



REAGAN'S DEMANDS, THE PRG'S REPLY

GRENADA IS a Caribbean island-state a mere one hundred miles north of Venezuela on the South American mainland; so tiny that by walking briskly one can reach to its southernmost tip from its northernmost end in less than 12 hours.

During my childhood, Grenada was a British colony. In 1951, when I was six and a half years old, a violent uprising termed 'Sky-Red' swept through our country. The leader of that rebellion held power for most of 20 years.

At 12, I met another boy. We were the same age. His name was Maurice Bishop. An immediate friendship was struck up between us. Maurice and I shared a passionate love of our country and desire to better the conditions of our people. Some 22 years later, on March 13, 1979, our party led the enthusiastic people of Grenada in overthrowing its dictator Eric Gairy and creating the first Revolution in the English-speaking world. Maurice Bishop became the Prime Minister of the People's Revolutionary Government (PRG) and I, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance. The leaders and members of our party, the New Jewel Movement (NJM), gave an example of joyful zeal and hard work, as did most Grenadians.

The Revolution, however, came at the height of the Cold War. The United States strongly opposed any country in the Western Hemisphere having friendly relations with Cuba. Grenada on the other hand, insisted that no 'big country' had the right to dictate what we should do. The conflict between the United States and Grenada was one of several which, together, threatened the very existence of the Revolution after barely four and a half years.



In January 1981, Ronald Reagan assumed the presidency of the United States of America, This was a victory for the American Right. And one of Reagan's campaign themes throughout 1980 had

been that if he were elected, tiny Grenada, just 21 miles long by 12½ miles wide but a friend of Cuba, would be “*taught a lesson!*”

In May 1981, two years into the Grenada Revolution and only four months after Reagan had been sworn in, the United States International Communications Agency (USICA) held a conference in Washington DC, bringing together the editors of the English-speaking Caribbean’s leading newspapers. Within two weeks of the conclusion of this gathering, a spate of articles and editorials attacking the Grenada Revolution appeared in Caribbean newspapers. In many cases the papers swapped and reprinted one another’s articles, and even their editorials. Then one Sunday Jamaica’s leading newspaper, the *Gleaner*, Barbados’ fierce rivals the *Sunday Sun* and the *Advocate*, and Trinidad’s equally strong competitors, the *Guardian* and the *Express*, all carried identical front page editorials calling upon the governments and people of the Caribbean region to isolate Grenada and expel our country from all regional organizations and groupings!

The escalation in the regional media’s propaganda against the Grenada Revolution did not surprise us in the leadership; its fever-pitch character and openly coordinated nature did. No longer was there any pretence that each paper was pursuing its own views and opinions which may or may not have coincided with that of others. The entire mainstream regional media had become one voice, and a particularly shrill one, demanding the total isolation and implicitly the eventual overthrow of the Grenada Revolution.

We in the leadership did not know enough about the United States International Communications Agency (USICA). Until its May meeting with the Caribbean’s press barons, I had thought of USICA as essentially the same as the various ‘Government Information Service’ entities in every Caribbean country: the organs through which governments informed their people of their plans, activities and successful accomplishments. We were totally clear on the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA); we had seen what it had done in many countries, most recently in the 1970s in Chile and Jamaica. USICA was ‘flying under our radar’.

We had friends in the United States, however: former agents of the CIA. These were Americans of integrity who had become disgusted by what they felt was their agency’s betrayal of their country’s ideals. They told us that the USICA’s role was similar to that of a military invading force ‘softening up’ a country through

weeks of bombardment from the air before putting its troops on the ground to actually seize power in the targeted country. They pointed out that the CIA's covert activity in our country through the De Ravinierre Plot, the Queen's Park bombing of the previous year, and the Yusuf-, Habib- and Ayub-led insurgency in the countryside, had all been crushed.¹ So it was time to bring in USICA, alongside the stepped-up economic destabilization which had already begun to 'soften up' Grenada prior to the desired landing of troops by the Reagan administration.

USICA, we were told, was the new name for what had previously been called the USIA. Many years before, this organization's role in the US government was spelled out by its then Deputy Director, Thomas C. Sorensen. It was, he said, "the psychological instrument of the US government overseas, just as the State Department is the diplomatic instrument, the Agency for International Development (USAID) the economic assistance instrument, and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), the intelligence instrument."

Our US-based intelligence friends left us in no doubt as to what 'the psychological instrument' of the US government meant. They highlighted for us a key passage in the *US Army's Field Manual on Psychological Warfare* which stated that: "PEACE IS THE CONTINUATION OF WAR BY NON-MILITARY MEANS." It went on to say that "Psychological activities are those carried out in peace time, or in places other than war theaters, in order to influence the feelings and attitudes of foreign groups in a manner favorable to the achievement of the policies of the United States."

