

Revo' Factsheet

Democracy and Participation



On seizing power the New Jewel Movement (NJM) planned to radically change the way in which Grenada was governed and how its people could best effect the direction of their future. The thinking of the revolutionaries was that politics involved decision-making about resource allocation. As such, they did not believe that the process should be an "exclusive club" composed of the rich, powerful and well-connected.

This was the model left by the retreating empire in order to ensure control through indirect means, as illustrated by the Gairy model of government, an incompetent, kleptocratic copy of the British Westminster model. The NJM felt that the Peoples Assemblies would be a better form of government in that it would empower the poor, marginalised and powerless.

The leaders of the Revolution did not envisage that People's assemblies would assume this role immediately following the NJM taking power. The proposal was for the formation of a provisional government that would, among other things, be dedicated to developing and implementing these assemblies. The NJM proposed instead that the Peoples Assemblies would be a better form of government in that this approach would empower the poor, marginalised and powerless.

Parish Council Meetings

Following Gairy's overthrow, the revolutionaries initiated meetings of *NJM Parish Council of Delegates*. These would meet monthly in each of Grenada's seven parishes. The first such NJM Council of Delegates Meeting was overwhelmed by non-NJM members wishing to attend. This was repeated at all of the other parish meetings. As a result of attendance being open to all local people, within three months they became simply Parish Council Meetings. The unleashed potential of the Grenadian people resulted in these Parish Council Meetings



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proving to be physically inadequate for those wanting to attend. At some of the meetings more than 1,000 would attend. Consequently, they were changed from Parish to Zonal Council Meetings, with the former splitting into two of the latter. In the case of St George five Zonal Councils were formed. By 1981, more than 28 zones were created across the country, and they met regularly.

Zonal Council Meetings

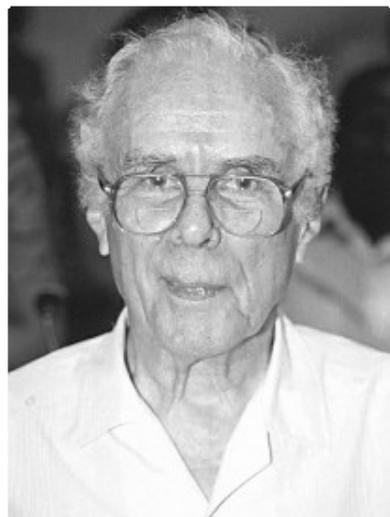
The evolution of a process of democratic control across Grenada, such as the Zonal Council Meetings, was extended to those who belonged to particular groups or were involved in particular areas. So, Women, Youth, Workers and Farmers Parish Council Meetings were also established. The contents of these meetings during the Revolution began with Government Ministers and the leadership of the Revolution presenting reports to the people followed by questions, suggestions and criticism. These developed into fora where senior public officers were asked to make presentations and engage in Q&A regarding their area of responsibility. Over time it became the norm for the Chief of Police, the Chief Medical Officer, the Director of Airport Construction, Permanent Secretaries of all Ministries to make regular reports to these meetings.

The success of the process, although very weak and to a certain extent embryonic in

nature, was the confidence it gave to Grenadians; instituted a degree of control of their economic and material environment; strengthened their understanding of the issues and challenges faced by the new Government and the Departments of Government. With such knowledge the ability to exercise real decision-making became stronger.

Constitutional Commission

Consequently, many of the programmes of the Revolution were conceived, tested and/or fleshed out at these meetings. Among these were the proposals to develop a National Transport System; the introduction of a National Insurance Scheme; the creation of the National Commercial Bank; the development of the Adult Literacy programme and many other ideas. At the Zonal level the meetings concentrated on local issues such as schools, health centres, roads, etc. However, the also discussed national and international issues including the US policies in the region and elsewhere, the freedom struggle in South Africa; Palestinian self-determination. In 1983 the PRG moved to give effect to another aspect of its 1973 Manifesto, the development of a constitution relevant to the needs of Grenadian People. A Constitutional Commission was formed, led by the eminent lawyer, Caribbean historian and writer Richard Hart. A founder member of the Peoples National Party of Jamaica, he had migrated to the UK following his expulsion from the PNP and there worked as a solicitor. He was recruited out of retirement by the PRG to become the Attorney General of Grenada.



Richard Hart

The brief given to the Commission was to draft a new constitution. As part of its work the Commission examined the operation and experience of a number of Councils, with the intention of ensuring they were placed on a legal footing. The revolutionaries hoped that as a result all adult Grenadians from a specific area would have the right to access, participate and be elected to the executive of the various Councils. Unfortunately, 1983 was also the year in which the structures of the Revolution appear to have encountered challenges, for reasons not yet fully understood.

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A Parish Council Meeting

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Obstacles

One of the many obstacles faced by the Revolution may have been their setting of too high an expectation for themselves. That challenges could not be overcome by the enthusiasm of the party members and the people alone. Bernard Coard explains that in the four years and seven months of the Revolution the assemblies, as described above, happened almost by accident. However, their role does not appear to have been given any legal status and their role can best be described as that of consultative bodies on their way to becoming legally established. Further, the NJM appears to have abandoned them when the crisis within the leadership overcame the Party.

These factsheets are a summary of some of the gains of the Revo' and are designed to inform current and future generations of its successes. Please download, read and circulate. If you have any comments please contact the author, Steve Cushion, info@grenada-forwardever.net