, that "We were to go and advise several people that Bernard Coard and Phyllis Coard are planning to kill Maurice Bishop". It was made clear that they should say the name of Phyllis Coard first.

Bishop then began to call out the names of persons to whom he wanted the rumour to be communicated to, which included Theresa (his cook), one Garry from St. Patrick's, Peggy Nesfiled and Richard Hart. Maurice Bishop then left for Fort George in the company of Cletus St Paul. At this point the cook Theresa arrived, and Errol proceeded to tell her the rumour as instructed by Maurice Bishop, indicating that Phyllis and Bernard Coard were planning to kill the chief and that she should tell as many people as possible. However, he then drove to the personal Security Headquarters where he advised the head of personal Security of what had happened at the meeting earlier that morning with Maurice Bishop and Cletus St Paul.

Upon Errol's return to the residence of the Prime Minister, Cletus St Paul advised him that Maurice wished to see him and he went into Bishop's room where they met with him and George Louison. Maurice asked Errol who he had told so far about the rumour, and when told he had spoken to Theresa he was asked to go and pick her up from her home. When he returned with Theresa, the prime Minister asked what she had done for the morning and she had indicated that she advised Ma Simeon that Phyllis Coard and Bernard Coard were planning to kill the Prime Minister. About 10 minutes after this conversation St Paul indicated to Errol that everything was settled.

Having been told of the rumour, the head of Personal Security advised the Chief of Counter Intelligence who set off to Fort George where the Central Committee was meeting, but when he arrived, they had adjourned for lunch so he set off for his office at Butler House. On the way, he met Bernard Coard's car and he advised Bernard that it may not be safe for him to go to his house and requested an urgent discussion at Butler House. He advised Bernard of the content of the rumour, and indicated that his life was now threatened.

By early afternoon it was clear that the rumour had reached significant sections of the population and was causing widespread confusion and potential for chaos. Some members of the St. Paul's Militia had taken up arms and has expressed a readiness to fight on behalf of Maurice Bishop.

In the afternoon of October 12th Cletus St Paul was questioned about the rumour, and when faced with the detailed report from his security colleague he confessed his guilt and gave a written confession that was also taped. By the evening Bernard and Phyllis Coard were advised that credible threats to their lives had been intercepted and that they would be moved from their home for that night.

The following day, October 13th, there was a general meeting of all members and applicants of the NJM at which Bishop spoke for over half an hour denying any knowledge of the rumour. However, his security guard Errol George was then brought in to address the meeting and he indicated that together with Cletus St Paul he had been given the rumour to spread and that Maurice had stressed that the name of Phyllis Coard must be called first.

While Errol spoke, a visibly dejected Bishop just looked down at the floor, and when he was given an opportunity to immediately respond he declined. Several persons present spoke urged Bishop to respond, but he declined to do so. He was subsequently placed under effective house arrest by the security forces with the agreement of the majority of the Central Committee. On October 14th, Bernard Coard sought a meeting with the Chief of Counter Intelligence and advised him that he intended to resign from the Government, both as Deputy Prime Minister and as Minister of Planning, Finance and Trade, and that he had also decided to leave Grenada with his family. His resignation was announced on Radio Grenada later in the day.

On 16th October the Chief of Counter Intelligence (CI) received a telephone call from Bishop who requested a meeting. The CI drove to his house, and during the course of the meeting Bishop indicated that he had heard about the demonstration in St George's the day before and that he never intended this matter to reach this far. He asked if the Chief believed that he has spread the rumour and got the reply that he had 'no reason to doubt it'.

Shortly after this meeting the CI Chief was visited by major Chris Stroude, who gave him a letter from Cletus St. Paul, which he wanted passing on to Lt. Co. Liam James. In the letter, St. Paul admitted that Maurice Bishop had told him to spread the rumour that Phyllis Coard and Bernard Coard wanted to kill him. Having read the letter James went to Calivigny to speak with St. Paul who confirmed that he had

written the letter and wrote another statement detailing his knowledge of the rumour.

19th October 1983

There were demonstrations on the island every day following the home confinement of Bishop, and no attempt was made to disrupt them, with the army being confined to their barracks in order to avoid the risk of confrontation.

On the previous evening (18th October), the Chief of Counter Intelligence had received word from his officers that a demonstration was planned for St. Georges on the following day. He discussed the demonstration with Lt. Col. Layne who took the position that the people had the right to demonstrate if they chose to and that as far as he was concerned force should not be used to avert the demonstration.

As the march progressed on 19th October, it became apparent that it was heading towards Prime Minister Bishop's official residence at Mount Wheldale and two soldiers were sent from Fort George to check out the situation. On arrival at Mount Wheldale, there was an Armoured Personnel Carrier (APC) positioned at the first checkpoint at the lower entrance to the official residence and a second positioned just inside the gate.

