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### TransAfrica Forum Issue Brief

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### GRENADA'S PATH TO A NEW SOCIETY: "IS FREEDOM WE MAKING"

Nearly four years have passed since a young lawyer named Maurice Bishop led the New Jewel (Joint Endeavor for Welfare, Education, and Liberation) Movement to power in Grenada in an almost bloodless coup d'état. Resting at the southern tip of the Windward Island chain, the small Caribbean island—21 miles long, 10 miles wide, 110,000 inhabitants—had been victimized by the corrupt and perverse policies of the Eric Gairy regime since its independence from Britain in 1974. On March 13, 1979, the popularly based New Jewel Movement (NJM) assumed power and formed the People's Revolutionary Government (PRG). For the last four years, the Bishop government has sought to re-orient the institutions and structure of Grenadian society substantially. More importantly, the PRG has attempted to implement the ambitious goal of creating a "New Grenadian" who broadly participates in the political life of the country.

Grenada's unique experiment in articulating and practicing participatory democracy at the grass-roots level and progressive social change has not gone unnoticed by its powerful neighbor to the north, the United States. Aside from recognizing the NJM government, the U.S. consistently has refused to have anything to do with it. The U.S. has neither exchanged ambassadors with Grenada nor maintained a diplomatic profile; minimal exchange is handled by the U.S. mission in Barbados.

American policy analysts view Grenada as a "client of communist Cuba" and a "bad example" for the Caribbean. Therefore, the U.S. has taken an openly hostile stance toward the country. The Reagan administration, following the lead set by its predecessor, has sought to isolate the nation by blocking multilateral loans to the country, by excluding it from the Caribbean Basin Initiative, and by putting pressure on other nations of the English-speaking Caribbean to ostracize the tiny island state. These and other topics will be discussed in this ISSUE BRIEF, which begins with an interview of Grenadian Ambassador to the Organization of American States, Dessima Williams, conducted by TransAfrica Forum Research Fellow, Cherri Waters. □

#### What is the current status of U.S. relations with Grenada?

**WILLIAMS:** Six weeks ago my government received notice that the U.S. administration is willing to accredit officers in the Embassy in Barbados formally and officially to the government of Grenada. This, of course, represents some kind of movement. We see this as a healthy sign. We think that it represents an atmosphere of maturity and coming to grips with Grenadian reality.

However, only a few weeks after that offer was made, the Grenadian Revolution was a victim of an assault by Vice President Bush during the Conference on the Caribbean and Central America held in Miami in December. Our Foreign Ministry has sent a letter protesting the statements of Vice President Bush. In it, we made a two-part offer to the Vice President. He obviously is not well-

informed because he said that our economy is floundering and that the government is repressive. We suggested that he send a delegate of his choosing to Grenada to examine the situation and to hold talks if necessary. Our second proposal is to send him literature on Grenada to help clarify and to help strengthen his information source, including the World Bank report on the economy which is an independent work that gives a very honest, objective view of the Grenadian economy.

On a third front, our Foreign Minister sent New Year's greetings to Secretary of State Shultz at the beginning of 1983 as a traditional diplomatic gesture. In that traditional greeting, he took the opportunity to say we hope that our governments will improve relations. This again signals our continuing call at every opportunity that is available to work towards better relations.

In summary, I would say that our relations are still not what they should be or what they could be given our commitment and our constant work in that field and the work of many of the forces within the United States. We believe that with consistent efforts, however, improvements will be made.

#### How would you describe Grenada's treatment at the recent CARICOM Conference?

**WILLIAMS:** The CARICOM meeting in Jamaica was a victory for the Caribbean people; and with all humility, we think it was also a victory for the Grenada Revolution. Before the meeting, our government stated that the



Staff Photo

OAS Ambassador Dessima Williams



most important issues facing Caribbean people and governments are the severe economic crisis and the question of Caribbean integration.

However, other voices, which our Prime Minister has called lackeys and lapdogs, barked another song—how to strangle the Grenadian Revolution and how to black-mail it by making charges of no freedom of the press and no human rights.

