

GRENADA

'LET THOSE WHO LABOUR HOLD THE REINS'



Interview with Bernard Coard of the Revolutionary Government of Grenada
by Chris Searle

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Prime Minister Maurice Bishop (left) and Minister of Finance Bernard Coard (right).

Introduction:

The 110,000 inhabitants of Grenada, the spice island of the Caribbean, live in very beautiful natural surroundings. But the economic and political reality of their existence has in recent years been far from beautiful. Though the island achieved its independence in February 1974, this event brought none of the benefits to the people that the pioneers of the struggle for self-determination had envisaged. Instead, power was concentrated in one of the most corrupt and oppressive regimes that the Caribbean had ever seen. But in March of this year history began to move forward in Grenada with breathtaking speed.

The attack on the military headquarters in the capital, St. George's, began at 4.15 am on 13 March 1979 with a barrage of Molotov cocktails and hand grenades. In half an hour the buildings were all ablaze, the soldiers had surrendered and been disarmed. Meanwhile another unit of the revolutionary force had captured the only radio station. By 6 am all but two of the members of the government, surprised in their homes, were in custody. At 6.30 listeners to Radio Grenada heard the announcement that the tyrant Eric Gairy and his government had been deposed.

In Grenville, the island's second town, local members of the New Jewel Movement, which had organised the seizure of power in the capital, entered the local police station. Taken by surprise, the sergeant in charge surrendered without a struggle. Having secured all the arms in the station, the Grenville rebels sent an armed party to the homes of the local bully boys on whom the deposed regime had depended for support, depriving them of their guns. By 7 am the streets of the island's towns and the centres of the villages were filled with people, vociferously cheering the overthrow of the man to

whom they had once looked for salvation but who had become their most hated oppressor.

At 10.30 am Maurice Bishop, the 35-year-old barrister who heads the New Jewel Movement, went on the air to announce the formation of a provisional revolutionary government under his leadership.

Announcing that 'several police stations have already put up the white flag of surrender' and that 'revolutionary forces have been despatched to mop up any possible source of resistance or disloyalty to the new government', the new Prime Minister pointed out that resistance would be futile. Long before the end of the day white shirts or vests were flying from the flag poles of police stations throughout the island and the revolutionary seizure of political power was complete. In the entire operation only three persons had lost their lives.

Meanwhile, from his luxurious hotel suite in New York, the deposed tyrant Eric Gairy was feverishly calling on his erstwhile imperialist backers to send an armed force to the island to restore him to power, but no one came to his aid. The British and US governments were too well aware of the popular hatred and dissatisfaction with Gairy and the public support for the New Jewel Movement to wish to draw that popular hatred down upon themselves.

What lay behind these dramatic events? Many years ago Gairy had enjoyed the support of the Grenadian masses. Back in 1951, when the people first obtained the right to vote in elections, they had given him an overwhelming mandate to work for the improvement of their conditions. He had made a promising start but very soon succumbed to the temptations of entering into a partnership with those who were their principal exploiters. When the people saw that he was only concerned with his own enrichment and was no longer interested in their welfare, they began to express their dissatisfaction.

In the 1970s the popular opposition to Gairy took on an organisational form. Demonstrations in 1970 led to the creation of a popular 'Forum'. In March 1972 an organisation called JEWEL (Joint Endeavour for Welfare, Education and Liberation) was formed. In October of that same year the movement for Assemblies of the People was organised. In the following year these organisations merged to form the New Jewel Movement.

In May 1973 the NJM organised a 'People's Convention' at Grenville which attracted the support of some 10,000 people. This was accompanied by a widespread strike movement. In November 1973 another massive 'Congress of the People' was held which demanded Gairy's resignation. Gairy retaliated on 18 November ('Bloody Sunday') by unleashing terror against his opponents. Six leading members of NJM, including Maurice Bishop, were savagely beaten and had to be hospitalised. In January 1974 there was a general strike. The dockworkers, who spear-headed it, held out for three months. On 21 January Rupert Bishop, father of Maurice Bishop, was murdered by the Mongoose Gang.

By the time of the general elections of 1976 the great majority of the population was hostile to the Gairy regime. An anti-Gairy electoral alliance was formed consisting of the NJM and two smaller groups. Gairy, however, retained office by a massive electoral fraud. Nevertheless, despite this shameless rigging of the election, the combined opposition obtained 6 of the 15 seats in the legislature, 3 going to NJM candidates.

Worried by the growing influence of the NJM, Gairy deprived his opponents of the right to use public address systems at their meetings.

Gairy also banned publication of a newspaper published by NJM, but it continued to appear. The small press on which it was printed was constantly on the move from one hiding place to another. Despite numerous police raids on private homes and business premises, the paper was never silenced. With every passing month NJM's popular support continued to increase.

On the morning of 10 March information reached the NJM leaders that a series of police raids on their homes were to be carried out in the course of which they were to be arbitrarily arrested. They immediately went into hiding and when the raids occurred that afternoon only one NJM leader was caught. On 12 March Gairy left the island by plane without any prior announcement of his destination. Landing in Barbados, en route for New York, he was met not by a representative of the Barbadian government but by the US Ambassador Frank Ortiz. They conferred in the airport lounge for two hours.

