THE
GRENADA REVOLUTION

Four Years of Freedom

Achievements, Challenges and Collapse

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Summary

This document provides a summary of the momentous events that occurred in Grenada between the Revolution (Revo') of 13 March 1979 and the US invasion of October 1983. It covers, in outline, the history of Grenada, the preparation and planning of the Revolution, the successes of the Revolution, its collapse, the US invasion and the lessons that can be learned from its collapse.

There is not the space to cover in full the collapse of the Revolution and this aspect of Grenada's history is disputed. I would urge readers to seek out available documents and come to their own conclusions. Likewise, there is not the space to go into detail the "show trial" of the leaders of the Grenada Revolution orchestrated by the US forces in a court of their creation established in Grenada. However, I would urge everyone to read Amnesty International's report that is highly critical of the trial, *The Grenada 17: Last of the cold war prisoners?* http://bit.ly/2YOLbD5 or https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/AMR32/001/2003/en/.

Introduction

If you enter "Grenada Revolution" in the various catalogues of academic articles such as JStore, 64 articles immediately appear, of which only 9 have anything useful to say about the achievements and challenges of the 4 years of the Revo' while the rest concern themselves almost entirely with an interminable discussion of what went wrong at the end and who did what to whom and why. Of course these are serious questions, but this discussion has come to dominate study of the Grenadian Revolution and tended to obscure the very real changes that the people of Grenada achieved in their society in such a short time. I would argue that it is now time to revisit those 4 years to draw up a balance sheet of their achievements.

Coupled with my personal knowledge of some of the events in Grenada; the University of the West Indies Open campus in St Georges, the capital of Grenada, has a collection of newspaper cuttings, government information bulletins and pamphlets.

Cross-referencing these with the British Foreign Office archives at Kew has enabled the drawing up of a balance sheet to be started.

For example, the list drawn up for the 2nd anniversary celebration of the Revolution in 1981 shows real progress made by the people during the Revo'.

In this paper I will look at three specific areas where the people of Grenada made real progress, namely the economy, education and women's organisation. In the process I shall concentrate on the active participation of ordinary Grenadians rather than the actions of individual leaders. First, a brief history of Grenada and the preparation and planning of the Revolution.

The History of Grenada

Grenada sits near the southern edge of the string of Caribbean islands, the Windwards. It comprises Grenada and the smaller islands of Carriacou and Petit Martinique. It is about 133 sq miles (344 sq kn) in area.

The Windward Islands of the Caribbean

First settled by the Lokano or Tiano people, Grenada was first visited by the Europeans in 1498. After much conflict between the European powers Britain took the island and their colonist killed most of the local people, established work camps and imported kidnapped African to labour there.

As elsewhere the kidnapped Africans resisted their enslavement and rebelled on numerous occasions. In 1795 Julian Fedon *an enslaver of multiple heritage*, launched a rebellion against the British, freeing the enslaved and being joined by the others. They captured the island but were defeated by an invasion of British forces.

Following British legislation against the kidnapping and trafficking of Africans and the subsequent "abolition" of enslavement

in the 1830s, Grenadians did not enjoy the benefits of their "freedom". In the post war period Grenadians rose up against their continued exploitation and from 1952 to the late 60's engaged in resistance against their condition. Led by the charismatic and oratorically gifted leader Eric Gairy, Grenada achieved independence in 1974.

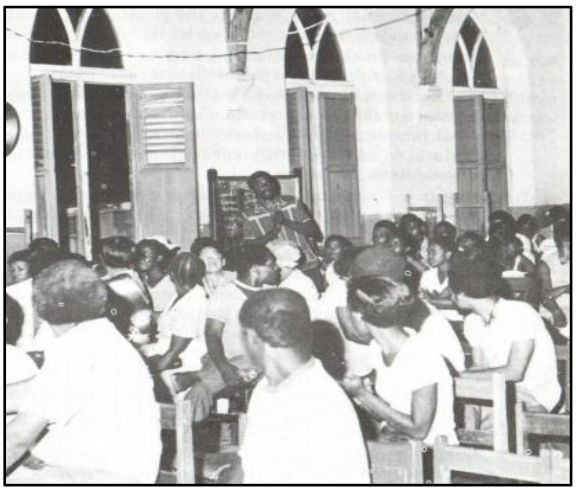
Preparation and Planning of the Revolution

Despite his brilliance as a leader of the uprising, in government Gairy proved incompetent, was out of his depth and brutal. A political organisation, the New Jewel Movement (NJM) (JEWEL - Joint Endeavour for Welfare, Education and Liberation) the combination of a number of smaller political groups and activists including trade unionists, returning students, agricultural leaders and former Black Muslims, challenged Gairy politically. In the 70s the NJM fought elections against Gairy but through corruption, threats, brutality and killings they were defeated. Led by Maurice Bishop, Jacqui Creft and Bernard Coard the NJM, upon learning that Gairy had planned to liquidate its leadership, decided to overthrow Gairy.

