

# The Development of 'Revolutionary Consciousness' in Maurice Bishop's Grenada.

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## **Declaration**

The body of this piece, inclusive of footnotes, totals **11,995 words** exactly.

As set out in the Student Handbook and clarified by K Hughes (14 Sept 07) this word count excludes the bibliography, title and contents pages, but includes footnotes.

## 2.1 Abstract: The Context of Revolution

*"It is no longer possible to hold on to the self righteous conceit that it [revolution] 'could never happen here'"<sup>1</sup>*

For Grenada and its Grenadines, a 'speck upon the world map' in the Windward sweep of the Caribbean basin, revolution was not only possible, but entirely with precedent. Partially as a consequence of a colonial past, Grenada's insurrectionary history included Fendon's slave uprisings in 1795, the striking and 'red skies' house burnings under Gairy's labour movement in 1950-1, the crippling island-wide strikes prior to 1974 independence, and Maurice Bishop's 'People's Revolution', spanning both its armed, effectively bloodless coup on March 13th, 1979, and its bloody end from internal crisis on October 19th, 1984.

The eventful premiership of Sir Eric Gairy catalyzed Grenada's most recent revolution. Gairy, a messianic black leader from the working classes, first came to power during the labour union movement in the 1950s and, after a period of political strife, secured almost autocratic power from the late 60s onwards. Such democratic perversion was partially due to Grenada's underdeveloped parliamentary system in the Westminster style. In his later years, Gairy grew increasingly eccentric, and, whilst overseas in 1979 presenting to the UN upon the topic of UFOs, was deposed from power by the armed coup instigated by the New Jewel Movement [NJM]. Bishop, the original leader of the NJM and aged 35 that year, was a charismatic leader and an internationalist intellectual, with a manner and personality that secured his position as leader of the People's Revolutionary Government [PRG].

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<sup>1</sup> GK Lewis, *Jewel Despoiled*, 20.

The programmes of social and political change initiated beneath the PRG were numerous and wide-ranging. Fundamentally, the PRG eschewed parliamentary democracy, instead establishing methods of 'popular participation' – of mass meetings and 'zonal councils'. Considerable development occurred in the areas of education and health; despite retrogressive movement in the field of human rights. Primarily due to internal conflict, the revolution collapsed four years later providing the context for US invasion and intervention to extinguish 'the Marxist virus'.

## 2.2 Revolutionary Consciousness: A Definition

*"The terminology of the Revolution, words like mobilisation, liberation, vigilance, destabilisation, consciousness... are [now] part of the active vocabulary of Grenadians."*<sup>2</sup>

The sudden inclusion of new words and terminologies in everyday language highlights to us the importance of emerging concepts in society. The concept of 'consciousness' peppers the public speeches of Bishop, leaving no doubt as to the relevancy of this new term in revolutionary Grenadian society. To understand its significance, it is important to understand its Grenadian usage, and latterly its connotations in a broader academic context.

A good starting point in defining 'consciousness' may be S R Cudjoe's words relating to Trinidad and Tobago (useful despite relating more strictly to class). "Consciousness," he writes, "means awareness."<sup>3</sup> To develop, in the Grenadian usage, 'raising consciousness' is the process closely associated with the noun. In one speech, Bishop urges intellectual and cultural workers to "forge links – direct links – with the Caribbean masses, and help them raise their

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<sup>2</sup> Searle, *Words Unchained*, 117.

<sup>3</sup> Cudjoe, *Just and Moral Society*, 48.

consciousness so that [they will not be] misled by the lies of... imperialism."<sup>4</sup> The lexical link between 'consciousness' and 'awareness' is implicit, both taking the verb 'to raise'. 'Raising consciousness' is also framed as one objective of the revolution.

Bishop's reference to 'the masses' also emphasizes that 'consciousness' is, to quote another speech, expressed upon "the collective level."<sup>5</sup> The Centre for Popular Education [CPE] programme was, in the words of Bishop, to define "national consciousness"<sup>6</sup>. Further from this, when Grenadians use the phrase, it is almost universally expressed as 'raise we consciousness' (British pronoun usage: 'our') to signify a collective state.

Consciousness, we understand, does not relate to the isolated individual, and this point is explored further by Cudjoe, who writes "consciousness implies an awareness that the social behaviour of an individual is the direct result of the manner in which the state is organised and the values the state promulgates through its collective behaviour."<sup>7</sup> Consciousness is therefore reflexive; with the action and intent of the individual becoming inseparable from the action and intent of the state. For masses to be conscious, therefore, their interaction with the state structure will inevitably change. Resultantly, consciousness implies the transcendence of individualism into collectivism, and an understanding of mass interest (likely along class boundaries) before those of the individual.

We may understand the nature of consciousness. But what does 'consciousness' consist of?

Wagner speaks dismissively of Grenada, arguing, "raising local consciousness [was] the buzz

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<sup>4</sup> Bishop, *Nobody's Backyard*, 89.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>7</sup> Cudjoe, *Just and Moral Society*, 49.

term for politicizing it.”<sup>8</sup> By implication, of course, ‘consciousness’ is a political term: the ‘false consciousness’ spoken of by Lenin stands as a considerable barrier in the development of mass uprising to secure political change along the lines of class interest. Indeed, revolutionary consciousness, remarked Guevara, was more important than production in “accelerat[ing] the transfer to communism.”<sup>9</sup> Speaking of the Grenadian context, G K Lewis notes “a giant leap forward to full-blown socialism, not to mention communism, would have been at once romantic and impractical.”<sup>10</sup> Avoiding a thorny debate of the ultimate goals of the PRG, revolutionary consciousness is posited as a fundamental tool in radical societal transformation: preparing the collective mindset for radical social change.