When the meeting was convened, we faced these issues very squarely. On the question of human rights, our position was that in no other time in our history have the human rights of the Grenadian people been so full, so vibrant, and so guaranteed.

Secondly, we argued that the most important right for any people is the right to life and with it the conditions for livelihood, including: a job, good meals, proper housing, health care, and opportunity for achievement of the full potential of the person.

The CARICOM declaration reiterated the call for Caribbean integration and the call for the recognition of the human rights for the Caribbean people along the lines of internationally declared positions such as the Declarations of the Rights of Man and the UN Declarations on the Obligations of States.

Therefore, the meeting in Jamaica was a success because first of all it brought unity rather than division. Second, it reiterated a number of important principles concerning Caribbean relations, including: ideological pluralism, cooperation, and respect for each other. Third, it was a success because important social and economic issues were both dealt with and pronounced upon by the Ministers. Fourth, it was a success because the progressive voice raised by Grenada and others was not drowned as some had hoped; but indeed, it was supported and advanced.

**How does your government respond to Grenada's exclusion from the CBI?**

**WILLIAMS:** The U.S. has a right to offer bilateral aid to anyone without consulting anyone except the two countries concerned. This is a principal of international relations which we do not intend to change. However, the program called the U.S. Caribbean Basin Initiative is offered as a multilateral program for the region. We have issued many statements arguing that it was incorrect to

propose a multilateral aid program and then designate who would be excluded.

It is also divisive. The Caribbean integration movement is infant. It has gone through a number of difficult periods. Therefore, we feel that *all* countries should respect the integration movement.

The impact the CBI has had is to give us an opportunity to dialogue more with our brothers in the Caribbean and to call more for cooperation and unity. This call for cooperation and unity has been also made in Barbados, in the Bahamas, and in Caribbean community at the Foreign Ministers level. They have all said that nobody should be left out. The principal of excluding some and including others is not one that is workable and is useful in our region.

**What specific changes would you like to see made in U.S. policy toward Grenada?**

**WILLIAMS:** In very broad terms we would like to see respect from the U.S. for our integrity, sovereignty, and independence as a people. We would like to see the principle of good neighborliness and the principle of mutual cooperation upheld.

We also would like to see in our bilateral relations the element of ideological pluralism because there is no doubt that the social, political, and economic system we are building in Grenada differs from that which you currently have in the United States. The recognition of that fact implies the recognition and the practice of ideological pluralism. We would like to see respect for Grenada's plea for the Caribbean to be a zone of peace.

On the economic front, we would like to see a policy that is more just and more realistic. For example, in the U.S. there is an interest in promoting the private sector as the main vehicle for development. We do not agree. In the Organization of American States, this [emphasis on the private sector] is disputed publicly by countries, such as Brazil, who realize that given the underdeveloped nature of our economies, our history, and our philosophy as Third World people that the public sector has an important and in many cases a leading role to play in national economic development. Therefore, we would like to see acceptance of the viability of the public sector so that we are not always confronted with programs that benefit and promote the private sector.

Certainly, I cannot end without saying that we would like to have full diplomatic relations established. In this day and age, given the policies that are coming out of the United States—whether in the World Bank, the IMF, the United Nations, or another institution—we have seen some differences. We have differences with this country in many fields: on the question of world peace, detente, the Law of the Sea, the role of the multinational corporations, and the national liberation movements. One of the major, modern mechanisms for conducting and maintaining relations to solve problems is full diplomatic facility through accreditations and presence. □

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## CREATING PEOPLE'S DEMOCRACY

*"People of Grenada, this revolution is for work, for food, for decent housing and health services, and for a bright future for our children and great grandchildren. The benefits of the revolution will be given to everyone regardless of political opinion . . . . Let us all unite as one . . . ."*

Prime Minister Maurice Bishop



Courtesy Grenadian Embassy

*Rally at the Airport Site*

Since assuming power in Grenada, the New Jewel Movement has sought to create "an alternative model for change in the region" directed toward restoring national pride and developing a cohesive society. Acknowledging the long and difficult tasks ahead, the People's Revolutionary Government has recognized that the active participation of the Grenadian masses and the rebuilding of social institutions are essential to the improvement of life in the country.

