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**GRENADA: FROM BISHOP TO THE MARINES**

**By: Anthony P. Maingot**

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## PREFACE

Anthony P. Maingot is Professor of Sociology and Director of the Graduate Program in International Studies at Florida International University. A past president of the Caribbean Studies Association, Dr. Maingot's analysis examines the origins of Grenada's New Jewel Movement and its demise with the assassination of Maurice Bishop and the subsequent U.S. intervention in that country. This paper was presented as testimony before the Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere Affairs of the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the House of Representatives on November 16, 1983.

Mark B. Rosenberg  
Director

### Summary

This testimony argues five points: (1) that the nearly five years of the People's Revolutionary Government in Grenada was a drastic deviation from the original ideas of the New Jewel Movement; (2) the PRG's popularity was based on Maurice Bishop's charisma and on the absence of any radical changes in the basic characteristics of the Grenadian social structure; (3) the orthodox Marxist-Leninist wing of the P.R.G. had decided to enter a new, "Scientific" stage of socialist development but lacked the popular support; (4) Grenada has available to it constitutional and human resources to reconstruct the democratic parliamentary system which is preferred there and in the rest of the English-Speaking Caribbean; (5) The U.S. should limit its role to economic assistance and remove its troops as soon as possible; the "special relationship" between the USA and the Eastern Caribbean insures continued strong ties.

On two previous occasions (June 30, 1977; July 14, 1981), I testified before Committees of this House on the peace loving and democratic nature of the people's of the Eastern Caribbean. Violent explosions were not excluded from that picture but I asserted that these would be acts of political elites, not massed-based social or revolutionary movements. It is clear that not all the facts are in and "contemporary history" is a field replete with risks. Be that as it may, however, and to the extent that we can at this point interpret the tragic recent events in Grenada, we reassert the basic premises of our previous testimony.

When, as is the case here, all the facts are not known, it is wise to analyze events such as those still unfolding in Grenada in terms of what reason and experience tell us about the actors.

To the invading U.S. Marines, this is but another in a long series of Caribbean landings that, if they had made permanent holes, would have left the area looking something like a tropical Swiss cheese. To be sure, they have always intervened for "democracy."

The activities of Cuban "workers" are rapidly catching up to the Marines record. One can well imagine that building airports in Grenada is far preferable to fighting in Angola or Ethiopia but, in any case, as Radio Havana kept repeating, Cubans there were really dying for Cuba. They intervene for "internationalism."

How honorable that these modern gladiators, like so many medieval armies, oblige their own political constituencies by fighting in other people's lands. The post-warfare ceremonies in Washington and Havana alike were for local consumption.

But what about the Eastern Caribbean states as actors? Survivors of hundreds of years of slavery and colonialism, they have emerged into independence as shining examples of decency, civility and the will to develop against all academic theories, theories that say they cannot: They are too small, too isolated, without resources and, as one misinformed reporter after the other keeps asserting, without any experience with democratic institutions. The fact is that there have been 57 elections in the area since 1951, that as Table No. 1 illustrates, the voter turnout has been very high and that this has been done without taking political prisoners or resorting to death squads or torture makes little impression.

The sad truth is that we live in an age when even those privileged elites who benefit from the freedoms of democratic systems tend to ridicule these as "five-minute-democracies". Everything that is "revolutionary" on the other hand is put beyond the pale of critical analysis. In a world where the majority of regimes are not only dictatorial and repressive but also administratively incompetent, what the democracies of the Eastern Caribbean have achieved is the true revolution, not the revolution of rhetoric.

And, yet, these states - without navies or air force and

troops counted in multiples of ten - have entered a brave new world. They are in their first rite of passage into manhood in a world where 35 cents out of every dollar is spent on armaments. The area will never be the same again, though one can still be optimistic about the future.

How sad it is, indeed, that it was precisely one of their own "family" that brought about this watershed and how tragic that it should have all begun with a dream, a utopia turned inferno for Grenadians and death to the dreamers.

The clearest evidence that the beautiful vision of those who took over Grenada on March 13, 1979, had jumped its tracks came in June 1981. A group of 26 Grenadians - including Alistair Hughes, who had bitterly attacked the previous regime - put out a mimeographed newspaper called The Grenadian Voice. In the absence of any opposition parties, they editorialized, it was important to have an independent source that would praise or criticize the revolutionary regime as need be.