Cuba represents the model state within the construction of revolutionary consciousness, with its aim most succinctly expressed by Castro in the need “to arm people’s minds.”<sup>11</sup> The detritus of colonialism and capitalistic society dogs the minds of those subjugated – indeed, the ideologies of the “economically dominant classes...constitute one of the most powerful forces for revolution to contend.”<sup>12</sup> Castro in addition cited ‘revolutionary consciousness’ as “not the question of indoctrination... but teaching people to analyse, to think.”<sup>13</sup> Bishop’s earlier quotations clearly illustrate his viewpoint in accordance. Indeed, in a manner similar to Guevara, Bishop spoke of the creation of a “New Caribbean man”<sup>14</sup>, free of the colonial antecedents of Grenadian history.

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<sup>8</sup> Wagner, *Red Calypso*, 81.

<sup>9</sup> Guevara, *Guevara – A New Society*, 46.

<sup>10</sup> GK Lewis, *Jewel Despoiled*, 29.

<sup>11</sup> Medin, *Cuba: Revolutionary Consciousness*, 13.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>14</sup> Bishop, *Nobody’s Backyard*, 175.

For clarity, I therefore define the methodologies of creating ‘revolutionary consciousness’ to be **the development, by the state, of a mass ideology supportive of radical political development, or a state-instigated political or ideological development causative of a mass-based cultural shift in understanding.** As a second close consideration, references within this paper to ‘revolution’ refer to the movement in its broadest sense – as a mass political upheaval, as relevant to Gairyism as to the NJM.

The significance of revolutionary consciousness in driving a societal overhaul in Grenada cannot be overestimated. The rich heritage of Jose Martí prepared the Cuban masses for dramatic political activity. Grenada’s revolutionary history, comparatively, provided a weak base for such overhaul. Despite this, Meeks writes “community mobilisation and self help projects...had roots in the traditional culture.”<sup>15</sup> The collectivism at the heart of Grenadian revolutionary consciousness was nothing new. It just needed to be awakened.

## **2.3 Notes on sources, method and abbreviations**

*“A popular theme of the revolution in Grenada was that more had been achieved in the four years under the PRG than in the previous 400. The same might be said for writers and publishers.”<sup>16</sup>*

There is a glut of secondary literature written upon certain facets of the Grenadian revolution. Most notably, a vast amount of work concerns the Marxist/Leninist orientation of the PRG; and a second large body of study seeks to evaluate the reasons for the revolution’s untimely collapse and subsequent US intervention. A good deal of such work (particularly that of Searle, the PRG’s Minister for Education) is extremely polemical, and evident care is needed in

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<sup>15</sup> Meeks, *Caribbean Revolutions*, 158.

<sup>16</sup> Sutton, *Grenadian Calloo*, 134.



extracting reliable data. Additionally, the lack of coherent ideological direction of the Central Committee means that the exploration of such matters may result in becoming mired in mud.

A number of scholars, including Dujmovic, Sanford and Vigilante, have tended to focus attention upon the 'Grenada Documents', internal party papers seized by the US upon intervention. Readings of such documents have often been purported to illustrate that the Central Committee was choosing to pursue a 'hard left' direction towards totalitarianism, unbeknown to the Grenadian populace at large. Although it is glib to dismiss such evidence out of hand, the level of disconnect between party and state is freely recognized by revolutionary leaders in the latter years, and questions may be asked of the extent to which the writings of the Central Committee reflect political realities upon the island. For this reason, and partly due to accessibility of an unbiased collection, I have refrained from extensive reference to these sources.

Considering the viability of information and the nature of existing literature, the emphasis of this piece is to partially rethink the Grenadian experience, considering the interaction between the state and the masses, rather than the state and the socialist world order. Particular attention has been paid to primary material from Fendon – the revolution's publishing house.

The paper will examine the creation of revolutionary consciousness in Grenada, both top-down **methodologies** of state-sanctioned development, and the **incidental cultivation** of consciousness as a consequence of political and economic currents. Due to the nebulous nature of measuring success, the paper will refrain from analysis of the effectiveness of these procedures, although some incidental attention will be paid in the concluding section.

As an important aside, the titular reference to ‘Maurice Bishop’s Grenada’, rather than ‘revolutionary Grenada’, signifies the intention to consider the pre-revolutionary period of Bishop’s political involvement, in order to extricate themes and similarities avoiding the polemic and unhelpful positioning of Gairy against Bishop, as seen in other literature.

*For clarity, NJM [New Jewel Movement] refers to the revolutionary force prior to 1979, and the PRG [People’s Revolutionary Government] is used to refer to the island’s governance from March 13, 1979 onwards.*

## 3.0 Cultivating revolutionary consciousness in Grenadian society and culture

### 3.1 Education, and the role of Standard English, Creole and Patois

If the aim of 'revolutionary consciousness' is to espouse critical awareness and understanding, the education of the masses must be a functional pre-requisite of enabling articulation and engagement with politics on a national and international level. The interaction between language and education, and the link between linguistics and the affirmation of identity is a cornerstone of mass consciousness, especially where mass language has historically experienced discrimination.

A number of North American critics have derided the intellectual capacity of the Grenadian Revolution, referring to PRG leaders as "semi-literate people who give themselves airs about being revolutionary leaders"<sup>17</sup>, or patronizingly referring to Caribbean spelling in extant documents as "non-standard"<sup>18</sup>. Behind such racist condescension, however, lies some truth regarding the interaction of language and education in pre-revolutionary Grenada. The outmoded educational system of the British Empire, and its inherent prejudices towards 'non-standard dialect' stagnated further during Gairyism and facilitated a climate of linguistic discrimination and of educational underdevelopment.