The NJM has attempted to fulfill these objectives through the establishment of interest groups, labor unions, and open membership in the NJM itself. It has moved to diffuse political power, to encourage broad participation, and to engender a strong spirit of communalism and national identification.

In 1981, the NJM opened its membership in the party support groups and mass organizations, inviting all in support of the revolution to join. As a result of the opening, the established organs of popular democracy, the Parish Councils, were inundated with new members. As participation swelled in the Parish Councils, the party leadership decided to further decentralize the political process and to institute Zonal Councils in each of the seven parishes. Each Zonal Council centers around a cluster of villages and functions similarly to the Parish Council.

Simultaneously, the NJM created parallel structures for each of the major interest groups: workers, independent farmers, women, and youth. These mass organizations meet regularly at the parish level, have a national coordinating committee, and elect national leaders. Each mass organization serves as a pressure group for its own interests and mobilizes support for national projects.

Both the Zonal Councils and the mass organizations provide formal interaction between the Grenadian people and their government. The process is based on the



Courtesy Grenadian Embassy

*Public Meeting in Grenada*

principal of accountability: government officials must face the citizenry on a regular basis to account for their performance. At the typical Zonal and Parish Council meetings, a member of the PRG Cabinet and one or more managerial level government officials are present to report, to listen, and to answer questions concerning current policies, the implementation of programs, and local grievances or concerns.

Beyond accountability, the meetings serve as a channel for popular input into the legislative process. The boldest expression of democratization to date has been the extensive consultations with thousands of people in the mass organizations and in a special conference on the economy in the preparation of the budget. Moreover, the government consulted hundreds of senior citizens, self-employed individuals, and workers in small enterprises who are not members of mass organizations.

Outsiders have criticized the PRG for not holding elections and for not drafting a new constitution—in short for abandoning the Westminster style of parliamentary democracy. But Grenadians remember Gairy's "rum and corned beef elections" which had nothing to do with the free expression of popular will.

The Bishop government also has been criticized for suspension of a free press, the detention without charges of about sixty political prisoners, and the harassment of conservative, independent labor union officials. Many of these critics have not considered the legitimate security concerns of a government in a highly fluid political environment with a powerful and hostile neighbor to the north. Grenadians remember Allende's high regard for formal democratic processes, the fate that befell both he and his revolution, and the U.S. role in his fall.

Certainly, the PRG has created a new sense of pride and determination to improve life in Grenada. A new participatory democracy is being created. The evolving popular political institutions and the formal consultative procedures are a vast improvement over sham parliamentary democracy presided over by Gairy's "Mongoose Gang" of thugs. The Bishop government has made a commitment to hold elections after a period of consolidation. Until then, we in the U.S. should be patient and supportive of Grenada's efforts. □



*"The Government which came to power in March 1979 inherited a deteriorating economy and is now addressing the task of rehabilitation and of laying better foundations for growth within the framework of a mixed economy."*

The World Bank  
August 1982



Courtesy Grenadian Embassy

*Agricultural Development in Grenada*

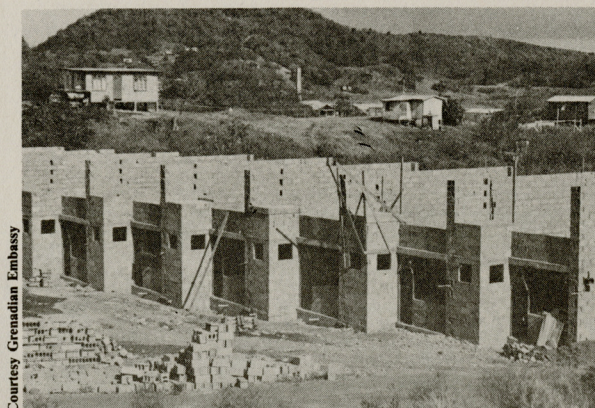
Economically, Grenada, like other Caribbean countries, has been affected adversely by the current world recession. The demand for major tropical exports—including nutmeg, mace, bananas, and cocoa—has been sluggish. In 1981, the average world market price for nutmeg was \$2.48 per pound, but it fell first to \$1.95 and then to \$1.20 during 1982. The price of cocoa, which had been \$1.54 per pound in 1981, had plunged to 81¢ a year later. Tourism lagged; and bankruptcies increased. These conditions produced little or no growth throughout the region.