That was the last issue of The Voice. People's Law No. 18 of June 19, 1980, made sure of that. It prohibited the publishing of any "newspaper or other paper, pamphlet or publication containing any public news, intelligence or report..." The army and police were authorized to "arrest without warrant any person whom he suspects of committing, having committed or being about to commit any offense under this law." The law was signed by Prime Minister Maurice Bishop.

A paid advertisement in the government newspaper, Free West

Indian, on July 18, 1981, indicated that there was a guilt-by-association atmosphere already present. In the ad, one of the 26 editors disclaimed any connection with The Voice and vowed that he was no counterrevolutionary and certainly not a CIA agent. Both the law and the intellectual climate made it clear that Bishop and the People's Revolutionary Government (PRG) had traveled a long way from the early days of heady intellectualizing, of utopian thinking about a Grenada free from any form of oppression. What, then, was the origin of those ideas and who were the people who held them?

The movement was called the New Jewel Movement and was created in 1973 by the merger of two very small groups of urban, middle-class Grenadians opposed to the rule of Eric Gairy, whose party, the Grenadian United Labour Party (GULP), had won six elections since 1951. The first group was composed of four young men (Unisson Whiteman, Selwyn Strachan, Sebastian Thomas and T. Victor) who had tried their hand in electoral politics, participating in the 1972 election under the banner of the anti-Gairy Grenadian National Party (GNP). They all lost.

Gairy was still a hero to the black peasantry, still popular in a land where class and color conflicts were played out in rambunctious elections that invariably pitted a black messiah (Gairy) against the brownskin professionals and their urban allies in the GNP.

And here is where a seldom told truth about Grenada has to be told: it was Gairy who presided over the first major social



and economic revolution in Grenada. With a major assist from world economic realities, be forced the capitulation of what remained of the old plantocracy; Grenada had become a nation of small, medium and a few large farms, nutmeg and cacao interspersed with bananas and food crops - all largely for export. Even Gairy's increasingly bizarre behavior failed to totally undermine his support in the black peasantry.

The intelligentsia knew that something had to be done to break this pattern. The four defeated young men decided to create a movement they called "The Jewel," for Joint Effort for Welfare, Education and Liberation. There was much of Tanzania's Nyrere doctrine of Christian Socialism, in their goal of educating the peasantry in self-sufficiency and self-pride.

Fate would have it that more or less at the same time two lawyers in the capital of St. George's, Maurice Bishop and Kendrick Radix, were leading a "discussion group" of some 30 people called the Movement of Assemblies (MAP). While Radix would always say that they were nationalists not interested in dogmas, it would later be revealed that Bishop had already made a fundamental decision in life: He would be a revolutionary. Born in Aruba of a prominent Grenadian family, educated in Britain, he was a six-foot-three picture of good looks, intelligence and captivating charm. So was George Oldum of St. Lucia, a Rhodes scholar, Oxford graduate and local sports hero. These two had met a year earlier on Rat Island off St. Lucia to plan a strategy for the "liberation" of the Eastern Caribbean. They remained

allies to the end, representatives of a whole generation of Eastern Caribbean radical intellectuals who sought power during the 1970s.

By this time Gairy's Grenada had become a West Indian aberration, the laughingstock of the region, represented in the United Nations by a defrocked Colombian priest who spoke no English, a haven for the Mafia and fugitives of every ilk. Increasingly indignant and ashamed, the leaders of The Jewel and MAP were merged into the New Jewel Movement in March 1973 with Bishop and Whiteman becoming the "joint coordinating secretaries."

They issued a manifesto that is an important piece of West Indian utopian thinking. Their goal was to "replace the present political system," destroy "the whole class relationship" and, in general, generate "a dynamic process of developing self-reliance and attaining self-sufficiency in all areas of our lives - economic, cultural, political and spiritual." The expectations of that self-sufficiency were based on the ancient and universal hope of an active peasantry producing enough surplus. That old aspiration was now tied to the modern idea of the small-island agro-industry.