Our ex-CIA contacts made clear to us their assessment that the United States would try to get an anti-PRG newspaper going again, inside Grenada, aimed at destabilizing our government. Destabilization is always more effective, they said, when there is a 'national' press organ fuelling the fire. Psychologically, attacks from media based outside a targeted country are never as effective. While external media attacks often succeeded in destroying the targeted country's tourist industry, for instance, they could be counterproductive as a tool for 'softening up' the people within the country as they frequently stirred up resentment and nationalist feelings amongst the population.

"They tried to destabilise the PRG, using the *Torchlight* then the

1 Described in *Forward Ever, Backward Never! Constructing the New Society in Grenada*. Forthcoming.

Catholic Focus newspapers. Look out, they're going to come again!" one of our friends in Washington DC warned us.

As with so much else that they had told us, our American friends were to be proven correct. These men, after all, had been trained by the best destabilizers in the business and had carried out their orders for years, until their consciences would not permit them to destroy other peoples' countries and hopes anymore.



"Comrades," said Bureau member and our outgoing Ambassador to the United States, Kenrick 'Dix' Radix, "the US will be financing the start-up of a newspaper in Grenada shortly."

Dix had flown into Grenada for the May 27 meeting of the NJM's Political Bureau (PB) to give a full report on his recent meeting with the Director of the Caribbean Section of the US State Department, Robert Mann. His meeting with Mann had taken place around the same time that the USICA was flexing its muscles against Grenada via the Caribbean media heavy-weights. I was absent from Dix's meeting with the Bureau as I had been out of the country raising funds for major capital projects, including the international airport construction. However, I had been kept up to date with developments through daily phone calls with Maurice Bishop, Grenada's Prime Minister, while I was away, and briefings from him and Selwyn 'Sello' Strachan when I returned, in addition to the minutes from the various meetings.

Dix's report covered a number of matters which we had asked him to raise with the State Department. The first was Maurice's letter to President Ronald Reagan of March 26, just two months after the latter had assumed office. In the letter, Maurice had written: "My government has *always* wanted good relations with your government and people. I would like to suggest that our two governments hold bilateral discussions at the highest possible level to discuss developments and to clear up possible misunderstandings." We had received no reply.

The Reagan Administration had not just ignored our government's overture; it had gone on the offensive weeks after Maurice's letter – firstly, by seeking to prevent countries around the world from providing Grenada with funds to complete our new international airport; then through active measures to block our receiving funds from the IMF. When Dix complained to Mann about these hostile actions, the latter sought to justify them, describing them

as 'legitimate'.

Reagan had also thus far refused to accept our new ambassador. "You will hear from us in due course; we haven't decided what our decision will be; we are still formulating our policy towards Grenada." This, Dix reported, was the gist of Mann's reply to his queries.



Maurice and I met the day after my return to Grenada. He told me that Dix had described the mood of his meeting with Mann as unhelpful, uncooperative, uncompromising, combative and openly challenging. "We will be financing an independent newspaper to come out shortly [in Grenada]. We want to see what you'll do!" Dix had reported the State Department man as saying to him.

"There has been," Maurice continued, bringing me up to date, "an upsurge in activities by elements opposed to the Revolution throughout May, especially this second half." I listened intently as he quickly outlined some of these developments.

"We have picked up word on the ground confirming what the State Department man told Dix. The newspaper will be launched in June."

"So soon, eh?" I responded.

"Significantly," Maurice continued, "Stanley Roberts has been telling friends of his since April that 'when June comes, they go see!' He means the PRG, of course."

Maurice paused to let me digest this. At age 36, after so many years together, we were always able to sense when the other needed time to consider a new development.²

I found what Maurice just told me highly significant, because Stanley Roberts was a leading member of the Seamen's Union, headed by Eric Pierre. Neither man favoured the Revolution, to put it mildly. Both were intimately connected with the CIA-controlled American Institute for Free Labor Development (AIFLD), a body with which Stanley Cyrus, our Grenada-born 'CIA agent' had worked closely in many parts of Latin America for several years. We had received unconfirmed intelligence reports that the AIFLD was providing substantial sums of hard cash to the Seamen's Union in preparation for using the Union to fight the Revolution through industrial action, at an appropriate moment. I do not believe that Stanley Roberts knew about the AIFLD's CIA connection, or was privy to the information regarding their providing secret funding

2 Our friendship is described in *Sky-Red: A Tale of Two Revolutions, Grenada*. Forthcoming.

to the Union. It appeared, however, that he knew of major political plans by forces opposed to the Revolution; plans which attracted his approval. "When June comes, they go see!" That is, the PRG will encounter real opposition to its rule by forces too powerful to crush. This is how I interpreted the statement attributed to him.