Approaches were made to a foreign government for military training, which was given, and arms were procured from abroad. On March 13 1979, whilst Gairy attended a UN meeting, the NJM seized control and the Revo' was launched. The NJM immediately established the Peoples Revolutionary Government (PRG) comprising and equal number of NJM members and business people plus representatives from other political parties, except Gairy's

The Successes of the Revolution

The Economy



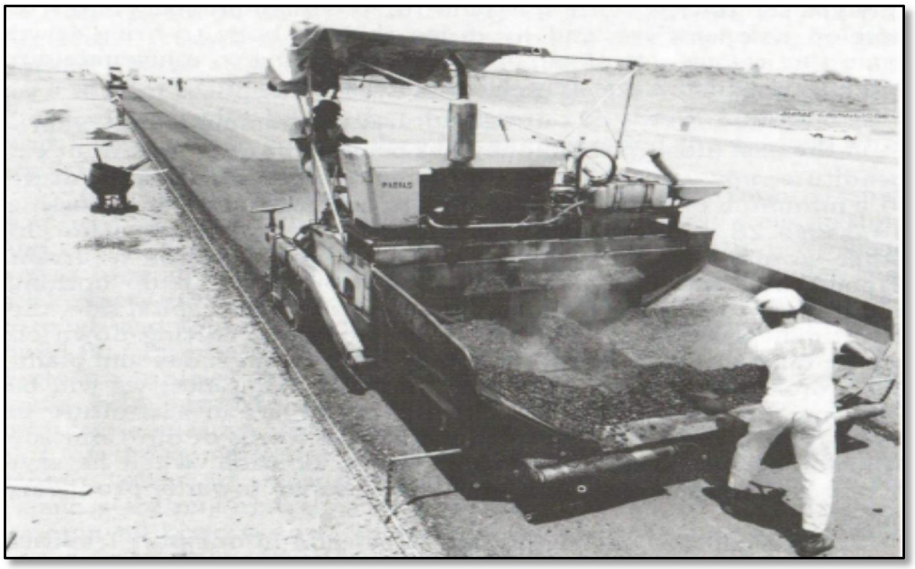
St Georges Zonal Council meeting discussing the Budget

Given the small size of Grenada and its population of 100,000, and the lopsided and dependent economy that the British Empire had left on decolonisation, improving the economic performance of the country was always going to be an uphill struggle, with the only bonus being that the elimination of the previous government's corruption gave an immediate boost to the exchequer.

The Gairy dictatorship had left no database of statistics, indeed there

was no mechanism for collecting any statistics. The only possibility for planning was to turn to the heavy involvement of the mass organisations, while opening the books to public scrutiny. The process of preparing the 1982 budget involved more than 25 meetings of Workers Parish and Zonal Councils, the National Women's Organisations, the National Youth Organisation, trade union branches, the Militia, the Productive Farmers Union etc. Each meeting was attended by a government minister. The input was incredibly detailed and when the original draft and the final proposals are compared, there are major differences that reflect the consultation process.

The principal behind the budget was that recurrent expenditure should come from revenues and taxation while loans and overseas aid were reserved for capital projects, the main one of which was the international airport. Grenadians, who faced great difficulty getting out of and returning to the country, took the decision to build the airport and begun the work before any resources were identified.



Work begins on Grenada's International airport

Under the Revo' accountancy was remarkably tight, a positive reaction to the loose accounting and resultant corruption of the previous regime. In part helped by the welcome given to the Revo' by the Grenadian civil servants, despite the fact that many of them were strong supporters of Gairy. This was aided by the recruitment of a number of very sharp economists from the rest of the Caribbean.

The decision was made that if tourism was to flourish and benefit the general population, an international airport was an absolute necessity was both a sensible economic priority and widely popular. It was eventually financed by loans and aid from 16 countries, ranging from Libya to Canada and the internal levy of a 2% extra tax on all imports.