Information had meanwhile reached the NJM leaders that the plan now was for them to be hunted down and assassinated during Gairy's absence from the island, thereby no doubt enabling him to deny any personal responsibility for their deaths. That same afternoon the NJM leadership made the decision to mobilise their forces for the immediate seizure of power. The plans were finalised that night and efficiently put into operation before the next day had dawned.

Once the people became aware that the uprising had been launched, their favourable response was overwhelming.

RICHARD HART

CHRIS SEARLE

Grenada's revolution: an interview with Bernard Coard

Chris Searle: There is clearly a new, revolutionary wind blowing through the Caribbean. We have seen a revolution in Grenada, the election of a new, radical government in St Lucia, a general strike and the ousting of Prime Minister Patrick John in Dominica, the development of the Yulimo party in St Vincent, and also events in neighbouring Latin-american countries like Nicaragua. How do you account for this process, and where do you think it is leading?

Bernard Coard: I'm not sure that there's a simple answer to the question 'how do you account for it?'. I would say that the phenomena that we're witnessing in the Caribbean now can perhaps be best compared to what happened in the Caribbean, in the English-speaking Caribbean certainly, in the 1930s, and particularly in the 1937-8 period, when you also had these mass, popular social-political upheavals throughout the region, from Trinidad right through to Jamaica.

But I think it has to be seen in a much broader context this time around. I think that struggles worldwide are becoming more inter-linked and peoples in different areas are following these struggles more closely and are being influenced by them. So that, for example,

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I see that what is happening in Grenada, St Lucia, Dominica and Nicaragua as also being linked in people's minds with what's happened in Iran with the ousting of the Shah, with the ousting of the Pol Pot regime in Kampuchea, with the overthrow of Amin in Uganda and so on. In fact, Grenadian people are very conscious of this and they have been counting dictators as they fall this year, one by one. We've had seven fall in seven months, which is a one per month ratio. Pol Pot went first, then you had the Shah, then you had Gairy third, you had Amin fourth, after Amin you had Patrick John in Dominica fifth, you had John Compton in St Lucia, then you had Somoza, seventh, in Nicaragua. The fact that Grenadians are counting them worldwide is also significant. They are not just looking at the fall of dictators within the region. Indeed, a number of working people have made the point that this year is shaping up now not so much as the International Year of the Child as the International Year of the Fall of Dictators!

So there is that phenomenon. I can also say this, that the people of Grenada were deeply influenced, firstly, by the struggles of the Jamaican people over the last seven years under the leadership of Michael Manley, very influenced by those struggles, by the attempt to build a genuinely independent economic base, by the attempt to transform Jamaica from being not only politically and constitutionally independent but also to being economically independent. Influenced by the attempt to spend the resources of the country on the poor people through the Jamal Programme for adult literacy; through the different Impact programmes to help unmarried mothers receive jobs and hence incomes; through the Youth Pioneer groups providing skills for the youth and putting them on the land and forming cooperatives, through the landlease programmes which gave something like 40,000 landless peasants in Jamaica land for the first time in history; through the attempt to expand agriculture on the basis of the peasantry, and through the purchasing of the land of the big estates to give it over to the sugar workers in the form of sugar workers' cooperatives and hence the building of the Sugar Workers' Cooperative Council. All these phenomena in Jamaica have had a profound influence, not just on our leadership, but also on the man in the street in Grenada. And the attempt to de-stabilise Jamaica in the 1974-6 period was also something of great concern to the people of Grenada and of the eastern Caribbean generally. We have followed with great interest, blow by blow, the struggles of the Jamaican people to liberate themselves, despite the fact that Jamaica is a thousand miles away from the eastern Caribbean — that in itself tells you something. And, conversely, the man in the street in Jamaica has been following the struggles in the eastern Caribbean in a way that has never happened before historically.

Moving beyond that, what is also very significant is the extent to

which the people of Grenada, in every village of the island, were listening to their BBC news and World News from this and that source as the struggle in Iran unfolded — particularly the mass demonstrations in the streets. People were comparing that with our mass demonstrations through the streets against Gairy in 1973-4 when we had our first mass upheaval of the recent period. And so they could identify with the people of Iran as they were demonstrating through the streets and building to a crescendo to oust the Shah. When we, the New Jewel Movement, spoke on platforms around the country, whenever we talked about Iran, you could hear a pin drop — people were all ears because they were following it so closely.

Another sign of the influence of Iran on our struggle was the fact that in one of the restaurants in the heart of St George's, the twenty workers there decided to tape-record the speeches of our Prime Minister, Maurice Bishop, who at the time was leader of the opposition, and also to tape-record the main news stories from our party newspaper which was an underground publication, *The New Jewel*. Then they would broadcast them through loud speakers which they set up, blaring from inside and outside the restaurant. Nearly all of them got fired by the employer, but they did this and the crowds would gather to listen in the streets. Now, if you remember, the Ayatollah Khomeini was using this technique from Paris. His phone calls would be recorded and many tapes would be made and would spread all over the villages and played so that the people would hear them on the streets all over the land. Now to me it could not have been totally accidental, that after this was happening in Iran and had become highly organised, suddenly you have a group of workers here, completely independent of any leadership from the New Jewel Movement, doing their own type of tape recorded system of reaching the masses and getting our underground publication to the people.

CS: So Grenadians don't see themselves just as islanders any more, they see themselves as a part of the world's people, the revolutionary force of the world?

