



GRENADA

Island of Conflict

George Brizan

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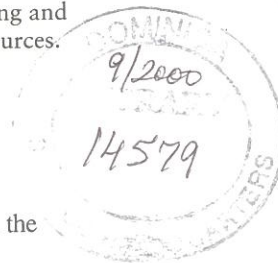
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In a mass meeting on 22 February 1951, Gairy indicated to his followers that the 'Legislative Council was meeting then to pass laws to bring them back into slavery. But we shall stand together and we shall die together.' This was greeted with rapturous applause. Whereas in 1951 Gairy fought against forms of legislation inimical to justice and freedom, by 1978, in order to preserve political power, he had become the architect of the same kind of legislation which had been odious to him 27 years before.

The Grenada Revolution 1979

On 13 March 1979 Gairy's government was overthrown in an armed seizure of power: the overthrow was organized and executed by the New Jewel Movement and sanctioned by the thousands who rallied to its banner. At a victory rally on 25 March 1979, the People's Revolutionary Government suspended the constitution of 1974 with effect retroactive to 12.01 a.m. on 13 March 1979. This was the essence of People's Law No. 1. The actual law reads as follows:

The Constitution of Grenada is hereby and has been suspended as of 12.01 a.m. on March 13th, 1979. All acts or deeds by or under the authority of the People's Revolutionary Government are hereby deemed and declared to have been legally done.

In the preamble to People's Law No. 1 the People's Revolutionary Government (PRG) pledged to observe fundamental rights and freedoms of Grenadians. The appropriate section reads as follows:

The PRG pledges to observe the fundamental rights and freedom of our people subject to certain measures necessary to:
the maintenance of stability, peace, order and good government;
the final eradication of Gairyism; and
the protection of the People's Revolution.

People's Law No. 7 established a People's Revolutionary Army and members of the army were vested with the same powers of arrest and search as those vested in members of the Royal Grenada Police Force.

With the suspension of the constitution, government became essentially one of governing by decree. The PRG passed many laws to enable it to begin the reconstruction of Grenada. This was a period of transition which preceded but not precluded a return to constitutional government. This was stated with the declaration of the Grenada Revolution. The said declaration also stated in Paragraph 3 that the PRG pledged to return to constitutional rule at an early opportunity; that a Consultative Assembly would be set up to consult with all the

people for the purpose of the establishment of a new constitution which would reflect the wishes and aspirations of all the people of Grenada; that the new constitution would be submitted for popular approval in a referendum. In 1980, some observers asked why there had not been a return to constitutional government. Many reasons for this delay were given by the PRG including: (a) the problem of national security, especially the possibility of an invasion externally generated by Gairy or other forces which still existed in a real sense: (b) the need to get the economy on a sound footing after years of economic mismanagement.

By 1980 the PRG had decreed some 63 People's Laws. People's Laws Nos 46 and 47 repealed the following laws of the old régime:

- Importation of Publications (Prohibition) Act, 1965;
- Public Order Act of 1974;
- Essential Services Act of 1978;
- Essential Services (Amendment) Act of 1978;
- Newspaper (Amendment) Act of 1975 & 1976.

All anti-worker laws were repealed in all their forms. Law No. 29 provided for the compulsory recognition by employers of trade unions that represent a majority of workers. Law No. 43 amended the Nutmeg Industry Ordinance, and introduced a new section into the principal ordinance entitled 86A. According to this section:

The Association (G.C.N.A.) may make such allowances and pay such expenses as may be approved by the Minister of Agriculture and all such allowances and expenses that have been approved by the said Minister. The Association may provide loans to meet the partial cost of establishing and developing approved agro-industries on such terms as may be agreed upon by the Association and the Minister of Agriculture.

The interim Board of 1975 set up by the former government was dissolved, and a new interim Board appointed, pending the election of a Board as provided under the principal ordinance.

People's Laws Nos 17 and 21 provided for the establishment of Preventive Detention. Under this law the Minister of National Security could order the detention of anyone whom he had reason to believe may act in a manner prejudicial to public safety or public order or defence of Grenada or with a view to subverting or otherwise sabotaging the PRG. Persons detained under this law would be allowed no bail; the writ of *habeas corpus* would not lie in the case of any person denied bail by or under this law, and the Supreme Court under any rule of law or other authority had no jurisdiction to grant such bail. No such detention could be called into question in any court.

Despite the seemingly major issues and problems that surrounded a return to constitutional government since the 'overthrow', it would be accurate to say that many Grenadians still anxiously awaited such a return, primarily to give weight to whatever major national decisions may have been taken and to give them a sense of constitutional security. Even up to 1983 they had such expectations, but realized that they had been duped and fooled.

NOTES

Full citations only given where work does not appear in the Bibliography.