The airport was designed by the Grenadians, based on a British plan of the 1950s that was never put into effect, largely built by Grenadian workers, including voluntary community organised labour, with dredging carried out by a US company based in Houston, Texas. It was far from the Cuban project so decried by the Reagan regime in the USA, although valuable assistance was provided by skilled workers from Cuba. The airport was linked to a efforts by the Ministry of Tourism to attract more tourists.

The PRG decided early on to link agriculture to industry with agro-industrial development. The former Gairy True Blue military base was converted to an agro-industrial complex for the processing and preserving of agricultural and fishery

The new fish processing plant (left) and workers at the agro-industrial plant

products. This operated in conjunction with a new spice grinding plant, the Mount Hartman livestock farm and a cocoa propagation scheme.

The object was to create added value to Grenada's agricultural production and thereby to expand exports, preserve excess production from the harvest and to produce local foodstuffs as an import substitution measure, with the aim of making the island self-sufficient in food. A Marketing and National Importing Board was set up to market the products of the islands agriculture and agro-industrial, locally and for export, as well as importing essential materials such as fertilizer, which were sold to farmers at below cost.

This is just skimming the surface of Grenada's economy during the Revo'. A more complete account would also have to consider the increased wages and enhanced "social wage" including health and education, the land-reform programme, the new

bus service, the nationalisation of GRENELEC, the other infrastructure projects such as the 63 miles of extra road built and the enhanced dock facilities, the house repair scheme, the reduction of unemployment, the creation of a state owned bank, the agricultural co- operatives and the whole question of tackling efficiency and productivity through planning.

Perhaps most interesting, given the hostility of the US government, is the continued support of the IMF whose 1982 report on the island's economy is most encouraging.

Education

If the economy was a success story, the results for Education was more mixed. Under Gairy, education was unchanged from the days of Empire, based on a Eurocentric model calculated to demean the history of the both the African-descendent majority and the East Indian minority, thereby undercutting their self-confidence. Most primary schools were in a dilapidated condition. There was little secondary school provision, with fees that placed it outside the grasp of the overwhelming majority.

Lyndon Adams, Grenada's youngest tutor receiving an award from Maurice Bishop

For example, there was one teacher training college that only catered for 50 students. A majority of the island's 600 teachers were unqualified and there was a high proportion who were either time servers or, having what was known locally as a "visa mentality", saw their involvement in education as a route off the island. Teachers as a group were not noted as supporters of the Revo'.

The Revo' halved school fees by 1980 and abolished it in '81, while the debts of the Gairy government to the University of the West Indies were paid so that Grenadians could benefit from the possibility of higher education. To quickly address the need for teacher training, the National In-Service Teacher Education Program (NISTEP) was devised, with the help of Chris Searle, the renowned British educationalist and Paulo Freire, the Brazilian educator and philosopher who was a leading advocate of critical pedagogy.

Teachers were expected to attend in-service training every Friday, while skilled workers and community leaders provided work-related education in their absence. Countering the previous pro-imperialist education was, of course, political, and this was condemned by enemies of the Revo' as "propaganda". However, despite the reservations and lack of enthusiasm of some of their colleagues, many teachers now threw themselves into developing the new curriculum with vigour and, while not an overwhelming success, standards improved greatly, new schools were built, a new set of primary school readers were produced and lessons were learned about teacher training that pointed a way forward.

Jacqui Creft, Minister of Education in the People's Revolutionary Government of Grenada

If we compare the school leaving exam pass rate, it went from 3% of the student population in 1978, entitled to take exams, to 32% in 1982. While not all teachers participated in NISTEP with enthusiasm, it may be argued that those who did gained greatly in professional abilities and their student's education prospered.

In Gairy's last year of power, 1978 to 1979, only four Grenadians were supported at university by his government. One was his daughter and another, the son of one of his ministers!

During the four years of the Revo' over 500 Grenadians entered into higher education. Scholarships were provided by a wide range of countries such as the USSR, Cuba, Tanzania, the UK amongst others, in subjects such as medicine, forestry, air-traffic control, dentistry, etc.

An award ceremony at the Centre for Popular Education

It can be argued that this was Grenada's successful "*Great Leap Forward*", which resulted in a huge post-Revo' advancement in the well being of Grenadians.