"A new party is also to be launched in June." Maurice broke into my thoughts about Stanley Roberts, Eric Pierre and their Seamen's Union.

"What?" I asked.

"Special Branch has picked up word from more than one quarter that there will be the launching of a political party this June."

"Hold on, hold on," I responded. "First, there will be a newspaper launched in Grenada this June, financed by the US government. Secondly, a political party is to be launched, also in June. And thirdly, since April, you say, Stanley Roberts has been saying that we 'go see' things happening – also in June?"

"There's more," Maurice responded. "The State Department man raised with Dix the question of the PRG holding elections – and soon – as part of the requirement for better relations with the US government. And Special Branch reports that those behind the new party are saying that it will be launched, 'come hell or high water' – presumably to contest those elections."

"Come hell or high water!" I repeated. "This shows a degree of boldness, of confidence, which suggests the backing of a major outside power, don't you think?" I asked rhetorically, smiling.

"It sure does," Maurice responded, chuckling. "And there's more," he continued. "Starting on the night of the 19th of May, there has been politically inspired defiant jumping up – every few nights in the streets of Tivoli and nearby Hermitage – the only two villages in the country opposed to the PRG. I have reports that these villages have been 'on the boil' again, since the middle of May. They, too, are expecting 'major developments' in June, according to my reports..."

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Five or six days after Dix's report to the Bureau on his State Department meeting, a diplomat from the US Embassy in Barbados, Ashley Wills, came into Grenada and met separately with several junior ministers in the PRG and senior NJM party comrades. His visit was, we later analysed, a speedy follow-up to Dix's Washington DC State

Department meeting. He spelled out, to each one of our comrades, the same message and in starker language than Dix had encountered. Clearly, the Reagan administration wanted there to be no doubt about its position.

There were three uncompromising demands: free elections must be held by the PRG right away; all detainees not charged must be released immediately; and Grenada's close relations with Cuba must end. "Unless these three conditions are met, there will be no acceptance of Grenada's new ambassador to the US," Wills was reported as saying, "and there will be no improved relations with the US government."

What a coincidence, I said to myself, on being told of these three demands. *A newspaper and a political party, both clearly Reagan-administration sponsored, to be launched within days or weeks. And the PRG must hold elections right away; Gairy's secret police detainees and others must be released, to create the mayhem they used to; and close ties with Cuba broken – all virtually at the same time!*

It was clear to me that if we failed to meet Reagan's demands, the attempts to block us at the World Bank, the IMF and with governments around the world friendly to the United States would continue; as would the escalating regional and international media campaign against Grenada, with its destructive effect on our tourist industry and economy. There would be no let-up in political, economic, propaganda, diplomatic, and CIA covert-activity pressure. This micro-state of ours, with fewer than 100,000 people, was facing a behemoth with a population of nearly 300 million: the mightiest economic and military power on earth, with a track record of imposing its will on countries multiple times our size!

We are stubborn fools, I thought, proud that we were standing up to this certified bully.



On June 12, ten days after US diplomat Ashley Wills 'laid down the law' from Ronald Reagan, a new newspaper, the *Grenadian Voice*, appeared on the streets of Grenada. It was published by a newly established publishing company called Spice Island Publishers, with 26 shareholders. Well over half of these 26 individuals had at one time or another been leading members or strong supporters of Herbert Blaize's conservative Grenada National Party (GNP). Several had been or were still members of the executive of the GNP: Ben Jones, deputy political leader, Hudson Scipio, Rawle Charles,

Eric Pierre and Leslie Pierre. Others were from Grenada's upper class, its social elite: these included prominent journalist Alister Hughes, Leonard Hughes, Fred Toppin, Charles McIntyre and Alex Bain. Yet others were well off businessmen such as William Minors, Terrence Cromwell, David Otway and Benedict LaQua. Ben Jones and others were lawyers, including Tillman Thomas, and Lloyd Noel.

Members of our NJM Bureau searched the list of 26 shareholders to locate a single worker or poor farmer. Not one could be found. Maurice was furious. He saw these 26 Grenadians as betraying their country by consciously permitting US imperialism and the CIA to use them to overthrow the Revolution, a revolution which was positively transforming the economic and social circumstances of the vast majority of their fellow Grenadians. As he told thousands of Grenadians one week later, "It is one thing when a local counter-revolutionary acts on his own ... when ... [he or she] tries to make a grab for dollars for personal gain ... seeking his own benefits. All that is bad enough. But it is another thing when a local counter, like a political Judas, openly and unashamedly links up with the CIA to try and overthrow our Revolution."