BC: Definitely. It's a worldwide struggle. When you've experienced revolution, when you've experienced the struggle to liberate yourself, it makes it very easy to identify with other people, wherever they be, regardless of their race, religion or whatever their cultural background. After all, until recently Grenadians didn't know about Nicaragua, they'd never heard of Nicaragua — Nicaragua could have been a million miles away as far as Grenadians were concerned. And it really is far away, 1,500 miles away, which in Grenadian terms is a lot. Hardly anybody from Grenada, if anyone, has ever visited Nicaragua. They have no connections there, no relatives, the people speak a different language, they have a completely different cultural background. And yet, I can tell you, every Grenadian has been

following with intense interest the Nicaraguan struggle over the last few months, and is jubilant at the victory of the people over the Somoza dynasty — because we have been through that process right here in Grenada, we can identify.

CS: Could you briefly relate a little of the history of the New Jewel Movement, and how it grew out of the history of popular struggle in Grenada?

BC: The New Jewel Movement came out of two organisations which merged in March 1973. The first of these organisations was formed in March 1972. That organisation was called JEWEL, Joint Endeavour for the Welfare, Education and Liberation of the People. This was based in the south-eastern part of the country, in the parish of St David's and was comprised of a few teachers, an ex-policeman, a few peasants and a number of youths. They had a farming cooperative as well as a news-sheet which they started. The other organisation was formed six months after that in September 1972, and that was called MAP, Movement for Assemblies of the People. It was based in the capital parish of St George's, and was composed of a mixture of professional types like lawyers and teachers, but also one or two workers, and one or two youths. What they all had in common was that they were young, they had come out of a black power tradition of the late 1960s and early 70s, many had lived in Britain, America and Canada and had studied and worked in those countries. They were all linked with young people struggling for similar broad goals, objectives and ideals in the neighbouring islands. Many were influenced by the 1970 uprising in Trinidad. All were deeply committed to the development of the country.

And so these two organisations very quickly saw themselves as one, since they had common goals and objectives, and six months after the formation of MAP and a year after the formation of JEWEL, they held a joint congress in which they decided to formally merge and form one body called the New Jewel Movement.

Now it is significant that this whole process started one month after the 1972 general elections. Because up until those elections, held in February (one month before JEWEL was formed), you had a two-party system of Gairy on the one hand and the Grenada National Party led by Herbert Blaize on the other. In other words, you had a kind of Tweedledee and Tweedledum situation, two parties which were two sides of the same coin. Now, while I don't want to give the impression in any way that Blaize and the GNP were fascist, or brutal and terrorist like Gairy was, because they were not, what I mean is that, in a sense, Gairy would be in there forever, so long as the kind of opposition he had was the GNP. They were so ineffectual, so bumbling, so lacking in any initiative, so cowardly that if Gairy breathed too hard they would all go hiding under a rockstone. With

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that kind of opposition, Gairy was going to be in there for the next thousand years once science was able to discover a way of keeping him alive!

The people had become thoroughly fed up with that type of politics and they had become fed up too with a type of politics which meant that you came to the people two weeks before an election, having not at all come to them for the preceding five years, and then asked them once more to vote for you. So you had what we call 'five seconds democracy'. You go into a polling booth and you vote, having been given enough rum and corned beef for the two weeks preceding — and maybe a little temporary work on the roads. Then you vote, and for the next five years you are ignored until two weeks before the next elections. We rejected this totally, and throughout the six years of struggle we maintained the principle that you had to be meeting with the people regularly, discussing all the issues with them, involving them in all the major decisions that the country faced, and having their total mass participation — which in our view is the essence of democracy.

So this is what we preached up and down the country on the platform, and we have kept to our principles. In four months of the revolution we have held meetings in every single village of Grenada. In some cases, in many villages, we have gone in half an hour or an hour before the meeting started and discussed all kinds of questions with the villagers, including what they want us to talk about. At the end of the meeting we would stay on for another hour or two for further discussions with the villagers, with individuals and groups. And so we have that kind of contact with the people. This is really the essence and spirit of the revolution and the building of a revolutionary democracy.

This was one of the fundamental differences between ourselves and the two existing Tweedledee and Tweedledum parties. And then, of course, you had the youth — a powerful force numerically, in terms of energy and in terms of *wanting* to do something for the country. They were completely unorganised and could not be reached by those old politicians.

So this is the kind of picture of how things stood in 1972. The New Jewel Movement emerged one month after the February 1972 elections, out of that context. It was also a context of a worsening economic situation because of the way that Gairy was managing the economy. You had greater and greater hardship and suffering on the part of the poor people. Water, roads, electricity, housing, health, jobs, you name it, all were extremely bad and were getting worse. Between 1970 and 1972 agricultural production had dropped by twenty per cent — a massive drop in two years. In this kind of situation the masses had reached a stage where they could take no more. It was significant, therefore, that the first outburst, the first

upsurge of the people, took place only a matter of four weeks after the formation of the NJM, with the killing of Jeremiah Richardson in April 1973, only 20 years of age, in the town of Grenville by one of Gairy's police. It was a typical and classic incident. Here is a poor youth, whose entire family, ironically, were Gairyite, not supporters of the NJM or the opposition. He was on the sidewalk, rapping and chatting and 'liming', as we say, with his friends. A policeman came up to him and said 'move on', and without even giving him five seconds to move on, put a gun to his temple and blew his brains out, literally.