Lt. Co. Layne walked down to the first checkpoint to converse with the crowd and while he was speaking a woman hit him with her umbrella and he just gave a gesture and walked back up the hill. He then instructed the soldiers to fire if the crowd attempted to break through to the Prime Minister's residence, but repeatedly emphasised, "Comrades, fire only in the air."

However, at the first checkpoint the demonstrators overpowered the security officers and proceeded up the hill; up to this point no firing had taken place. When the crowd crossed the main gate, the soldiers fired into the air several times and at first the crowd drew back, but eventually they forced their way past the soldiers, forcibly entered the Prime Minister's official residence and came out half carrying Bishop. That scene was witnessed by many NJM Central Committee members who were at the home of Bernard Coard, located almost opposite to Bishop's on the same compound, separated only by a fence, a large gate and road.

The assumption was that the crowd would be taking Maurice either to Radio Free Grenada (RFG) or to the Market Square in the centre of the town of St George's, where microphones had been set up, so Lt. Col. James gave the order to evacuate all military units from the radio station so as to avoid any confrontation there.

While still at the compound they were approached by demonstrators who hurled

abuse and threatened to “deal with us”. Because of the nature of the threats, it was proposed that Bernard and Phyllis Coard should be removed to a safe place for their protection, and transport was arranged to take them Fort Frederick. An instruction was also given to remove all weapons from the personal security office and take them to Fort Frederick, as there were still demonstrators at the compound and the situation had become volatile.



Above is a recent photo of Fort Fredrick and surrounding buildings. Top left, there is a building with four pillars and a pick-up truck parked in front. On the right side of the vehicle, facing the picture, is where Cletus St Paul was witnessed to be sitting, handcuffed, on ammunition boxes in the veranda, on October 19th 1983. There is much evidence to suggest he arrived 1.5 to 2 hours after CC members and would not have witnessed any meeting.

Several soldiers testified that over the period of time when the Central Committee members arrived at Fort Frederick, Cletus St Paul was not at the Fort. As they arrived, the Central Committee members were directed to the top level at the Fort, and at that point the mobile unit from Calivigny had not yet arrived. That unit arrived approximately one and half hours later, and Cletus St Paul came with it.

Errol George has indicated that on arrival at Fort Frederick he saw Cletus St Paul at the bottom level of the Fort, handcuffed and sitting on an ammunition box. They spoke and St Paul indicated he was very disappointed in Bishop and that he had betrayed the people. Errol remained in close proximity to St Paul for approximately two hours and at no time did he leave the immediate vicinity of the ammunition box. It is not possible to see the top level of the Fort from where St Paul was sitting or indeed hear what was being said by people at the higher level.

Errol George remains adamant that at no time did he witness any member of the Central Committee giving instructions to any soldier or group of soldiers, and further, at no time did hear shouts of : “ Long live the Central Committee” and “Long live the revolution” as testified to by Cletus St Paul at the Maurice Bishop murder trial.

Errol had given evidence to the Preliminary Inquiry (PI) that substantially differs from that given by Cletus St Paul, who denied knowledge of the rumour. He had expected to be called as a witness in the trial, and was listed on the indictment but at no time was he requested to give his testimony. The physical location of St Paul at the time in question is supported by evidence from several others of the people present.

The crowd that overcame the few soldiers and forcibly released Bishop did not go to the Market Square or the radio station as predicted. Instead they went to Fort George which was the army Headquarters. As he crowd approached, the soldiers were ordered by the senior officer present not to fire on the crowd. The crowd with Bishop entered the Fort and ordered soldiers to put down their weapons and the senior officer was ordered to open the armoury and weapons were then distributed to the crowd of hostile civilians.

A woman soldier on duty at the entry to the fort was stripped of her uniform and left only wearing her underwear; one of the soldiers interviewed indicated that this was done in the presence of leaders who took no action to prevent it.

Civilians with military training were asked to step forward to be armed for other missions, and plans to seize the main armoury and other PRA camps were announced. A couple of armed men were dispatched to the home of Bernard Coard, but he wasn't there.

When the crowd first arrived at the Fort, telephone communications were still in place, and a communications officer had indicated that the general staff was under arrest and weapons were being distributed to the demonstrators. During a conversation with Ian St. Bernard, Unison Whiteman spoke on the line and indicated: “There will be no compromising this time. We are in control.” St. Bernard was advised to give himself up to the nearest police station and that “the others would be dealt with later”.



Soon after the crowd arrived at Fort George on October 19th... Bishop is pictured, near the sand bags / operations room, on the upper level of the fort, facing the crowd.

There were no further telephone communications as someone had been sent to the exchange with a list of numbers to be disconnected. At the same time, the army communication system was jammed, so there was no effective communication in place.