Prior to the PRG, there existed only one secondary school upon the entire island, primarily for the education of boys, and only 30% of primary and 7% of secondary teachers were

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<sup>17</sup> Piper, *Grenada and Soviet/Cuban Policy*, 38.

<sup>18</sup> Dujmovic, *Window on Totalitarianism*, 2.

professionally trained<sup>19</sup>. From 1973 onwards, the Gairy government had further exacerbated the problem by declining to pay governmental fees to the University of the West Indies, meaning that very few Grenadians were eligible for scholarship<sup>20</sup>.

This financial underinvestment in the Grenadian people was matched by the intellectual underinvestment of successive governments. Prior to 1979, it was estimated that the accessibility of language was severely restricted, with a high percentage of Grenadians, between 5-7%, being functionally illiterate<sup>21</sup>. The restriction of educational opportunity past primary level, in addition to pre-existing race and class stratifications, resulted in the dialectical positioning of Standard English, and of Creole and Patois. From this, Standard English, utilized within colonial bureaucracy and by the fair-skinned elite, was perceived to have greater legitimacy than working class languages.

Referring to the school as a “fortress of colonialism”<sup>22</sup>, the PRG was vociferous in its criticism of the colonial curriculum, blaming it for “alienating” and “dehumanizing”<sup>23</sup> the West Indian child, and for instilling “an attitude of self hate”<sup>24</sup>. This criticism was shared in popular culture, with the Mighty Sparrow, a calypsonian, penning in 1963 “the tings dey teach me / should be a block headed ting ... Solomon Grundy was born on Monday / The ass in the lion’s skin.... And Dan is the man in the van.”<sup>25</sup> Merle Collins’ novel *Angel*, develops this sentiment – chronicling Angel’s youthful quest for identity, we see her able to pass exams on British history, but unable to comprehend her O Level in West Indian slavery. Collins’ emphasis is clear: that the British

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<sup>19</sup> Grauwe, *Education and Political Change*, 336.

<sup>20</sup> Jacobs and Jacobs, *Route to Revolution*, 103.

<sup>21</sup> Searle, *Words Unchained*, 48.

<sup>22</sup> Schoenhals and Melanson, *Revolution and Intervention*, 54.

<sup>23</sup> Bishop, *Bishop Speaks*, 45.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>25</sup> Singham, *Hero and Crowd*, 77.

colonial education, continuing well into Gairyism, deprived West Indian children of understanding their own histories and identity, with this malaise exacerbated by the levels of academic prejudice levelled at the Creole tongue.

Significantly, Gairy exploited linguistic juxtapositions for political gain. On 15<sup>th</sup> March 1951, a planter wrote to the island's governor, complaining of Gairy's threatening manner on Radio Grenada. Gairy had warned, "there are persons who speak bad about me, I warn them... *pingad cour*."<sup>26</sup> Derived from the French *prenez garde*, or take care, the actual significance of Gairy's words likely mattered less than the fact they were uttered in mass-utilized Patois, not understood by the plantocracy. Gairy's usage of the tongue of the masses evidently represented his solidarity with their position. However, more importantly, this tactical usage imbued Patois with counter-cultural significance, creating an impenetrable barrier to speakers of Standard English. Patois became a tool of mass empowerment, asserting collective strength from what had been viewed before as black illiteracy.

The decline in the common use of Patois into the 1970s, partially due to urbanisation and an increasingly youthful population, contrasted with the relative health of Creole well into the revolution. Interestingly however, Bishop emphasised the inter-relationship between language and unity, rejecting a mindset of 'divide and rule'. "[The colonisers] told us that those who speak English must regard those who speak Spanish and Dutch as enemies, and vice versa"<sup>27</sup>, he argued, emphasising cross-Caribbean solidarity transcending linguistic division.

From such a viewpoint, DeRiggs, a member of the Grenadian cabinet, spoke of the need to be "bi-lingual. We need Standard English as an international instrument for study, newspapers

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<sup>26</sup> Franklyn, *Bridging the Two Grenadas*, 27.

<sup>27</sup> Bishop, *Bishop Speaks*, 55.

and radio, but we would be culturally incomplete...if we couldn't understand and use our dialect."<sup>28</sup> This argument is curious, citing Creole being little more than a cultural artefact whilst repudiating Standard English as the 'official' language of media and business. Indeed, due to Bishop's emphasis upon cultural sovereignty, one might have imagined that Creole would have been portrayed as the more legitimate linguistic choice, given its Grenadian heritage and Standard English's relationship with British colonialism. However, it would appear that such linguistic decisions were formed through pragmatism: in the context of a tiny island with high net migration and partial reliance upon monetary remittances, it would be unrealistic PRG to eschew teaching English. Such compromise must be seen to be a consequence of Grenada's position in a postcolonial environment.

In revolutionary Grenada, the educational system taught Standard English and Creole in parity, and attempted to disengage itself from British colonial underdevelopment. The *Marryshow Readers*, created in 1982, were Grenadian textbooks for school children, depicting West Indian families, local food and produce, and notably attempted to question implicit societal prejudice – picturing a father caring for a baby whilst its mother looks on, as an example.<sup>29</sup> Fundamentally, the textbooks attempted to make Standard English accessible to all children by treating its construction as an extension of the Creole dialect spoken at home. Hodge, writer of the series, comments, “there are grammatical patterns in Creole that are the same as English...patterns that are unfamiliar are introduced systematically...[the books] provide teachers with a rationalised syllabus for teaching English.”<sup>30</sup> Access to Standard English was therefore democratised.