1. Emmanuel, *Crown Colony Politics*, pp. 54-70
2. *Census of 1921. Constitutional Order in Council 1924.*
3. *Constitutional Order in Council 1924, March 1924.*
4. Emmanuel, *Crown Colony Politics*, p. 117.
5. *Ibid*, p. 128; West India Royal Commission 1938-39, Cmnd 6607, 1945.
6. Ann Spackman, *Constitutional History*, p. 209.
7. *Constitutional Order in Council, 1959.*
8. *Report of the Commission of Enquiry into the Control of Public Expenditure in Grenada during 1961 and Subsequently, 1962*, p.1.
9. *Ibid*, p.8.
10. *Ibid*, pp. 9-10.
11. *The New Jewel*, Vol. 1, No. 36, 9 February 1973.
12. *Grenada, 1965-66*, Government Printery, 1968.
13. *Ibid*.
14. Associated States Constitution 1967.
15. *Report on the Legislative Council General Elections for 1951, 1952.*
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20. *Report on the General Elections of 1967*, St George's, Government Printery, 1973.
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22. The New Jewel Movement, *Manifesto for Power to the People*, November 1973.
23. *The New Jewel* 9 November 1973.
24. *Report of the Duffus Commission*, p. 6.
25. *Ibid*, pp. 136-7.
26. *Ibid*, pp. 231-5.
27. *Newspaper (Amendment) Act 1975*, 'An Act to Amend the Newspaper Ordinance', Cap. 197.

The formation of the RMC

Two hours later General Austin made a radio broadcast to the nation, placing the blame for what had happened on the indiscretion of Bishop and his colleagues, his alliance with so-called counter-revolutionaries, and at the same time placing the entire country under house arrest. Austin sounded like a man caught 'between the devil and the deep blue sea'.

He announced the formation of a Revolutionary Military Council, among other things:

The People's Revolutionary Army has at 3:00 p.m. today established a Revolutionary Military Council, which will form the government of the country until normality is restored. Let it be clearly understood that the Revolutionary Armed Forces will govern with absolute strictness. Anyone who seeks to demonstrate or disturb the peace will be shot. All day and all night curfew will be established for the next four days ... No one is to leave their house; anyone violating this curfew will be shot on site ... all schools are closed and all work places except essential services until further notice.

The Revolution had committed suicide, and the rigid adherence to ideology proved to be its self-inflicted deadly wound.

The Revolutionary Military Council realized that all the conditions existed for a military intervention. Grenadians felt so terrorized and were in such a state of shock and fear, that they were prepared to welcome assistance from 'Satan' himself.

So when on 25 October US forces landed at the invitation of regional governments (OECS) the nation breathed a sigh of relief and some 93% of the population welcomed the American armed forces with open arms. The very invasion the People's Revolutionary Government had imagined for years, they invited on 19 October 1983 by their own ideological paranoia. In so doing they played right into President Reagan's hands. He seized the opportunity and Grenadians for a while idolized him. Grenada secured for him his re-election at the polls. He secured for Grenadians a freedom they yearned for, and a rescue from the jaws of a monster. Bishop and his colleagues created a monster they could not tame; it went wild and devoured them all.

The lessons of 19 October

October 19th was a classic epic confrontation between revolutionaries from above and a revolution from below; a confrontation between the popular leader and the masses, against the ideologue Bernard Coard and an élite officer corps; between populist forces and a totalitarian



US Marines patrolling the streets of St George's, October 1983



US Marines landing by helicopter at the Greenville landing zone



US troops guarding Cuban and Grenadian prisoners at Point Salines

Leninist clique; between the party and the people. The outcome suggests that no side was victorious. The drama holds many lessons for the region and indeed many Third World Countries.

1. Rigid ideological ideas are irrelevant to the Commonwealth Caribbean. It is political suicide to attack or alienate the Church in a predominantly Christian community.

2. Marxist-Leninist régimes with their emphasis on militarization, ideological purity, democratic centralism and Bolshevik staunchness inevitably produce popular resistance, disillusionment, and factional bloodshed. Worst yet, it is difficult for such régimes to survive in predominantly peasant agrarian societies.
3. Stripped of its ideological aberration and lunacy, many of the social and economic programmes of the People's Revolutionary Government were good and could help develop self-reliance in our people and attack the disease of dependent underdevelopment.
4. No people can be satisfactorily governed from a textbook and by abstract theoretical ideas. The stark reality is that 'man does not live by bread alone'. Revolutionaries in Grenada heard this cliché all their lives, but never once reflected upon its correctness.
5. Peasant agrarian societies like Grenada have certain characteristic features which can be utilized in the development process, but which when ignored or deliberately submerged can prove suicidal to those who govern.
6. Parliamentary democracy with structures for popular consultation and participation is still the best governmental form for Commonwealth Caribbean countries. The abolition of the 1973 Grenada constitution by the People's Revolutionary Government, and the failure to reconstitute Parliament made Bishop a victim of the Central Committee and Politburo. There was no constitutional counterweight to those party organs and he suffered tragically and paid the price expressly for this.
7. The 1979–83 Revolution devoured at first elements it considered hostile to it, then elements opposed to Leninism, then Bishop's supporters, then ultimately Bishop himself, which supports the dictum that revolutions tend to devour their own children. It is reminiscent of France in 1789–93, 200 years before, when Robespierre the architect of the guillotine during the French Revolution, and leader of the Jacobin Party, was sent to the guillotine to be executed in 1793, an artifice of his own creation.

Conclusion: Main Political Periods 1763–1983

There were at least seven broad stages in Grenada's historical development from 1763 to 1983; these can be summarized as follows:

1. The old Representative System: 1763–1876.
2. The classic Crown Colony Government: 1877–1924.
3. The modified Crown Colony Government: 1924–51.
4. The Responsible Government: 1952–67.