Nonetheless, Grenada has been one of the very few countries in the Western Hemisphere that has had per capita growth in the 1980s. Since forming the PRG, the Bishop government has implemented a comprehensive economic development strategy which has attacked the problems of a previously deteriorating economy on several fronts.

The government's program has had four goals and has produced rather impressive results. The goals are:

- To rehabilitate existing infrastructure and to add to Grenada's infrastructure investment.
- To stimulate productive investment both on the part of the private sector and through increased public investments.
- To improve the efficiency of the public sector and to maintain sound public finances.
- To emphasize agriculture and tourism.

Agriculture clearly dominates Grenada's economy as the main supplier of food, the major earner of foreign exchange, and the largest employer. In implementing its goals, the PRG has spent fifty-four times more on agriculture than did the Gairy government. The government has enhanced and upgraded extension services and technical assistance to individual farmers. It has provided substantial flows of financial assistance for banana and cocoa rehabilitation. It has re-organized and rationalized state-owned farms and has established private coopera-



Courtesy Grenadian Embassy

*Grand Anse Housing Project*

tives of small farmers.

The highest growth rate sector of the economy has been construction. The largest project has been the construction of the international airport. However, there also has been major public investment in roads, education, health, and housing.

The World Bank has estimated that the PRG's program has resulted in nine percent real per capita growth. The principal beneficiaries of this achievement have been the Grenadian people. Unemployment has fallen from 49.0 percent in 1979 to 14.2 percent in 1982. Considered a privilege under the Gairy regime, education has become a right under the PRG. A recent census found only seven to ten percent illiteracy, down significantly from the fifteen percent projected by a 1979 World Bank report. Free milk and hot lunches are provided for primary school children. A new secondary school has been constructed, and secondary school fees have been reduced. The Mireaubeau Agricultural School has been expanded and rehabilitated, and the number of university scholarships have increased from 3 in 1978 to 209 in 1981.

Significant improvements also have been made in health care. An increase in the number of doctors now in residence on the island allowed for major expansions in health care facilities. Each parish currently is equipped with a medical and a dental clinic. Twenty-eight medical stations have been placed throughout the country. New departments have been added to the main hospital; and for the first time, the Ministry of Health has the assistance of a professional health planner. The government has created a Food and Nutrition Council to combat dietary problems and has stressed the importance of preventive medicine in attacking the nation's health problems.

More than 11,000 Grenadians have received housing assistance. Fifty housing units currently under construction are expected to be completed in the Grand Anse Valley next year. Moreover, the government will be able to build more than five hundred houses each as a result of important infrastructural improvements.

Prime Minister Bishop has argued that the future of Grenada's revolution "hinge[s] on the struggle to construct a viable economy . . . ." Clearly, his government has made significant strides in that direction. □



*"El Salvador isn't the only country that's being threatened with Marxism. Grenada bears the Soviet and Cuban trademark, which means it will attempt to spread the virus among its neighbors."*

President Ronald Reagan

Since the formation of the People's Revolutionary Government (PRG), the U.S. government has viewed Grenada with unwarranted suspicion, has maintained only nominal diplomatic relations, has engaged in a deliberate campaign of economic subversion, and has plotted the overthrow of the Bishop government.

Open hostility toward Grenada began under the Carter administration as early as April 1979. A series of radio broadcasts from Gairy's new home in San Diego, California, calling for a counter coup, prompted the Bishop government to ask for security assistance from the U.S. Although the Carter administration refused Bishop's request for bilateral assistance, it sent Frank Ortiz, the Ambassador to the Eastern Caribbean, to meet with Prime Minister Bishop. Ortiz warned Bishop that the U.S. would, "view with displeasure any tendency on the part of Grenada to develop closer ties with Cuba." The ambassador added that talk of "mercenary invasions" would harm Grenada's tourist industry and offered \$5000 from his discretionary fund to aid in rebuilding the island.