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<sup>28</sup> Searle, *Words Unchained*, 24.

<sup>29</sup> Schoenhals and Melanson, *Revolution and Intervention*, 52.

<sup>30</sup> Searle, *Words Unchained*, 82.

Such ideological advances were matched by the improved provision of educational resources and facilities. Bishop heralded the construction of a new secondary school, with equality of access for girls and boys, free education for all by 1981, and investment in overseas scholarships yielding record numbers of Grenadians studying abroad<sup>31</sup>. The PRG also institutionalised the pioneering 'day in the community' programme, where students spent time in Grenadian industry. However, disorganisation, transport problems, and a paucity of industrial activities for students meant the policy was subject to criticism and was terminated.<sup>32</sup>

The Centre for Popular Education [CPE], at the heart of the PRG's educational policies, attempted to engage Grenadians in a mindset of "permanent"<sup>33</sup> learning and educational development. The CPE 'plan' for peer-taught adult education was heralded to be the driving force for adult literacy in Grenada, and the PRG emphasised the link between educational development and mental freedom, coining the phrase, "the CPE sets you free."<sup>34</sup> The CPE was also seen to engender the critical faculties necessary for the protection of the revolution, with Bishop commenting, through the CPE, "it will be much easier for them [the masses] to understand what we mean of when we speak of destabilisation [counter-revolutionary rumour]."<sup>35</sup> The programme was resultantly paramount in the cultivation of revolutionary consciousness.

Hart, who taught at the CPE, records general progress with his adult evening classes, heralding a lesson upon women's status in society to be "a great success", whereas another class upon

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<sup>31</sup> Payne *et al.*, *Grenada: Revolution and Invasion*, 27.

<sup>32</sup> Grauwe, *Education and Political Change*, 340.

<sup>33</sup> Bishop, *Nobody's Backyard*, 61.

<sup>34</sup> Augustine, *Tongues of the New Dawn*, 61.

<sup>35</sup> Bishop, *Nobody's Backyard*, 58.

feudalism “left them cold”<sup>36</sup>. Such comments echo the calls of Bishop, who asserted that any education offered in Grenada needed to be highly relevant to the island’s economic context. Speaking of education as the grounding to prepare “[oneself] for making a contribution”<sup>37</sup>, Bishop rebuked the concept that “study must be totally unrelated to what is happening in society”<sup>38</sup> and instead called for farmers to pursue education and, equally, students to not be afraid to work in the fields. The ‘day in the community’ programme clearly needs to be seen in this context.

Resultantly, the truly revolutionary aspect of the educational policies of the PRG, in common with the Cuban model, were the attempts to redefine education as the constant occupation of the masses in a conscious society; in addition to the unique decision to democratise the use of Standard English. The tailoring of governmental educational policies to the particular agricultural context of Grenada highlighted a degree of self-awareness, and the need for relevancy when educating the island’s masses. Revolutionary consciousness was cultivated from such critical awareness; the democratisation of opportunity, and by the strengthening of community ties in the peer-taught CPE programme.

## **3.2 The Church, rumour, folklore and superstition**

Just as the antecedents of the educational system represented cultural relics of underdevelopment, the construction of a ‘new consciousness’ in revolutionary Grenada demanded the erosion of what Bishop defined as “superstition and backwardness”<sup>39</sup> in order to foster a new era of critical understanding and of a ‘scientific’ value system as glimpsed in Cuba.

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<sup>36</sup> Hart, *Setting Record Straight*, 27.

<sup>37</sup> Bishop, *Nobody’s Backyard*, 58.

<sup>38</sup> Bishop, *Bishop Speaks*, 43.

<sup>39</sup> Bishop, *Bishop Speaks*, 45.



Overtly, therefore, the PRG attempted to quell the proliferation of rumour; and more covertly, to curb the influence of the Church.

That rumour and folklore still play such an important role in Grenadian society can be attributed to the country's 'small-island' status, as physical size and population density may facilitate the dissemination of such information across close kin networks. Rumour tends to have counter-cultural significance, and can take the form of a manner of popular dissent. Identifying rumour as a method of 'destabilisation', citing the precedent of Chile where the CIA aimed to "keep the nation in a state of commotion"<sup>40</sup>, Bishop placed significant effort in quelling the spread of such ideas, sometimes with unintentional humour: in one of his early speeches, he chose to refute "the early rumour that I had been bitten by a bee, and was no longer able to see... [it] was meant to suggest Gairy's mystical and obeah qualities"<sup>41</sup>.

Not only did rumour threaten to endanger the critical consciousness sought by the PRG, but its subversive nature, ability to carry information outside of closely restricted governmental control, and its possibility to overturn established law and order in an eminently superstitious society could not be ignored. Popular stories, such as the presence of large Cuban forces, Soviet defence bases and of CIA agents engaging in combat with the People's Militia, were on occasion corroborated by the broader Caribbean press, most notoriously in *The Torchlight*<sup>42</sup>. Indeed, in a twist of terrible irony, it was the persistent rumour that Coard was planning to murder Bishop, and Bishop's subsequent validation of this unproved assertion for political survival<sup>43</sup>, that led in part to the overturn of law and order that resulted in his tragic death.

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<sup>40</sup> Bishop, *Nobody's Backyard*, 29.

<sup>41</sup> Searle, *Struggle Against Destablization*, 79.