That so angered the people that, led by NJM, 5,000 people in the parish of St Andrew's (including many who up until that day were Gairyites) marched down to the police station in Grenville. The policemen, seeing that massive crowd, barricaded themselves inside and fled through the back door. The people then marched from Grenville to the airport, three miles away, and closed it down for three days. That brought international attention for the first time onto the Grenada situation, only four weeks after the formation of the NJM.

From there it led from one struggle to another struggle. All of the same kind. There was a struggle which NJM led a few weeks before it formally became NJM with the same leaders who were in the process of putting the First Congress together. This was the La Sagesse struggle as it's called. In the parish of St David's, an Englishman by the name of Lord Brownlow (a member of your House of Lords) bought an estate in Grenada, assisted by Gairy. Then he decided that the only beach in the entire parish of St David's would no longer be accessible to the people. Now, under Grenadian Law, there are no such things as private beaches, all beaches must be accessible to the public. There was a road running through the estate which for over a hundred years had been an access road, what the law calls an 'allowed road'. Lord Brownlow built a gate, an iron fence and gate, and blocked it off, getting Gairy's police to enforce it with guns. NJM led the people, over 800 people from that parish, to march on the spot. We held a 'People's Trial', as we called it, of Lord Brownlow and the court found him guilty. The sentence was that he was declared 'persona non grata', that he would no longer be welcome in Grenada, and secondly, that the gate be removed immediately and the people have their beach returned to them. Fifty police were rushed up by Gairy, armed with all sorts of weapons (303s, shotguns and so on), threatening to shoot. The people ignored them, removed the gate, and ever since then the beach has been liberated and once more available to the people. Lord Brownlow, fortunately for him, saw fit not to return to Grenada, which was quite frankly to the delight of the people!

The character of our struggles throughout the years was always to

fight for the common man, the poor man, the nutmeg farmers, the cocoa farmers, the banana farmers, the youths who were brutalised and beaten and in some places shot and killed by the police, people who were being denied use of the local beach in their area, people who suffered from merchants who were charging 300 and 400 per cent mark-up on the price of sugar, flour, rice and other basic necessities. These were the kinds of struggles, broad, democratic, economic, social and political struggles — this is the background to the New Jewel Movement.

CS: How would you summarise and illustrate the main characteristics of Gairyism?

BC: Gairyism? Massive corruption, violence — the naked use of violence and terror as an instrument of rule — in that sense, fascism.

Gairy had very strong links with the South Korean and Chilean regimes. Two of his military men were trained in Chile, including the second-in-command of his army, Abrahams, and another leading officer, La Crette. There were plans to train more. He received ten crates of arms from Chile, marked 'medical supplies', which turned out to be guns and uniforms — which the revolution has since seized, and put to good use, I may add. One of the ironies of our history is that the first set of uniforms that the People's Revolutionary Army got were sent to Gairy thanks to Pinochet. And there were also plans, announced by the Chileans themselves, to train some of his police. So there was a close connection. We had a visit from a Chilean naval training vessel, *The Esmeralda*, which the UN Commissioner of Human Rights described in 1974 as a 'torture chamber' to house and torture many of the supporters of Allende. Chileans were constantly visiting the country and Grenadians going over there. One of the documents we found in the barracks of Trueblue that we burned to the ground when we took over on 13 March was written in Spanish and dealt with the methods of torture. This was the same building which housed the Chilean-trained officers.

Then we were really shocked and shaken up more recently when we discovered eight cells at Richmond Hill Prison that were four feet underground, specially designed and built for torture. Just simply being put in a cell like that is a form of torture, because you couldn't last very long in such a place. Gairy built only eight and there were just eight leaders of the New Jewel Movement. We were told later by prison officers that they were specifically designed, built and intended for us — that is where we were going to be placed.

CS: Is it true that he used obscurantist practices to deceive the people?

BC: He used and mobilised superstition, black magic, obeah — all kinds of foolishness, trying to play on the ignorance of the masses.

trying to play on their lack of education. And he deliberately denied the people education. Do you know that the last time a new government secondary school was built in Grenada was in 1885? In thirty years of Gairyism not a single secondary school was built. The few private schools that have been built in that time have not been built by the Grenadian Government. The goal was very clear — no education. In other words, a 'Papa Doc' Duvalier situation as existed in Haiti, and using superstition in all its manifestations to create an aura of fear and magic, an aura of mysticism, an environment and ambiance in which he could rule ruthlessly and autocratically, and subjugate the people at his whim and fancy.

CS: You have declared your objective of building socialism in Grenada. With such a small population and little or no working class, how will you set about doing this?

BC: I think that one has to have a very clear objective and a realistic appraisal of what is possible, and over what period of time and in what way. I think that the first thing that has to be said is that we do not subscribe to nor do we take a dogmatic approach to this question. We have to try to develop a socialist society, a society of genuine equality, a society that genuinely serves the interests of the broad masses of the country, based on our objective conditions — our size, the kind of natural resources we have, the kind of skill levels we have to deal with, the type of organisational capacity we have at any given moment and so on. Our primary objective at this point of time, therefore, is not the building of socialism, quite frankly, but simply trying to get the economy, which has been totally shattered by Gairy, back on its feet. What we have witnessed over the past thirty years of Gairy and Gairyism is really what the people call 'Hurricane Gairy'. But unlike a hurricane that comes and might last for a few hours, destroy a lot and go away, and then you can start building, we've had thirty years of Hurricane Gairy.