The document reflected the level of sophistication and modernity that had already made the societies of the English-speaking Caribbean stand out in the Third World: They were educated and traveled, they had intellectualized ideas and development plans as varied as classical Marxism-Leninism, Tanzanian

Christian Socialism, West India "New World" grassroots developmentalism and American Black Power formulations.

But what do you do when the peasantry is caught in the grips of Gairy's primitive politics? The New Jewel Movement could not have been more clear: "To all of us," they said, "the fundamental, urgent and crucial question is the taking of political power by the organized people so as to clear up this mess and to set the island back on course." But even as the political goal was clear, the second part of the sentence indicated an understanding of what the middle class yearned for: Cleaning out Prime Minister Gairy's closets and stables meant a return to a simpler, more honest, peaceful and decent past.

The pitch was utopian revolutionary aspiration and conservative nostalgia for redemption and spiritual regeneration rolled into one package. But, then, so it had been in Cuba in 1958--59 and Nicaragua in 1979 - both mass movements that carried revolutionary elites to power on a wave of collective moral indignation. If this were all there was to the New Jewel Movement, it would hardly warrant further discussion. There was much more.

There was the full outline of a totally different political system that intended to replace political parties, trade unions and other established institutions. It was predicated on two ideas with influences of a perceived African past: First was to give the grassroots direct power; at any time the Village

Assemblies could replace the people at any level including the National Council. This was direct democracy, power flowed up rather than trickling down. Second was the idea of collective leadership: "All important decisions will be made by the whole group. There will be no premier."

Whatever else it was, this was not a Marxist-Leninist blueprint: There was no role for a "vanguard" party, and it did not project ongoing class conflict and the eventual dictatorship of the proletariat. Because they emphasized agriculture, they opposed the typical Third World emphasis on what they called "prestige dream" projects. Most important of these was the old idea of a new airport. Both the conservative GNP and Gairy's GULP had advocated building it but the NJM's Manifesto was categorically opposed: "We are not in favour of building an international airport at this time. The present airport is more than adequate for our needs." This was in keeping with the 1978 report to the World Bank that warned against overly ambitious airport construction projects in the smaller islands (The Commonwealth Caribbean. Sidney E. Cherwick, Chief of Mission).

As with the rest of their utopian blueprint, the airport was never a campaign issue. In the only elections in which they ever participated (1976), they were part of the People's Alliance, a coalition of three parties that included the much longer established Grenadian National Party. Therefore, one can only make a rough guess as to the movement's popularity. In 1976, 40,782 or 65 per cent of the electorate voted and the

Alliance received 48 per cent of the votes cast and won six of the 15 seats in Parliament. Of these six, three were New Jewel Movement candidates (Bishop and Whiteman and a relatively new member, Bernard Coard) who together gathered 25 per cent of the voting electorate.

This figure is only adequate to make one point: The New Jewel Movement was by no stretch of the imagination a national mass movement. And yet, in 1976, the NJM had found its natural constituency: The new 18-year-old voters with plenty of time on their hands, unemployed but literate and, perhaps fundamental, with little or no attachment to the Parliamentary system. They wanted action now.

On March 13, 1979, a swift and virtually bloodless coup put the New Jewel Movement in position to implement its utopia. Gairy's excesses made the coup popular and his 65-man defense force and 50-man "mongoose gang" collapsed like a house of cards. There was no immediate internal armed threat to an NJM initiative.

When that initiative came, however, it looked quite different from the 1979 utopia: There was a hierarchy of command and power trickled down. The party's central committee, not any people's assemblies, provided the leadership of what was now called the People's Revolutionary Government (PRG). Rather than a people's police force, the people's revolutionary armed forces (with former sergeant Hundson Austin now its commanding general) was trained and equipped by the Cubans. The

East Germans trained the secret police.

Rather than the village Assemblies, "mass organizations" were led by the inner circle. Rather than grassroots agricultural development, the PRG's energies were taken up by a major airport that became the centerpiece of the nations' development plan. It would serve, they argued, a major new initiative in tourism - rejected in 1973 as encouraging "national-cultural prostitution."

A new blueprint was revealing itself, a new description of Grenadian reality.