Lt. Col. Layne had a conversation with the Chief of Counter intelligence and expressed his concern that arms were being given to militia personnel and that there were explosives kept in the underground rooms and if a cigarette was to fall there, the whole area could be destroyed. He therefore determined that the fort had to be recaptured and order restored, so he ordered Officer Cadet Mayers to retake the army headquarters with an armed unit comprising of three armoured squads drawn from soldiers of Mayers' unit.

Their orders were to enter firing in the air to create shock and disorientation, to quickly secure the high ground and then proceed to systematically chase the crowd out of the army headquarters. The troops were instructed that if they came under fire, they should defend themselves but this would be the very last resort. The unit clearly did not expect to be fired upon, as the soldiers were sitting on top of the vehicles rather than inside where they would have been afforded far more protection; some were also reported to have been casually waving at the public on their journey to the Fort.



Soldiers sitting on top of an APC, near the roadside at Fort George, on October 19th.

As the unit arrived at the foot of Fort George, just as they were about to take the hill leading to the bottom square, they were ambushed by armed civilians firing from the fort. A sergeant in the first armoured car, Warrant Officer Mason, was shot with multiple bullets to his chest and died instantly.

Soldiers observing at the time from the fort have indicated that the first shots were fired by an “Asian-looking man” with Guyanese parents, who was quickly and officially smuggled off the island the next day. Soldiers present at the time are adamant that the first shots came from the Fort and not from the unit. The unit returned fire, but this was targeted on the operations room from where they had been fired upon. There was an exchange of gunfire and explosions, and people panicked and bolted in every direction. Hundreds, including women and children bolted towards the armoured cars as they fled the exchange of gunfire between the soldiers on the first armoured car and the armed civilians.

In the chaos, it was difficult for the soldiers in the second armoured car to manoeuvre their way to the bottom square a few yards ahead. When they finally reached the bottom square, it was discovered that Officer cadet Mayer’s and Private Martin Simon had both been shot, the former in the lower abdomen and the latter had

received four bullets in his upper chest. Martin Simon was trying his best to prevent Mayer's from collapsing on the ground.

Having secured the Fort, the soldiers placed Bishop and others under arrest. The Unit was by all accounts clearly enraged by all that had happened, culminating in the ambush. When the news arrived that Mayer's had died from his wounds, all discipline broke down and the unit's commander lost it. He ordered a firing squad to be assembled and Maurice Bishop and others were executed. That commander has consistently made it clear that there were no prior instructions to eliminate Bishop as alleged by Cletus St Paul - and he had no communication with anyone at Fort Frederick once Fort George had been secured. He was bitterly angry over what he saw as a "betrayal of the revolution" by Bishop and the reported death of one of his closest friends in the entire army had pushed him over the edge.



Armoured Patrolled Vehicles situated by entrance of Fort George, thought to be taken after ambush from higher levels of the fort.

Shortly after the Fort had been retaken, a jeep carrying Captain Lester Redhead and Lieutenant Cecil Prime arrived at Fort Frederick to report on what had occurred to Lt. Col. Layne. A few minutes later they left, to return to Fort George, and just about a-minute-and-a half later, there was another burst of gunfire, which is presumed to have been the firing squad. Given the distance between the two forts, it would not have been possible for them to have returned by the time of the bursts of gunfire.

Conclusion

The stories told by the ex-soldiers in this pamphlet are true version of events as they happened in October 1983 and expose the following five from a much larger number of untruths that have been sold to the Grenadian people as their true history by the US Government: -

1. That Bernard Coard was hungry for power and brought about the crisis that led to the collapse of the Revolution. This is false. The decision to have a joint leadership of the Party (not the Government) was a decision made by the members of the NJM with both Maurice Bishop and Unison Whiteman voting in favour. While Bishop was on the trip to Eastern Europe he was persuaded by George Louison and Unison Whiteman to change his mind. On his return to Grenada, he initiated the rumour that Phyllis and Bernard Coard were planning to kill him and this led to the political crisis that eventually gripped the island. Coard's reaction was not to try and seek power, it was to express a desire to leave the island with his family. Ironically, a credible plot to murder the Coards was uncovered, and they were removed from their home to protect their safety.

On the night of 18th October, a delegation of four Central Committee members met with Bishop with a proposed a package of measures to end the political crisis, which included: the Party abandoning the Joint Leadership of the party that had been agreed at an emergency party meeting held earlier in the evening, immediate resumption by Bishop of all his functions and his acceptance of responsibility the rumour that sparked-off the crisis. It was understood that, if necessary, the Central Committee would back down from the last element of the package. The meeting was cordial and the expectation of the Central Committee members present was that the issue would be resolved the following day.