Can you imagine a constant hurricane-force wind for thirty years? That's the situation we've inherited, in the financial aspect, in terms of the infrastructure — and there are people who have not seen water in their pipes for five years. That is how bad the water situation is. Roads? Terrible! Medical facilities? Non-existent, non-existent! No sheets or pillow cases on the hospital beds, no medicines, not even aspirins; no qualified nurses, hardly any qualified doctors, virtually no ambulances — just two or three and they don't work and yet they're supposed to cover the entire country! I could go on and on, all the different areas of infrastructure. We've had school buildings collapsing and falling down, no school books or uniforms. The people are poor, very poor, with half the population out of work and 40 per cent of the country illiterate. Never mind the official figures, which were glowing, but the reality is half of our people cannot read or write.

So we have inherited an unbelievable mess — financially, unbelievable! Millions upon millions of dollars of taxpayers' money raped from the treasury — disappeared! Can't be found anywhere! So we are trying to repair the damage of Hurricane Gairy. That is our number one task, to get agricultural production going again, develop a fishing industry, develop a lumber industry with our limited forestry — in conjunction with a reforestation programme. We must get tourism going, because tourism is important in our context. We need to get our agro-industries going, based on food processing of our cocoa, nutmegs and bananas, our fruits, vegetables, coconuts sugar cane and so on. There's an enormous range of agro-industries that are possible, but it will take time and will require financial resources.

So fundamentally, at this time, we see our task not as one of building socialism. It is one of re-structuring and re-building the economy, of getting production going and trying to develop genuine grassroots democracy, trying to involve the people in every village and every workplace in the process of the reconstruction of the country. In that sense we are in a national democratic revolution involving the broad masses and many strata of the population.

CS: You have inherited an economy based on a narrow reliance on certain export cash crops and tourism. How much of this economy do you see as a liability and how much as an advantage? And how do you set about reconstructing and diversifying your economy?

BC: For us the most important aspect of building an economically-independent country (which is the only way in which you can truly eventually say that you are politically independent) is by the method of diversification — in all ways and in all aspects. First, diversification of agricultural production, secondly, diversification of the markets that we sell these products to, thirdly, diversification of the sources of our tourism, the variety of countries from which our tourists come. The maximum of diversification, the minimum of reliance upon one country or a handful of countries means the greater your independence, the less able certain people are to squeeze you, pressurise you and blackmail you. So the principle of diversification is important in terms of the political objective of political and economic independence. But it's also important in its own right as a means of expanding employment opportunities, preventing all reliance on one or two commodities or one or two markets. Then if you have a crisis or recession in a particular advanced industrial economy or in a group of such economies, you do not have a situation whereby your Grenadian economy collapses because something has gone wrong in the USA or Canada. You would have so many different sources for your imports and tourism that a recession in one or two economies would not collapse your own economy totally. You would feel it, but

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you wouldn't have this type of disastrous collapse which is a phenomenon of Caribbean societies right now.

Concretely, it means that apart from our cocoa, nutmeg and bananas, our three agricultural commodities through which we earn all our visible foreign exchange earnings, we also want to move into the minor spices area where we have a great deal of potential, possibly into horticulture for export, certainly into fruits and vegetables for export. So that, instead of three, we would have six or seven basic food items to export. And fish as well, lobster, possibly shrimp. We need to develop a fishing industry. We are surrounded by sea, we're an island and we haven't been making use of that. Right now, the fishing technology that we use is the technology of the Old Testament — a little rowing boat, a fishing rod, line and a little hook at the bottom, and if the guy is really technologically advanced he might have three hooks at the bottom of the line instead of one. And then there is the other type of fishing where they pull the nets up on the sand — anything more advanced and sophisticated we don't know about. We have to move into the twentieth century rapidly with respect to fishing. Half of the fish we eat now we import. We need to supply that locally, and still export more fish to the outside world.

Secondly, we want to process these foodstuffs. We want to make our own jams, jellies, wines, liqueurs, our own tins of sardines and mackerel. There is the canning, bottling and preserving of our fruits. We can do this ourselves with our own juices and nectars. And we have already begun this in the four months since the revolution, using our produce laboratory for experimentation and perfection of the products. We want to be able to make our own Milo and Ovaltine — not necessarily with those brand names, but using the same basic principles. We see no reason why we should be the ones who import this kind of thing.

So this is the diversification picture, basic agricultural production and food processing which would also be for the local market, as an import substitute phenomenon to cut down on what we're importing and make it locally. Instead of importing the tins and bottles of this and that, we shall produce them for ourselves and also export them to a variety of countries throughout the world, by seeking markets all over. Thus we shall diversify the markets where these goods we produce are going, so again we are able to protect ourselves against economic as well as political buffeting worldwide.

CS: How will the New Jewel Movement politically educate your youth, and indeed, your entire people, towards socialism?

BC: In the first place, I don't think that the immediate task facing us is to educate them towards socialism. As a goal, as an objective — yes, and that has already started over the years. Right now, the most

critical area of education is education for dealing with the immediate situation that we face: the threat from imperialism, the threat to bully us, the threat to invade us, the threat to determine our lives for us.