<sup>42</sup> Thorndike, *Grenada*, 116.

<sup>43</sup> Hart, *Setting the Record Straight*, 41.

The severity of the threat of rumour to the PRG was, in part, due to Gairy's tacit support of this means of communication. The GULP had seemed positively strengthened on occasion by whispered threats - such was the state's monopoly upon violence, the rumours of a brutal assault by a policeman upon a Grenadian<sup>44</sup> strengthened Gairy's control of power. Inevitably, the threat of violence may have been more powerful than the deployment of violence itself.

As rumour had been so well integrated into Grenadian societal structure, the prevailing societal tolerance to the medium endangered the PRG's construction of a genuinely critical consciousness. In addition, the active manipulation of local superstition and religion, as utilised within Gairyism to retain hegemony, embedded irrational belief into Grenadian politics. Notably, Gairy's oratory surrounded him with epithets including "protector of the faith"<sup>45</sup>, and his curious conjunction of Christianity and obeah belief resulted in his official prayer to be used in schools, beginning "Have mercy on our PMD Eric Gairy, remove him from all dark evil and negative conditions..."<sup>46</sup>. The repetition of "save him from..." and overall structure bore considerable similarity to the Christian Lord's Prayer. Indeed, his early political meetings were preceded by both Catholic prayers and shango rituals (open air ritual using dance and exorcism)<sup>47</sup> and, infamously to Parliament in 1978, Gairy declared "he who opposes me, opposes God"<sup>48</sup>. The penetration of religion into the sphere of politics was not mirrored by the penetration of politics by religion: priests who objected to Gairy's government were frequently deported<sup>49</sup>.

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<sup>44</sup> Singham, *Hero and Crowd*, 163.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 197.

<sup>46</sup> Jacobs and Jacobs, *Route to Revolution*, 146.

<sup>47</sup> Franklyn, *Bridging Two Grenadas*, 44.

<sup>48</sup> Bishop, *Bishop Speaks*, 64.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

Gairy's attempts to gain political legitimacy by fusing hierarchical Christianity with occult belief paralleled, to some extent, policies of Duvalier in Haiti. Previously, Christianity had supported the ruling apparatus of the British Empire, and had legitimised the stratified societal structure on the island, but for the first time Gairy drew the broad-based religion of the masses into the political domain. The irrational nature of obeah belief effectively placed Gairy beyond coherent criticism and random acts of chance could be attributed to his supernatural 'powers' (when a tractor overturned clearing a landslide that unionised workers had refused to, it was quickly attributed to Gairy's mysticism<sup>50</sup>). By deeply ingraining irrational belief into the political and social spheres, Gairy created considerable obstacles for the PRG to surmount. More significantly, however, such techniques prepared mass consciousness for non-democratic revolutionary action due to this historical heritage of basing anti-democratic leadership legitimacy upon wholly intangible elements.

Interestingly, prior to 1979, the NJM granted wholesale support to free religious expression. The movement had instituted prayer sessions prior to their localised meetings and, in a remarkably ironic twist, a letter writer in the NJM youth newspaper *Fight!* during 1979 rebuked *The Torchlight* newspaper to be "shaking because of the greatest unity and developing Christian consciousness of...youths"<sup>51</sup>. However, when in power, the PRG became notably more secular. I can find no allusion to Christian doctrine within any of Bishop's published speeches, and mass-mobilization activities generally failed to include religious representation.

Dujmovic, speaking of the revolutionary period, summarises that "the Church represented to the Party [PRG] the greatest domestic threat"<sup>52</sup>. Such words stem from the belief that the

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<sup>50</sup> Singham, *Hero and Crowd*, 169.

<sup>51</sup> Editorial, *Fight!*, 11 November 1978, 5.

<sup>52</sup> Dujmovic, *Window on Totalitarianism*, 54.

religious organisation wielded social status to contend with the PRG's attempted monopoly of speech and power. Hart argues with the critical assertion that the PRG steadily attempted to curb ecclesiastical authority, positing "the churches and church societies functioned freely throughout the revolutionary period"<sup>53</sup>. However, the PRG became markedly uneasy as a result of the 1980 'Priest's Plot', a leaked letter of a religious order that asserted the need for outstanding religious activity to defeat the "Communist/Marxist"<sup>54</sup> [sic] threat. Bishop thought it important enough to devote an entire public speech repudiating the letter, and objected to priests "abandon[ing] their...perfectably acceptable role of minister of religion to become instead political activists"<sup>55</sup>. Like Gairy, Bishop showed marked reluctance of religious intrusion into governmental operation.

The PRG's attempts to separate the strands of religion and the state structure have been interpreted to be a consequence of Marxist/Leninist ideological development. Although this may have been a factor, it is indisputable that the PRG chose to cultivate a critical revolutionary consciousness that, hand in hand with the focus upon education, sought to remove what Bishop disdainfully referred to as "backwardness"<sup>56</sup> from the state. Poetry by Collins, "Not going to be meek / and let see if somebody / goin' let you / inherit the earth / becus yu know already / its yours"<sup>57</sup> is a direct repudiation of Psalm 38:11, perceived to be a tool of colonial suppression via religious doctrine. A poem like this, although hardly indicative of a mass shift in attitude, highlights the intention of the PRG's activities: to stimulate revolutionary consciousness through questioning of existing societal elements.

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<sup>53</sup> Hart, *Setting the Record Straight*, 24.

<sup>54</sup> Bishop, *Bishop Speaks*, 60

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>57</sup> Collins, *Because the Dawn Breaks!*, 23.