When the Bishop government formalized relations with Cuba, the outraged Carter administration considered Grenada to be a threat to U.S. interests and began to act accordingly. A number of measures, including covert operations against Grenada, were discussed. The National Security Council (NSC) formulated a plan to initiate a blockade against the country. After reviewing the options, the Carter administration rejected the NSC plan, but it adopted other measures designed to harass Grenada. The State Department refused to accept the credentials of the Grenadian Ambassador designate. Under pressure from the U.S., the Windward Islands Banana Growers Association excluded Grenada from a U.S. grant for the rehabilitation of hurricane-damaged banana trees. USAID attempted to block food damage assistance for Grenada from the OAS Emergency Fund. Charging that Grenada had not fulfilled legal requirements for extradition, the U.S. refused to return Gairy to the island. Under the advice of State Department officials, some travel agencies began to discourage their clients from visiting Grenada. In addition, a massive media campaign to discredit Bishop and the PRG began in which newspapers and magazines decryd "The Castroization of Grenada."

The Reagan administration merely increased the intensity of attacks against Grenada begun by its predecessor. In March, 1981 the U.S. director on the Board of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) successfully opposed Grenada's application for \$6.3 million of IMF Special Drawings Rights to be used for capital improvements. Grenada was refused a \$3 million loan from the International Development Association (IDA) when the U.S. used its influence within the World Bank to prevent it from endorsing Grenada's public investment program.

Arguing that the proposed Grenadian international airport would accommodate Cuban military aircraft and would be used as a forward base to disrupt the U.S. supply routes in the Eastern Caribbean, the Reagan administration tried to dissuade both attendance and pledges at a European Economic Community (EEC) cofinancing conference on the airport. The administration tried to convince EEC members that the airport's nine thousand foot runway would be longer than necessary to service tourist and import/export traffic.

Despite arguments that Guadeloupe, Barbados, and St. Lucia have airports with longer runways, the Reagan administration continued to rail against it. When the EEC voted to honor Grenada's request, the U.S. began a vicious propaganda campaign aimed at discrediting the country. Transferring the attack from print to film, the American Security Council Foundation released "Attack on the Americas," depicting Grenada as a Soviet stronghold in January 1981. A five-part CBS television series released in May, "The Prisoner and the Police State," alleged that Grenada is a police state in which people are afraid to speak and prisoners are tortured.

In June, 1982 the U.S. offered \$4 million to the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) on the condition that no money go to Grenada. And like its predecessor, the Reagan administration refused to extradite Gairy, failed to respond to the appointment of a new Grenadian Ambassador designate, instructed the new U.S. Ambassador to the Eastern Caribbean to exclude Grenada from his charge, attacked the regime in numerous public statements both here and abroad, refused to acknowledge Grenadian attempts to normalize relations, and excluded Grenada from participation in the Caribbean Basin Initiative (CBI).

Moreover, the CIA once again developed plans for the economic destabilization of Grenada, which would have been implemented if the Senate Intelligence Committee had not opposed them. The proposed operation was designed to damage the Grenadian economy to a degree sufficient to threaten the viability of the Bishop government. Also proposed was aid to opposition groups both inside and outside the country.

The Reagan administration alleges that its attacks on Grenada are justified because of human rights violations and the absence of democratic processes. "No elections, no exchange of ambassadors, and no aid," they argue. Of course, this same administration increased aid to the Guatemalan military regime—which has murdered thousands of its people—and proposed "constructive engagement" with South Africa—which denies all forms of political and human rights to its black majority.

What the U.S. is concerned principally with is Grenada's relationship with Cuba. The airport has been made such an issue because Cuba has assisted in its construction. If the Reagan administration expects to force Grenada to change its alliances by bullying and ostracizing the country, then it will fail. The Grenadians consistently have sought to normalize relations with the U.S. It is time Washington agreed. □



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