The people have to have a deep grasp of what imperialism is in concrete terms — worldwide, in the Caribbean and specifically as it affects Grenada. What are the mechanisms by which it seeks to control our economy and determine our lives? That is one level. Secondly, there is education dealing with the fundamentals of democracy — not in the 'five second democracy' we spoke about, five seconds in a polling booth every five years — but genuine democracy which involves ongoing participation by the people, the whole question of the organisation of society, of economic and social transformation and the steps which need to be taken immediately along that path — the immediate tasks that are necessary in order to get further on with the objectives. In other words, we are dealing with a crisis situation, a situation in which we have inherited an infrastructural crisis, a financial crisis, a crisis in production, an unemployment crisis, an inflationary crisis — a crisis in just about every aspect of the economy and society. We have to educate and prepare our people to deal with that immediate situation, while at the same time educating and preparing them for the broader objectives of building socialism further down the road.

CS: What is the New Jewel Movement doing to fully integrate the Grenadian woman into the revolutionary process?

BC: The upsurge of activity by women in Grenada is one of the most remarkable features of the revolution. Their participation and involvement at so many levels, particularly at the grassroots level of the villages, is truly extraordinary. Right now, quite frankly, the men must be embarrassed, because the initiative has been entirely seized by the women. It's no longer a question of equality of activity, but of the women being in front in the different villages, and it shows itself in many different ways.

One of the very first steps that the revolution took was to decree equal pay for men and women. 'Equal pay for equal work' is a fundamental slogan. Another was the abolition of sexual exploitation through practices which were taking place in both government and private sectors. Gairy and his ministers promoted these practices which went down as far as many senior civil servants in some cases, who engaged in the practice of hiring women only on the basis of sexual favours — and people who were already employed were losing their jobs if they did not provide these favours. A number of businessmen and managers in the private sector were also doing the same thing. We quite frankly consider this as rape, and we have made it clear that such activities would not only result in immediate dismissal, but in penalties much more serious than that. We would

jail anybody involved in that kind of activity. The sexual exploitation of women is something we will simply not tolerate — we have made this clear in radio broadcasts, mass rallies, public meetings, newspaper articles and so on. Everyone has got the message and no one is in any doubt. Any woman who is approached in this kind of way can report it immediately and we would take drastic measures.

This is one of the most popular measures among our women because it was an area of massive abuse by the Gairy dictatorship. It was one of the features of Gairyism. So the question of equal pay and the question of the abolition of sexual exploitation and severe penalties for anyone engaging in this are two of the positive gains for women in the revolution in just the opening four months.

Apart from this we're taking other steps which benefit women along with other people. For example, the various workers' rights which women identify with fully. The Trade Union Recognition Act we never had on the books before. This compels the employers to recognise the trade union of the workers' choice once a secret ballot shows that over 50 per cent of the workers have voted for that union. This has resulted in the unionisation of nearly the entire working class in four months in Grenada. This is important because a lot of the working class here are women, especially in the garment factories, offices, commercial houses, banks and so on. Women predominate in these industries and therefore the Act is of direct significance to them. A lot of the people who have been fired for trying to engage in trade union activity have been women. Apart from this, all the anti-worker laws which were on the books have been abolished. That too benefits women workers along with the men.

The NJM has had a women's arm for many years, and this has grown from strength to strength before the revolution, and even more so since. This has been in the vanguard of the struggle for women's rights on many fronts. Since the revolution, a National Conference has been held to deal with the burning questions and issues facing women in particular and working people in general in all the villages in Grenada, with the women identifying the problems themselves. And this was presented in a formal report to the cabinet from the women's arm of the party, which has been studied — and many sections of it implemented. (1)

We are examining now the bringing up to what we would consider civilised standards of maternity leave with full pay, because we don't have that in Grenada right now. We want to do something about this soon. We're looking into the absence of pipe-borne water in houses and the strain this puts on women, particularly pregnant women. Then there is the question of medical attention for women, particularly as regards childbirth and the care of young children.

CS: What is the New Jewel Movement's policy with regard to family planning and control of the birth rate?

BC: While it is good to educate people and provide them with the material basis of family planning, such as contraceptives, at the same time we do not see the solution to our problems as lying in just this. For fundamentally, what history shows across many countries, is that when you have a higher standard of living, when you have an income sufficient to care for your family, you tend to have fewer children. This sounds ironic, but it is true that the poorer the country is, the more children per family there are. Even within a country, the middle and upper classes who have more wealth at their disposal tend to have smaller families. If you are poor and have ten or twelve children, then they are a form of insurance. It means you are going to have several more breadwinners in the family once they start working. It also means that the half dozen out of your twelve who go abroad as migrants in search of work will be sending money back in the form of remittances, and that is a type of pension in old age in a society where there are no pensions — except for civil servants. Ninety per cent of our working people have no pensions to look forward to when they reach an age when they can no longer work.

In Grenada, 15 per cent of the entire gross domestic product of the country comes in the form of remittances from relatives abroad. It is as fantastic as that. So, many poor people see large families as an insurance against unemployment, sickness and old age. So until you solve the economic problem you will not really fundamentally reduce family sizes. That is our perspective. We have no quarrel with educating people about smaller family sizes and providing them with the means of doing it, but we don't see that in a vacuum divorced from economic development and putting real incomes into the pockets of the people as a solution to the problem of population growth.

CS: What do you see as the political and military role of the People's Revolutionary Army in Grenada?

BC: This is our army, comprised almost entirely of young people who seized power on 13 March, and who have been in the process of consolidating that power ever since. They are the young people who patrol the beaches at night and ensure that any mercenary attempt at invasion will be resoundingly defeated. So that their role is defence and consolidation of the revolution, and making sure that any mercenary invasion by Gairy and any imperialist forces that may seek to back him will be crushed.