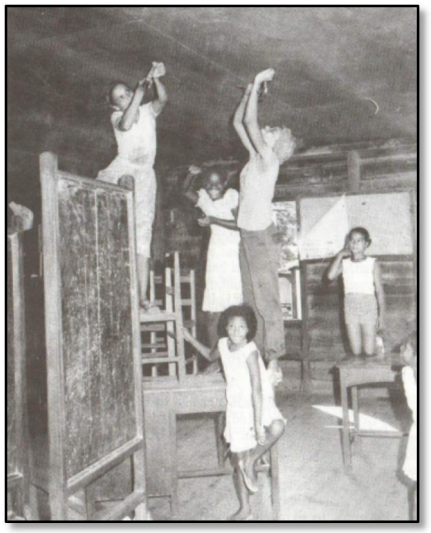
Numerous Grenadians, who were graduates of the Revo' or had participated in the Revo', are now professor and lecturers in a

range of universities; senior international civil servants or professionals working in Grenada.

The Centre for Popular Education (CPE) started as a literacy programme in August 1980, but soon became much more, incorporating songs, poetry and dance. It was an important source of intergenerational solidarity as the young taught the elderly to read, while at the same time learning much from the traditional wisdom of their elders. Illiteracy was reduced from about 20% to less than 3% of the population. From 1982, phase two branched out into Maths, English History, Politics and the Natural Sciences as a post-literacy programme.

Women

Women were very important for the overthrow of the dictator Eric Gairy. The St Georges Progressive Women's Association (PWA), set up in 1977, was very active prior to 1979, campaigning for better wages, employment for women, better housing, medical facilities and democratic rights. And of course, opposition to the "jobs for sex" that was a part of the endemic corruption under Gairy.



Repairs to a Community School

The PWA had its first post-revolution meeting in June 1979 but it was realised that a different form organisation is needed during the overthrow a dictatorship from that required to construct the new society

The PWA gave way to the National Women's Organisation (NWO) which held its founding general meeting in December 1980 although it already had 1,500 members in 47 groups. By the December 1982 NWO congress, it had 6,500 members, 22% of the female adult population of 30,000. The NWO was at pains to stress that it was open to all women. It saw its role as a mixture of encouraging popular participation, promoting government programmes and holding government departments to account.

The NWO was heavily involved with social welfare, monitoring government programmes for primary health care, free milk, free school meals, books and uniforms.

The NWO also led the other mass organisations in establishing, servicing and running the day care centres enabling more women to enter the workforce. This was part of

women's involvement in "voluntary community work" such as road repair, in which many women moved out of their traditional roles into heavier manual labour.

In the field of education, the 1982 NWO congress made women's education a priority, in particular encouraging full participation in the Centre for Popular Education. There was considerable effort to encourage girls to go into what had previously been seen as "male "occupations" with laws stipulating equal pay for men and women in the same job. There was however, little effort made to persuade boys to enter traditional "female" occupations. The NWO collaborated with the Ministry of Education in developing the curriculum for mass education for women: Grenada's history from the Caribs to 1979; the economy; overcoming underdevelopment; World history and international affairs; women's involvement in People's Power; maternity law and first aid. On the question of the Maternity Leave Law, pressure from the NWO considerably improved the provisions and they were instrumental in pushing for the first prosecution of an employer who refused to comply.

BEAT BACK NEW THREAT
OF COUNTER-REVOLUTION

The grief-stricken faces of Loraine Phillip's family as they mourn at the graveside of young Loraine, killed in the brutal bomb attack of June 19. Such grief and mourning caused by counter-revolutionaries must never happen again in our country.

COUNTER REVOLUTION ON THE RISE:

Counter-revolution is on the rise again in Grenada. Remnants of the criminal gang, who planned and carried out the bombing at the Queens Park are still operating in Grenada, backed by outside forces.

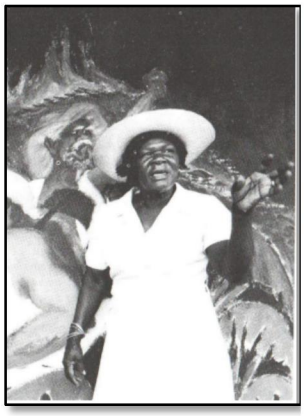
This small clique is making a last desperate attempt to gain power for themselves by the use of rumours, destabilizing pamphlets and violent acts of terrorism. These activities are aimed at making us a people lose confidence in ourselves in our revolution and in our ability to move forward and to solve our problems. With this they hope to pave the way for a final attempt at overthrowing the Government and turning back the revolution.