There were, said Bernard Coard, using language straight from Moscow's "Internationalist" vocabulary, in the "national democratic" stage. This stage had three distinct characteristics: (1) A continual enhancement of the state sector; (2) a stimulation of production in the private sector (the "Nationalist bourgeoisie"), and (3) a socialist-oriented, "internationalist" foreign policy.

Because these are not "stages" in the Marxian sense of development, but more Leninist party-directed objectives, it is notorious that the fly in the ointment of this plan is objective No. 2. Not surprisingly, the regime split into "scientific" and "pragmatic" wings over the appropriate role of the private sector. Once Bishop admitted (as he did to Cuba's Gramma in July 1981) that "the state sector alone cannot develop the economy" and once the state-directed "cooperative sector" produced little more than subsistence and minor cash crops, this private sector necessarily took on importance.

Theoretical discussions over "development strategies" were reported by sympathetic allies (and later revealed in captured documents) to have become angry battles over day-to-day decisions. For example, should Grenada participate in the then upcoming November 1983 Caribbean Conference in Miami, tilted as it would be toward private-sector initiatives?

The first sign that the typical succession battle in authoritarian socialist states was in full gear was Bernard Coard's call for a return to collective leadership. Coard was known to control a semi-secret "cell" within the New Jewel Movement, the military-civilian Marxist discussion group called the Organization for Educational Advancement and Research. His military man in that group was Grenada's ambassador to Cuba, Major Leon Cornwall, who returned to Grenada just in time to play a key role in the events that ended tragically in the shooting of Bishop and four of his closest NJM associates. It was Cornwall who emerged on October 15 to announce that while "the Party" recognized Bishop's contributions during the past 10 years, "our process as it develops is becoming more complex" and that changes were required, fundamentally "strengthening the work of the party and the Revolution." (Reported by Foreign Broadcast Information Service, October 17, 1983). In the struggle for power such arguments about entering "new stages" is mere ideological rationalization.

What, then, triggered the bloody denouement? Bishop's trip to the United States and his search for a rapprochement with the Reagan Administration? His hint to West Indian leaders that

a "constitutional process" would start in Grenada? Was the utopian beacon still calling? Reason tells us that were it only Bishop who was assassinated, that could be seen as a personal matter between competing leaders. But since it was virtually the whole group of original 1973 utopians who were eliminated, it became what Machiavelli called an "act of state".

We will never read Bishop's memoirs. We will never fully understand these four years of revolution. Another chance of knowing ourselves better has been buried with the utopia.

And, yet, there are some lessons that can be drawn from this West Indian tragedy.

First, despite its imperfections, parliamentary democracy does what authoritarian systems can never do: solve the problem of succession. It is disheartening to know that what took place in Grenada was more akin to the Stalin vs. Trotsky battle of the 1920s. In both cases the totalitarian state was still in its infancy. The one that will inevitably come in Cuba will probably be more akin to the Khrushchev vs. Malenkov vs. Beria struggle simply because of the consolidation of state control in both cases.

Second, precisely because the problem of succession often presents opportunities to influence events in authoritarian states, their diplomatic isolation is counterproductive. In this regard, the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States, by refusing to isolate Bishop during the nearly 5 years of his rule behaved more rationally than the United States; they, not the United States, should be fully in charge of helping Grenada return to the democratic



fold.

As this is written, there is no evidence that the intervention was legal. The United States claims humanitarian reasons that, if true, would justify a rescue operation, but not the overthrow of the regime. The Organization of Eastern Caribbean States claims a preemptive strike that has no legal grounds in the OECS, U.N. or OAS charters. And yet, in these deeply lawabiding states, which for nearly five years respected Grenada's right to shape its own destiny, the intervention enjoyed wide support.<sup>1</sup> The people's reasons are a complex blend of revulsion at the brutal murders and a sense of communal solidarity with those believed to be oppressed. There are an estimated 120,000 Grenadians living in Trinidad; is it any surprise that their concerns were also the concerns of the rest of the population?

The fundamental question for Grenada now, however, is not whether the peoples of the Eastern Caribbean support the invasion but whether that island nation has the resources (constitutional, political and psychological) to build a democratic state. The constitutional question is crucial.