A revolutionary army does not see itself as some kind of standing army divorced from the people. The PRA is made up of young people who have come from all the villages in Grenada. They are a part of the people and see themselves as such. As a result of this, they are engaged through many hours each day, in literacy programmes, adult education programmes, mechanical work — particularly in getting government vehicles repaired. There's a PRA garage engaged

in bringing back onto the roads literally hundreds of old vehicles of all sorts which were used by the different ministries and abandoned as impossible to fix. Other young soldiers are into the area of refrigeration, going around fixing government refrigeration equipment. Quite a large number are engaged in direct agricultural production, and more and more will be.

The army is also renovating roads all over the country and improving their services, and a lot of feeder roads are being built into new agricultural areas. In fact, the Commander of our Armed Forces is a civil engineer. He has been building roads all his life and has whole military teams doing this, which is a great advantage to the farmers. Also we have had heavy rainstorms and the roads have become blocked by landslides — and one of the things which the people have commented upon is that within an hour or two the PRA appears on the scene and the whole place is cleaned and fixed up. Also, within the PRA are teachers, bankworkers, agriculturalists — all kinds of people with skills, and all these skills are being put to use.

So while we have people who are there to defend the country against external aggression, at the same time every single one of them has to be engaged on a daily basis in directly productive work. We can't afford a standing army in the traditional sense of a bunch of people just gobbling up food and expense and not being productive. So we must have an army which is more than an army.(2)

CS: In the recent 'Caribbean Solidarity Summit' here between the governments of Grenada, St Lucia and Dominica, the New Jewel Movement used the slogan, 'One Caribbean'. Do you see any possibility of a federated socialist Caribbean community emerging in the future?

BC: Well, I think that's going to be far, far down the road. But what I think can happen and is beginning to happen is the coming together of the people of the Caribbean regardless of the language barriers — Spanish speaking, Dutch speaking, English speaking, French speaking. Our view, which we have expressed publicly on many occasions, is that these language barriers are artificial barriers put there by the colonialists in much the same way as they chopped up Africa. We refuse to respect them and are determined to break them down, and to see people in Aruba, Curaçao, Bonaire, Saba, St Eustacius, St Maarten, Surinam, Martinique, Guadeloupe, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, as well as the English-speaking islands, *all* as Caribbean people. Our goal is, through cultural and sporting exchanges, discussions at the political leadership level, greater inter-Caribbean tourism, through all sorts of people-exchanges to bring our people closer together, to learn each other's languages and bust down those barriers.

We have no illusions, we know it's going to take many years, but a

start has got to be made. It's an important goal, it's a principled question, and our goal must be, sighted far down the road, the building of one Caribbean nation.(3)

CS: How have you so far dealt with the campaigns of destabilisation launched by imperialism against your young revolution?

BC: We believe fundamentally that one has to understand historically the significance and place in historical perspective the phenomenon and imperialist tactics of destabilisation.

In the old days, the method of rule was direct rule. You had your imperialist governors, governor-generals and the other colonial officials. Imperialism took the form of direct colonialism, and the army and colonial police force was stationed on the spot in the country to quell any disturbances or riots. We moved from that to a neo-colonial model, and anybody who tried to step outside that neo-colonial framework — then the gunboat would appear on the horizon and the marines would land and deal with the problem: Dominican Republic, 1965, Guatemala, 1954.

Then there is a slightly more sophisticated model of the same thing. You use reactionary exiles from the country under attack, combined with some mercenaries or marines pretending to be other-than-regular troops, and you launch invasions like the Bay of Pigs, 1961. These methods of direct and not-so-direct military intervention have become extremely unpopular worldwide — including inside the very countries themselves, following Vietnam in particular. So there has been a tendency to move away from these tactics, and world opinion is solidly against this kind of vulgar imperialism.

So now you move to more subtle methods, the methods of putting a squeeze on a country's export crops, on a country's tourism, by spreading the most vicious lies in newspapers around the world to frighten tourists and dissuade them from coming to the country. Thus you can collapse the economy by removing the foreign exchange earnings. You can plant articles, not only internationally, but in the local and regional press, that would tend to undermine the confidence of the people in their government and sow the seeds of doubt with lies and innuendoes. You can engage in a tremendous volume of anti-communist propaganda so as to frighten people and give them the impression that there are people around who are going to take their cow and sheep and goat, their shop or piece of land or everything — which is totally untrue. The idea is to frighten people, to scare the hell out of them so that they lose confidence in themselves and in their government and therefore are easy prey now to any kind of reactionary position that is presented to them.(4)

Then if these tactics don't work, you move a stage further to acts of violence within the society, deliberately stirring up acts of violence.

You hire two or three criminal elements to shoot a couple of tourists — preferably white tourists, so you have a big scandal in the world's press and that mashes up the tourist industry. Then you start picking off and shooting some of the leaders of the ruling party at the grass roots level. This was done in Jamaica in 1975-6, in that period of destabilisation. Hundreds of the ruling party PNP cadres and youth leaders around the country were gunned down in the streets and shot in their beds by criminal elements hired by imperialism. So that the deliberate stirring-up of violence, unrest and an aura of instability in a society, is one method of destabilising. And then there is the planting of a handful of agents within the country with bankrolls — to bankroll these activities by the same criminal elements.