The movement from Gairyism to the PRG marked a notable shift from a style of personality leadership that legitimised (and was legitimised by) mass irrational belief systems, to the creation of governance that attempted to separate religion and popular superstition from the political system. This secularisation marked an attempt to engender a level of critical questioning of existing hierarchies of power and information, and hence a consciousness to support whole scale revolution.

### 3.3 Calypso and popular poetry

*“Revolutionaries will come who will sing the song of the new man in the true voice of the people.”<sup>58</sup>*

In addition to attempts to wash away vestiges of educational ‘subnormalism’ and ingrained societal superstition, the PRG expended effort in reconstructing traditional Grenadian cultural forms. The ‘outpouring of creativity’ experienced during the Grenadian Revolution doubtlessly needs to be considered in the context of Bishop’s invocation of the ‘New Caribbean Man’, and in the context of V S Naipaul’s 1962 assertion that, in colonial societies, “History is built around achievement and creation; and [so] nothing was created in the West Indies.”<sup>59</sup> The PRG’s efforts to fertilize popular involvement in calypso and oral poetry, and simultaneously to draw the art forms closer into the state structure, represent techniques to nurture a new consciousness in the minds of the masses, and to develop a creative confidence that had previously withered.

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<sup>58</sup> Guevara, *Guevara – A New Society*, 223.

<sup>59</sup> Naipaul, *Middle Passage*, 29.

Academically, calypso has been perceived as being generally inextricable from the Creole language, its alleged origins being a method of slave resistance<sup>60</sup>. Calypso's affiliation with the lower classes combined with its frequent smutty content had meant it being regarded as a 'low' art form with considerable social stigma. Middle-class aversion was neatly illustrated by Bishop, who commented, "if we were overheard singing calypsos, we were ordered to go and wash our mouths out, because they were 'devil songs'"<sup>61</sup>.

Despite its coarse reputation, calypso has traditionally espoused biting political criticism from its roots outside the political establishment. In 1970, the Mighty Scraper sang of the persistent under-development in Carriacou, "England ah want to go/send me voucher/send me passport"<sup>62</sup>, and in 1962 the Mighty Zebra satirized Gairy in his song *Squandermania*, singing "Spending money like fire/he got a piano for 3000 five/And some Grenadians can't eat enough to stay alive"<sup>63</sup>. Gairy tolerated rather than suppressed these particular words - he responded with his trademark verve, arguing that some in society simply resented the opportunity of a poor black boy to own a piano<sup>64</sup> - but the power of calypsonians to critique Grenadian culture was amply demonstrated. Calypso was a tool of counter-cultural mass expression.

This is not to say that calypso was wholly separated from mainstream society. From 1951-1979, it became increasingly institutionalized within Grenada, with successive governments permitting the presence of a roving 'calypso tent' prior to the annual festival of song. In 1981 however, the PRG's lengthening of the festival, and the change of date to August, meant that "the calypso monarch competition took the leap to become the keen, fever pitched national

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<sup>60</sup> McQuilkin and Panchoo, *Calypso: Growth of an Artform*, 34.

<sup>61</sup> Searle, Bishop, *Grenada: Education is a Must!*, 28

<sup>62</sup> Searle, *Carriacou in the Mainstream*, 8.

<sup>63</sup> Singham, *Hero and Crowd*, 276.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

event it now is”<sup>65</sup>. Indeed, likely as a consequence of Bishop’s campaign for ‘cultural sovereignty’, the PRG sought to re-invigorate the popular art-form and to draw it more closely into the Grenadian state – and the enticement of famous Caribbean calypsonians to Grenada in conjunction with tours to the Cuban Carifest, cultivated Grenadian talent in a broader Caribbean context. Notably, PRG rhetoric spoke of calypso “reasserting itself from its circumscription of smut.”<sup>66</sup>

This era of confidence in the calypso form also, crucially, represented its integration into mass politics. The PRG instigated calypso competitions in its Young Pioneers youth groups<sup>67</sup>, and as with oral poetry, calypso was frequently performed during the openings or intervals of zonal and parish mass-participation meetings. Calypso’s ‘new dawn’ derived from the PRG’s likely repudiation of its form as a “voice of the masses”, and the art form curiously developed from mass-political critique to a method of asserting political legitimacy. As an example, in 1982, the winning song in the calypso competition originated from Grenada’s sister island of Carricou; the event was heralded in a book published by Fendon as representing the closer integration of the Grenadines with Grenada by the PRG<sup>68</sup>.

In addition to the integration of the calypso form into mass politics, calypso content became politicised in a manner supportive of the status quo. The 1982 winner of the calypso competition paid conspicuous reference to social and political cohesion, with Grantis ‘The Lion’ Joseph singing, “Tell me which island in the West Indies / You could see rastas living at ease / Or rastas working with the government”<sup>69</sup>. In addition, the Flying Turkey, a popular Grenadian

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<sup>65</sup> McQuilkin and Panchoo, *Calypso: Growth of an Artform*, 20.

<sup>66</sup> Searle, *Struggle Against Destablization*, 103.

<sup>67</sup> Dujmovic, *Window on Totalitarianism*, 46.

<sup>68</sup> Searle, *Carricou in the Mainstream*, 16.