S.A. deSmith, the British constitutional authority, voiced a widely held belief when he noted that "in developing countries, constitutional factors will seldom play a dominant role in the shaping of political history." (The New Commonwealth

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<sup>1</sup>In Jamaica public opinion was divided by political party loyalties: Seaga's JLP supporters were 76% in favor, Manley's PNP, 38% and the Communist party (Workers Party of Jamaica), 0%. Among those unaffiliated the support was 58%, 24% against (Carl Stone poll, Jamaican Weekly Gleamer, Nov. 7, 1983, p. 23) In Trinidad the invasion was supported by 63% while 56% felt that Trinidad should have joined the Caribbean forces (The Express, Nov. 6 1983, p. 1).

and its Constitutions, 1964, p. 83). Whether Grenada will provide an exception to de Smith's general rule depends on how some fundamental questions are answered.

First, did the New Jewel Movement's 1979 coup d'etat destroy the entire constitutional framework of Grenada, as established in its independence constitution of 1974? Did Grenada stop being a constitutional monarchy in the British Commonwealth?

If the answers to these questions are yes, there is nothing further to discuss; de Smith's observation will stand confirmed, and there is nothing left to do other than to start the rebuilding process from scratch.

If the answers are no, a second set of questions will become quite crucial: What was, or were, the elements of that system that remained intact, and what (if any) was the scope of their power before the invasion and their continuity of power to the present?

The last five years of the people's revolutionary government in Grenada would indicate that the 1979 coup leaders did not seek to destroy the constitutional system in its entirety--at least not immediately. Grenada remained within the British Commonwealth, and the new prime minister, Maurice Bishop, regularly attended the commonwealth head of state meetings presided over by Queen Elizabeth II. Promises to restore a "purified parliamentary system," while never strongly asserted, were occasionally heard, most recently and clearly from Bishop himself, just before he was assassinated.

But, more important, the post of Governor General was kept, and the occupant since 1978, Sir Paul Scoon, was retained. The constitutional provision that the executive authority of Grenada "may be exercised on behalf of Her Majesty by the governor general" was still operational.

One of the intriguing questions about those five years of authoritarian rule is why the People's Revolutionary Government considered it desirable to retain the post of Governor General.

One answer could be that, given the basically conservative nature of Grenadian society, the traditional respect for the post, plus the prestige of the occupants, persuaded the Marxist-Leninist government elite that the governor general was useful in a period of transition. From all appearances the post carried little authority, especially during periods of full parliamentary governments, which might have further convinced them that it was a cheap and unthreatening link to less - than - revolutionary sectors of society and to traditional respectability.

As it turns out, the post of governor general -- typical of the split executive in the British system -- was geared not really toward handling extraconstitutional acts such as a coup d'etat but to handling exceptional constitutional situations such as death or the absence of one or another branch of the executive. This is done by providing for the governor general to "act on his own deliberate judgment" when exceptional circumstances arise.

On the basis of Grenada's constitutional provisions for peacetime exceptions, the case can be made that there was a

functioning governor general after the 1979 coup. The argument is as follows:

First, since Parliament had not met since March, 1979, and since by law there should be no interval longer than six months between sittings, Parliament can be considered to have been legally dissolved. Second, on dissolution the governor general "shall act in his own deliberate judgment" to appoint as prime minister anyone who was a member of the House of Representatives "immediately before dissolution." It would appear, therefore, that the governor general's constitutional authority in this rebuilding phase is clear.

But what about Grenada's political infrastructure? Was there sufficient constitutional history to have created the experience, manpower and political culture necessary for independent action?

The answer here has to be yes. Between the abolition of outright colonial status in 1951 and the coup of 1979, there have been eight elections in Grenada under universal suffrage, and a fairly stable two-party system had emerged. In 1972 for instance, 83.5% of the electorate voted. During that period Grenadian legal and political elites had participated in processes as varied and complex as the creation of a West Indies federation, an attempted unitary statehood relationship with Trinidad and Tobago, total political independence, failed association with Guyana and the other Eastern Caribbean states, and successful memberships in the Caribbean Common Market and the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States.

The people with experience and patriotism are there, and the Governor General has the authority to work with them. The

provisional government he has established is proof of the available talent. No spurious challenges by those whose whole philosophy and behavior attest to their rejection of parliamentary systems should be allowed to obstruct their vital mission.