And if these methods don't succeed, you try assassination of the leadership: Kamal Jumblatt in the Lebanon, Marien N'gouabi in the Congo Republic, you had Lumumba in the early 60s, a number of people in the leadership of both Nkomo and Mugabe's liberation movements — and there were seventeen attempts to kill Fidel Castro. Let us not forget Eduardo Mondlane of Mozambique and Amilcar Cabral of Guinea-Bissau. All were outstanding fighters for their countries' liberation. This weapon of assassination of leaders is very much a current tactic of destabilisation.

All of these methods — propaganda destabilisation, economic destabilisation, violent, terrorist destabilisation are a part of the package of the modern gunboat diplomacy. It is no longer the gunboat coming, but you plant agents within the country to undertake these activities and to destroy the economy and fabric of the society, and to create political instability to lay the basis for the emergence of reaction — even fascism.

CS: Have you any observations from Grenada to young West Indians and their families in Britain, and to British working people, black and white in general?

BC: I have this overall and general comment. I'm not advocating anything to anybody to do anything, because it would be out of place for me to do so. It is simply an observation from a distance as to what I see as the only way forward. Whether it happens or not is really a question for history and for the people themselves to determine.

I would say, as someone who lived in England for many years, who studied there, worked there, and struggled there for the black working people experiencing racism, that something I feel very deeply about, having had some time to be away from Britain and to reflect from a distance, is this. A population of black people comprising about 2 per cent of the total population, has no hope whatsoever of ever achieving its just rights, of being treated equally, unless there is forged an alliance of all working people regardless of race. I feel very strongly about this. I think the lessons of history

teach this, my own experiences in Britain confirm this, and my experiences since leaving Britain doubly confirm this.

Therefore, the task of the white working-class and the black working-class leaders who are genuine and committed, must be to forge an alliance of the working people, so that those ruling-class elements who are deliberately trying to divide the working class, black and white, by spreading racism and hatred, by trying to get the white working class to hate the black working class, are defeated. Poor people cussing poor people, poor people discriminating against poor people, poor people fighting against poor people is just self-defeating and has the imperialist and ruling class laughing. They are deliberately stirring this up and there's no way that anything can change in terms of improving the living and working conditions of the working people, white and black — including the elimination of racism and the elimination of discrimination against women — unless there's that unity of the working class and of the working people to struggle against the ruling class and this kind of exploitation and 'divide and rule'.

St George's, Grenada
28 July, 1979



NOTES

- 1 The First National Women's Conference of Grenada was held in June 1979. Its theme was 'In search of solutions to the problems facing Grenadian Women'.

There were 76 delegates, from every parish, including the sister islands of Carriacou and Petit Martinique.

The problems selected for study were the high cost of living, unemployment amongst women, bad working conditions for women workers, poor health facilities (especially for pregnant women), the lack of water, roads and electricity, poor housing and the need for provision of education of skills training for Grenadian women, to enable them to qualify for better jobs.

- 2 The *Free West Indian* of 19 May 1979 carried a feature story which showed the PRA of Victoria village uniting with local fishermen to provide deep-freeze facilities in the area for fish storage. Before obtaining these facilities the fishermen had to give away their catches because there was nowhere to either store or market their fish.

The PRA also helped the fishermen clear a part of the stony beach so that they could pull their boats up to safety, and be able to come into shore at nights without fear of being sunk by hitting their boats on rocks.

'The PRA will not be an army of idlers, as the army was under Gairy,' commented the journal, 'but an army dedicated to the service of the People.'

- 3 At this conference, Prime Minister Maurice Bishop stated: 'We are not forming any block against anybody. We have agreed on seeking friendly relations with all progressive countries. But let it be known, that we once and for all reject the concept of "backyardism" ... They can no longer divide us either by geography or language. We are of one blood. One People. One Destiny.'

- 4 It is clear that the *Torchlight*, Grenada's twice-weekly newspaper, has been running a campaign markedly hostile to the People's Revolutionary Government's policies. Apart from publicly revealing the exact locations of Grenada's defence installations, the *Torchlight* has published a series of articles on Cuba, clearly hostile to the friendship developing between the two countries.

These syndicated articles, by a 'prominent American photojournalist', Fred Ward, who writes for the American *National Geographic Magazine*, are advertised in the *Torchlight* as 'a compelling account of life under communism in the Caribbean', but are clearly designed to raise suspicions and hostility about the fraternal aid — including twelve doctors — being given to Grenada by Cuba. In one of Ward's articles, a Cuban secretly confides in him: 'Cuba is not for Cubans now. It is only for the Russians. Look around, they are everywhere. It was a lot better when the Americans were here.' The same issue displays a headline made from a quotation of John Harrell, 'Founder of the Christian Conservative Churches', which reads: 'Communism is the boiled-down evil of all the generations.'

However, the enthusiastic response by Grenadians to the Cuba links show on many levels — including the warm and joyous reception given to the Cuban Cultural Group which toured Grenada and played to bursting audiences in the villages in June 1979, and the appreciation shown by Grenadians for the medical work being done by the Cuban doctors. As I travelled between Grenada and Carriacou on the small, nine-seater plane, a young mother with a new-born baby told me how she had needed a Caesarian birth, which had been performed by a Cuban doctor in the hospital at St George's. 'If Gairy had still been here my baby would not have been,' she said.

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