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I had returned to Grenada just a few days prior to the June 19 Heroes Day Anniversary Rally in Queen's Park. It was the first June 19 since the tragic bomb blast which had killed three young women and injured over one hundred persons exactly one year earlier. Yet the crowd was actually larger and more demonstrative than the one a year before. The definitive crushing of violent counter-revolution since the bombing had probably played its part in these respects. People showed little fear of being killed or maimed by further bomb blasts.

I had seen and heard Maurice when he was as passionate as he was that day, but never had he been more passionate. I had, moreover, never encountered any occasion on which he spoke more authoritatively. Maurice saw the Reagan administration's demands as insulting and out of place, as did all the leaders of our Party. As tiny as we were as a country, we genuinely – if naively – saw ourselves as possessing equal sovereignty with the mighty USA. We would not be pushed around. And we would make this abundantly clear to the US and everyone else!

Most of all, Maurice felt that these 26 Grenadians, now referred to as the 'Committee of Twenty-six',

some of whom had been personal friends and political colleagues in the past, had betrayed the Revolution, the Grenadian people and him personally. He had previously been merciless in excoriating former friends and comrades who he felt had betrayed him: Teddy Victor, Ralphie Thompson and the Budhlall brothers. Now he was equally tough on Lloyd Noel and Tillman Thomas...

"Comrades, what I want you to see today, most of all," Maurice said midway through his speech, "is that the enemy we face today is no small enemy; it is not just some jokers who are running the *Torchlight*; it is not just some parasites who are running what they call the *Grenadian Voice*. What we are facing today is a much more powerful enemy that has these stooges in their back pockets to do their dirty work for them. What we are facing today, in other words, is the full might of US imperialism ... the full fury of the organized CIA, which has made up its mind in the clearest possible way that it is out to overthrow our revolution, and it has told these local elements, these parasites, that they can have the fullest and firmest backing of imperialism in their plan to overthrow the Revolution."

Maurice's last phrase was an allusion to the growing signs of confidence displayed by all those who had taken the decision to defy the revolution's political strictures. He then let them know that he knew what was next in their plans.

"Apart from the first stage of a press [the *Grenadian Voice*], you will see other developments in the next few weeks... You might see them try to graduate from the 'free press' to a political organization, a political party ... a 'human rights' organization... [to] use their economic bases to try to get shortages [of essential goods] or to lay off people or to try to close down businesses. You might see them try to use the banks in a particular way. These are all stages, all elements on the road to the overthrow of the Grenadian Revolution."

Then Maurice named some of the 26, singling out Tillman Thomas, Lloyd Noel, Alister Hughes, Eric Pierre, and Leslie Pierre, asserting that the CIA was using them and others like them "to overthrow the Revolution in Grenada." At one stage, he said: "It is not the Committee of Twenty-six. It is the CIA." And again: "This is not about freedom of the press, it is about overthrowing the Grenadian Revolution."

During the final section of his speech, Maurice spoke with increasing passion: "When the Revolution speaks, it must be heard, listened to. Whatever the Revolution decrees, must be obeyed;

when the Revolution commands, it must be carried out; when the Revolution talks, no parasite must bark in their corner. The voice of the masses must be listened to; their rules must be obeyed. When the masses speak, they must be heard. When the Revolution orders, it must be obeyed. The Revolution must be respected.”

Maurice went on to say, that “those who want to link up with the CIA to overthrow the Revolution, they are going to understand that counter-revolutionary activity will be met by revolutionary action, counter-revolutionary violence by revolutionary manners. All counter-revolutionary plots, plans and schemes will be crushed with revolutionary firmness, revolutionary manners. If you play with fire, fire will burn you; if you touch the Revolution, power is going to break your backs. Don’t touch the Revo. It is too strong, it is too powerful!”

Then he ended with this warning: “If they attempt any political industrial strike that is not justified, we are going to manners the strike [Applause]. If they come with any terrorism, we are going to manners the terrorists, and those who are paying them [Applause]. If they come with any economic sabotage, any time they close down as a means of pressuring the Revolution, that is going to be the last time they close that door.”

This was an extraordinarily tough speech from Maurice, one which surprised even me, although I agreed with every word he said. He was speaking from his heart. A proud Grenadian nationalist, as we all were, he was in no mood to tolerate any further demands or threats from Reagan. Neither were we prepared to be lenient with the few within Grenada whom we perceived – wrongly, as we later learned – to be playing US imperialism’s hand for it.

We all believed that outside of a military invasion and seizure of the country, US imperialism could only achieve an overthrow of the Revolution by manipulating locals to do its will. We were determined to prevent this.

Two questions followed from our stance, as exemplified in Maurice’s speech: would the local Committee of Twenty-six get the message? And secondly, what would the United States do, now that we had publicly rejected its imperious demands? ■■■