But women were also in the forefront of political activism. The fact that, in June 1980, following a CIA organised terrorist bomb attack on a political rally, the three persons killed and the majority of the injured were women, is evidence that women were present in large numbers.

After this outrage, the majority of new recruits to the militia were young women and if anything women's organisation and determination were strengthened.

But let us finish this section on a happier note, to quote 60 year-old Agatha Francis, who was interviewed by Chris Searle: -

> *"... and for the women, they are proud and boast up of Maternity Leave. The kind of bad treatment the men give the women before, they done with that. The Revolution bring we love, and is that love that teach the men different, bring them work and cause them to respect we."*



Agatha Francis

or 72 year-old Scotilda Noel: -

> *"...When we hear the news of the revolution that morning, it was joy come out in the morning! Joy come out in the morning! As if lifted up that morning!..."*

The Collapse

In the middle of 1983 the NJM faced problems caused, some would say, by the success of the Revo'. The achievements of the Revo' opened the tap of increased expectation amongst Grenadians, who were, as a result, demanding more. The NJM unanimously agreed to measures designed to deal with these expectations. However, these measures led to a subsequent split in the NJM.

Following an attempt by one of the groups to seize power through force, soldiers were killed, leading in turn, to Prime Minister Maurice Bishop and others being killed. As stated above, the event surrounding the killing of Maurice Bishop are highly contested and numerous versions are touted as the truth.

The version US has created a narrative that, up to now, has been very successful. Here a hard line, Marxist, Stalinist, Maoist, faction led by Bernard and Phyllis Coard wanted Grenada to convert to communism and were unhappy with Maurice Bishop's easy-going liberal line and so assassinated him.

The space/time is not available to discuss this tragic event and readers are urged to study a wide range of publications and come to their own conclusions. A place to start is with *Timeline* by Noreen and Alan Scott of the Committee for Human Rights in Grenada UK chrguk@sky.com, available at https://bit.ly/3kjted4 or http://grenada-forwardever.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/2021-06-07-Timeline.pdf.

The US Invasion

On Sunday, October 23, 1983, suicide bombers blew up the US barracks in Beirut, Lebanon, killing over 300 persons including more than 240 US marines. A fleet was assembled by the Reagan government that day with the intention of sailing to Lebanon.

However, they were later diverted to Grenada, which they invaded on the 25th October with 4,000 troops. The small Grenadian army and Militia resisted to such

an extent that the US forces had to call in reinforcements. After 5 days of intense fighting Grenada was subdued.

The US and their local Caribbean allies who were very hostile to the Revo' seized the remaining leaders of the NJM and put them on trial in an irregular court they create, controlled and paid for. Having paid US$millions to bribe witnesses the court found 17 , the Grenada 17, guilty of the murder of Maurice Bishop and the others, killed on the 19th of October 1983, and sentenced 14 defendants, including Bernard and Phyllis Coard, to death.

However, a worldwide campaign involving figures as diverse as Jeremy Corbyn and Edward Heath, along with thousand of others, led to the sentences being commuted to life imprisonment. After 26 years of global pressure the Grenada 17 were released.

The Grenada 17 continue to pursue pursue legal avenues designed to overturn their convictions.

Selwyn Strachan, Maurice Bishop and Bernard Coard - leaders of the Revo'

The Lessons Learned From the Collapse of Grenada's Revolution

The lessons that the authors believe can be learned from this tragic series of events are as follows: -

- ✧ Unity is vital in the face of struggle.
- ✧ Internal difference allows the common enemy/opponent to take advantage of

such difference.

- ✧ Difference of approach must be explained to the population at large in a non-confrontational manners by all sides in any internal dispute.
- ✧ Leaders need to understand the desires of their members.

Dennot Nyack
2021-11-08

Contributions gratefully received from Dr Steve Cushion - Caribbean Labour Solidarity, http://cls-uk.org.uk, email: info@cls-uk.org.uk and Socialist History Sociarty, http://www.socialisthistorysociety.co.uk.

For further information on the Grenada Revolution got to Grenada - Forward Ever at http://grenada-forwardever.net.

Contact Grenada - Forward Ever via *info@grenada-forwardever.net*.