<sup>69</sup> Searle, *Carricou in the Mainstream*, 115.

calypsonian, famously sang “No, no, no, imperialism, no! / No backward reaction could stop this revolution”<sup>70</sup>, and linguistically and ideologically, the Turkey spoke of calypso working towards the “integration of the propaganda of the struggle.”<sup>71</sup> Calypso became a part of, rather than a critical foil to, state politics: Thorndike argues also that the PRG “ushered in far more overtly political messages.”<sup>72</sup>

Other art forms became more politicised under the PRG. When relations with the West Indian Church deteriorated under the so-called ‘Priests Plot’, a highly reactionary poem by DeRiggs entitled ‘Devil Priest, Evil Beast’ was published in the *Free West Indian*<sup>73</sup>. Other titles published by Fendon showcased poetry with equally explicit ideological leanings – ‘Crush Them’ within title *Beyond the Ballot Box* cites “America! / Bosom of tyrants.”<sup>74</sup>

It should not be overlooked, however, that the PRG provided unprecedented opportunities for Grenadian self-expression. Most notably, in the literary sphere, two volumes of poetry were published by Fendon to commemorate the 1981 and 1982 anniversaries of the revolution. The act of publishing was, in itself, political, but the collections represented a remarkable opportunity for Grenadian self definition: “Let us go,” writes Nanatambu Stuart, “With our pens of piercing progressive / Poetic persuit / To write our own history.”<sup>75</sup> Ross’ *Stones Throw* highlights contemporary awareness of Grenada in the fuller Latin American context, and the destruction and subsequent socialist reconstruction of those in the path of United States intervention:

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<sup>70</sup> Searle, *Words Unchained*, 213.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 222.

<sup>72</sup> Thorndike, *Grenada*, 112.

<sup>73</sup> Sanford and Vigilante, *Grenada: Untold Story*, 128.

<sup>74</sup> Bain, *Beyond the Ballot Box*, 74.

<sup>75</sup> Nantambu, *Tongues of the New Dawn*, 4.



Fling me hard, sah  
Like I's stone...  
Haiti squirms like a worm  
Under the hell a' de monster  
Chile still eating she children  
Puerto Rico still pukin from spikes in she guts  
Trinidad still starving she people on oil  
Make me break an' burn  
And when I done  
Use me, dis stone, to build!<sup>76</sup>

Such pieces were interspersed with simpler poetry, utilising the slogans of mass mobilisation as the basis for the poetical work ("CPE for you and me / CPE will surely beat back illiteracy"<sup>77</sup>), or represent examples of the percolation of didactic messages into consciousness ("To get manure / It now quite easy / Since the PRG has provided subsidy"<sup>78</sup>). Somewhat self reflexively, poems were even written about the development of revolutionary consciousness: "Our consciousness is every moment being raised / for our zeal and enthusiasm since being praised."<sup>79</sup>

The true extent of popular cultural acclimatisation to revolutionary consciousness is difficult to gauge from a manuscript sanctioned by governmental publishing, evidently, but the process of dissemination of mass creative voices marked an unprecedented opportunity for popular expression in Grenada. The efforts also had political significance. The PRG's 1982 negotiation of an agreement with Cuba to assist in the construction of a "casa de cultura" marked the

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<sup>76</sup> Ross, *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>77</sup> Augustine, *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>78</sup> Abdulwali, *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>79</sup> Calder, *Ibid.*, 23.

relevancy of the Cuban experience to the Grenadian effort, and the importance of cultural construction in revolutionary wellbeing.<sup>80</sup>

If one were to argue from the viewpoint of the PRG as an emerging totalitarian power, the integration of poetry and calypso into the structure of the state provided the government with the opportunity to manufacture a polyphony of voices of the masses that may have distracted from (or acted to legitimize) governmental monopoly of speech within Grenada – and the PRG’s politicisation of popular culture, in addition, limited its ability to criticise governmental policy. However, such assertions would undermine the PRG’s attempts of sovereign expression upon the island, and attempts to secure the transcendence of calypso beyond existing class and racial prejudice. A ‘new man’, an “intellectual mercenary”<sup>81</sup>, was emerging in Bishop’s Grenada, from an incipient stream of revolutionary consciousness.

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<sup>80</sup> Thorndike, *Grenada*, 113.

<sup>81</sup> Bishop, *Nobody’s Backyard*, 200.

## **4.0 Cultivating revolutionary consciousness in the Grenadian political system**

### **4.1 Race and class within mass politics: the emergence of revolutionary consciousness through Labour Unionism, and its consolidation during Socialist Transformation**

In the political sphere, Gairyism laid the foundations for the development of revolutionary consciousness in Bishop's Grenada, by catalyzing social change based upon race and class division. Under Gairy, for the first time in Grenadian history, the mass black community began to gain political voice and the power to articulate needs and demands. Such political changes need to be posited in the context of the black power movement, international strains of labour unionism, and in light of colonial political developments including, in 1951, universal suffrage. However, the significance of Gairy's eccentric leadership in generating such change cannot be overlooked – as from these beginnings, revolutionary consciousness was honed by the PRG.

Slavery created deep clefs in society along the lines of race; with class divisions overlaid upon these fault lines. In 1942, prior to Gairy's 1950s uprisings, Grenada's peasantry, proportionally greatest in size of all the Windward Islands, was predominately black and constituted 78.2% of the island's population, whereas a white plantocracy made up 0.9%<sup>82</sup>. Despite this, land and wealth ownership remained disproportionately concentrated in the hands of the elite, as 0.2% of all farms in Grenada in 1950 utilised 49.2% of all cultivatable land<sup>83</sup>; meaning that, by the end of the 1970s, 90% of all farms were of less than five acres<sup>84</sup>.

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<sup>82</sup> Franklyn, *Bridging Two Grenadas*, 22.

<sup>83</sup> Fitzroy and Dunkerley, *Whose Freedom?*, 17.