Nor should the U.S. occupying forces engage in that obstruction which could most easily occur if they attempt some sort of "guardianship", or worse, "protectorate", on the island.

Such efforts in Cuba, the Philippines and Puerto Rico after the Spanish-American War should warn Americans about the dire consequences of anything except total political independence in the post-"liberation" stage.

That total independence will take place in the context of a very "special relationship" between the United States and the Caribbean, the Eastern Caribbean in specific. Table No. 2 illustrates one of the most vital aspects of that relationship: migration. Table No. 2 shows that not only have West Indians been in the USA in large numbers but, if given their choice, would preferably reside there. They know this country and they purposefully chose it over others. This is an integral part of that special relationship and should be given the importance it deserves. Once this is done we then realize that these democratic societies of the Caribbean form more than a "backyard," a "sphere of influence", a "vital strategic region." Given the way the world is organized, they may or may not be all that. What cannot be in doubt is that they are allies, committed to pluralistic democracy and human rights and it is to that fold that they all want Grenada back. Surely the USA will want no less.

Table No 1

THE ELECTORAL PROCESS IN THE EASTERN CARIBBEAN, 1951-1978

(% of Electorate Voting)

Year	B'dos	Antigua	Monserrat	St. Kitts- Nevis-Anguilla	Dominica	Grenada	St. Lucia	St. Vincent
1951	64.6	70.3	n.a.	n.a.	75.9	70.6	51.1	69.2
1954	----	----	n.a.	n.a.	70.3	67.4	49.4	59.8
1956	60.3	57.0	n.a.	n.a.	----	----	----	----
1957	----	----	n.a.	n.a.	75.6	68.5	56.8	70.9
1960	----	40.0	60.8	66.1	76.9	55.5	----	77.1
1961	61.3	----	----	70.3	80.3	----	51.9 (1964)	84.1
1965	----	n.a.	53.6	70.3	81.6	77.1 (1967)	53.2 (1969)	82.6 (1967)
1966	79.3*	----	83.0	87.9	77.3	83.5* (1972)	84.1 (1974)	75.6 (1972)
1970	81.6	56.4	70.3	72.0	65.3	68.0 (1979)	68.0 (1979)	63.2 (1974)
1971	----	----	78.2	74.1	76.8	70.1	60.4	72.9
1973	----	----	69.2	74.1	76.8	70.1	60.4	72.9
1975	----	----	63.7	74.1	76.8	70.1	60.4	72.9
1976	74.1	95.0*	----	74.1	76.8	70.1	60.4	72.9
1978	----	----	78.2	74.1	76.8	70.1	60.4	72.9
Average	70.2	63.7	69.2	74.1	76.8	70.1	60.4	72.9

Source: Patrick A.M. Emmanuel, General Elections in the Eastern Caribbean: A Handbook (Barbados: ISER, 1979)

\* Independence

Table No 2

MIGRATION FROM THE EASTERN CARIBBEAN AND  
THE "SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP" WITH THE USA:

Experience of Being Overseas

Longer than 3 Months

	<u>Barbados</u>	<u>St. Kitts</u>	<u>Nevis</u>	<u>St. Vincent</u>	<u>St. Lucia</u>
Total with this experience (%)	23.1	50.0	42.3	32.0	33.9
<u>Location:</u>					
USA*	36.8	41.8	36.3	8.5	18.9
U.K.	13.0	9.	18.2	19.1	13.5
Canada	9.6	1.8	-0-	2.1	4.5
English-Sp. Carib.	21.5	14.5	27.3	36.2	26.1
Remittances Received	45.8	59.3	67.3	56.0	40.5
<u>Choice of Overseas Residence</u>					
USA*	61.6	40.9	69.3	39.4	41.6
U.K.	11.0	9.1	15.4	10.6	11.5
Canada	21.9	18.2	15.4	15.4	13.3
English-Sp. Carib.	2.8	15.9	-0-	24.1	8.0

Source:

Institute of Social and Economic Research, UWI (Barbados), "Four Country Questionnaire Survey, 1980" (February 1980).

\* Mainland, Puerto Rico & Virgin Islands