2. The decision to bring about a military confrontation was not the making of the Central Committee or the People's Revolutionary Army. From October 12th to 19th the army had observed the order from the Central Committee to stay in its barracks, never once leaving its barracks to seek to break-up any of protest demonstrations that were taking place. When the crowd marched on the Official Residence of the Prime Minister and released Bishop, soldiers were repeatedly instructed not to fire on the people in order to avoid any confrontation. When the crowd marched on Fort George, there was no attempt to prevent them from entering , even though it was the Army Headquarters.

The soldiers on the Fort were instead ordered not to fire on the crowd and to lay down their arms. All military personnel were also removed from the radio station in order to avoid any confrontation should the crowd be led there.

3. When the mobile unit was sent to regain control of the army headquarters at Fort George they did not go “with blood in their eyes” as has been alleged. Instead, they were again instructed to fire in the air, and only to defend themselves as a last resort if they came under fire. As the soldiers drove from Fort Frederick to Fort George they sat on top of the armoured vehicles and waved at the crowd.
4. The soldiers did not initiate the firing that led to the confrontation. Instead, they were fired upon by the civilians on Fort George who had been armed by Bishop and his supporters. A number of the soldiers on the lead armoured car were killed or wounded during this attack, and their colleagues returned fire, concentrating in the direction of the Operations Room where the source of the attack originated. No attempt has ever been made by the authorities to ascertain who was responsible for murdering the soldiers and bringing them to justice.
5. The only evidence entered against the ten members of the Central Committee at the Bishop murder trial was that of Cletus St Paul, who claimed that while standing at the entrance of Fort Frederick on October 19th he saw Bernard Coard and other members of the Central Committee arrive in a state of great urgency and on their arrival, they huddled together. Following this meeting, he claimed that one of the Central Committee members made a short statement to the soldiers at Fort Frederick indicating that Bishop and others had taken over Fort George and they “must be liquidated”. The truth, as seen in the statements of others present, was that at the time the Central Committee members arrived, Cletus St Paul was not on Fort Frederick, but was at Camp Fedon in Calvigny and came to Fort with the mobile unit led by Conrad Mayers later. Indeed, at the Preliminary Hearing held in 1984 he indicated that he arrived at the Fort Frederick at 12:30 pm, which would have been one-and-a half-hours after the crowd arrived at Fort George and the Central Committee arrived at Fort Frederick. The Central Committee members had left Bernard Coard’s residence just after the crowd had released Maurice Bishop, and would have been at Fort Frederick at approximately 11 am. On his arrival, St Paul spent his time at the bottom level of the Fort, as illustrated in the photo of Fort Fredrick, from where it would be impossible to see or hear what was happening on the top level of the Fort where the Central Committee members were. Remarkably, it

has been claimed that at the Preliminary Hearing which took place a few months after the tragic events St Paul says nothing about seeing anything at Fort Frederick which could pass for a Central Committee meeting. Errol George, the security officer, who gave contrary evidence to St Paul at the Preliminary Enquiry was never called to give evidence at the actual trial despite being the first witness named on the indictment. At the trial, St Paul denied any knowledge of the rumour that Phyllis and Bernard Coard were planning to kill Maurice Bishop, and his statements, both written and taped, admitting his involvement were removed from the Island by the US forces and were among the many documents that they refused to return to be used as evidence in the trial. Without St Paul's evidence no properly conducted Free and Fair trial could have found the members of the NJM Central Committee guilty of any crime; it was on this evidence that all ten were sentenced to hang.

In retrospect, it's difficult to understand what Maurice Bishop and / or his supporters were seeking to achieve on the 19th October. The general perception within the party was that it was not Bishop the man but the NJM party that was in power, with the clear support of the People's Revolutionary Army. The party seemed willing to accept the withdrawal of the joint leadership proposal on October 18th, but the very next day Bishop marched on the army headquarters with those who had persuaded him to renege on the proposal he had earlier supported. Once at the Fort, they armed untrained civilians and made plans to seize other army bases. That is what would surely have resulted in a bloody civil war.



The square on Fort George where Maurice Bishop and others were tragically killed.

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Reconsidering the evidence presented at the trial of the Grenada 17

“Those accused of the killings should have been brought before a court and subjected to a fair trial under domestic and international laws and standards. However, the trial of the Grenada 17 manifestly failed to reach such standards. As the trial was unfair, it was inherently unreliable as a mechanism to establish the true facts of events of 19 October 1983, as well as ensuring that justice was done. Amnesty International believes the trial of the Grenada 17 was fatally flawed and did not meet international standards. In line with international human rights, Amnesty International stated that the Grenada 17 could not continue to be incarcerated on the grounds of a conviction that was obtained via a process that was in gross violation of international standards governing the fairness of trials”.

Amnesty International on the trial and appeal of the Grenada 17

“the decision was totally political in context and tone. It included no consideration of the facts and law, making the entire proceedings illegal, false in its finding of fact and a corruption of justice.”

Ramsey Clark, former US Attorney General