<sup>84</sup> Cotman, *Gorrior Tree*, 12.

Between such riches and the 'slums of the empire', the fairer skinned middle-classes generally took on urban roles in trade and retail – Rupert Bishop, the father of Maurice, imported petroleum, for example. The segregation of an urban-based mixed-race middle class from black rural peasantry was further exacerbated by the general absence of a black proletariat from Grenadian society. The limited importance of manufacturing and heavy industry, employing, in as late as 1978, just 6% of the country's workforce<sup>85</sup> (with the dockworkers in St Georges being the most prominent example), meant that, prior to Gairy, most black rural workers were denied opportunities of regular work or indeed to unionise.

In literary terms, Collins' novel *Angel*, set during the rise of Gairyism, questions the racial discrimination inherent within Grenada's cultural attitudes, that sanctified the riches of the white plantocracy whilst simultaneously restraining the poor black classes. Referring to the black protagonist Angel, her father comments, "when you ever see black angel?" to which a family friend replies "she go well lonely up there [in heaven] wid all dem white people God have roun im."<sup>86</sup> With gentle humour, Collins illustrates the colonial mindset, where feelings of racial inferiority are hard-wired and reinforced by colonial hierarchies that encompass even the religious sphere.

Such broad-based societal discontent prior to 1951 fed into Gairy's exceptional rise as a charismatic leader in the Trade Union movement, from his roots as the self-proclaimed "poor black boy from the East"<sup>87</sup>. Creating a Union that was, for the first time, genuinely working class and accessible to black rural workers, the Grenada Mental and Manual Workers Union [GMMWU] enjoyed exceptional growth, amassing 5,000 members in its first six months of

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<sup>85</sup> Cotman, *Gorriion Tree*, 12.

<sup>86</sup> Collins, *Angel*, 61.

<sup>87</sup> Singham, *Hero and Crowd*, 201.

existence, and a total of 8,000 members by 1955<sup>88</sup>. During the 1951 labour strikes, the unionised penetration of the city areas by the rural workforce secured significant wage increases and marked a revelation in the ability of the black, underprivileged classes to articulate collective voice outside of a colonial 'democracy', where functions in government tended to be fulfilled by the colonial elite. Gairy's rhetoric during strike action was strongly influenced by notions of underprivileged equality, asserting that "today we must be respected, today is not like before"<sup>89</sup>, and in 1950, the West Indian newspaper proclaimed that Gairy had "awakened the eyes of the African race... to enable them to occupy a place consistent with their self respect."<sup>90</sup> Mass consciousness of the black working class was resultantly conceived under Gairyism.

From a society so divided upon lines of race and class, broad-based unionised support developed into the mass articulation of politics upon the instatement of universal suffrage – and Gairy gained significant leverage within the Grenada United Labour Party (GULP), achieving unrivalled electoral success during 1951. His latter consolidation in the 1970s after political strife in the mid 50s to mid 60s fundamentally marked the politicization of this emerging mass consciousness.

The manipulation of race and class stratifications was key to the maintenance of mass support. Gairy centrally reconfigured the diametric oppositions present in society, between underprivileged black and privileged white, to become one of "two classes...those who belong to the oppressors or those who belong to the movement."<sup>91</sup> Gairy resultantly became the messianic leader of a politicized, working class black mass, with existing oligarchies of power being extremely wary of such working-class unionism: "Gairyism," remarked one planter "is

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<sup>88</sup> Brizan, *Grenadian Peasantry*, 30.

<sup>89</sup> Franklyn, *Bridging Two Grenadas*, 76.

<sup>90</sup> Collins, *Grenada: A Political History*, 58.

<sup>91</sup> Franklyn, *Bridging Two Grenadas*, 15.

not a trade union, it bears all the classmarks of communism"<sup>92</sup>. It is interesting that Gairy hysterically branded the NJM movement, nearly thirty years later, to be "communists"<sup>93</sup>.

Centrally, despite Gairy's early rhetoric of broad-based societal change, his politics made no attempt to alter the economic substructure of Grenada, and thereby did little to tackle an origin of racial discrimination – the dearth of economic opportunity offered to black workers. Instead, Gairy usurped the British colonial hierarchy as the arbiter of the island's power, maintaining the structural divisions inherent in the old political order. An excellent analogy for Gairy's power-grab lies in the song "we'll never let our leader fall/because we love him best of all"<sup>94</sup>, sung by the masses at Gairy's rallies. The words were performed to the tune of "We'll never let our old flag fall", previously only sung on the annual British Empire day<sup>95</sup>. Evidently, in the everyday consciousness of Grenadians, Gairyism simply usurped the power and position of the colonisers.

Echoes of Garveyism were felt in Gairy's leadership of Grenada – Gairy's protestations for black power were based upon a separatist rather than assimilationist ethic, and centred upon racial, not cultural heritage. However, although his politics should be placed in the temporal context of the black power movement within the United States and other Caribbean islands, Gairy's leadership was without such academic heritage - his reaction to the overspill of the Trinidad and Tobago riots was one of hysteria. "I have already won black power for Grenada," he argued in his 1971 radio broadcast containing the infamous sentiment, "if your neighbours house is on fire, you wet yours"<sup>96</sup>. Admittedly, the riots contained strong counter-cultural

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<sup>92</sup> Brizan, *Grenadian Peasantry*, 36.

<sup>93</sup> Jacobs and Jacobs, *Route to Revolution*, 89.

<sup>94</sup> Singham, *Hero and Crowd*, 168.

<sup>95</sup> Collins, *Grenada: A Political History*, 109.

<sup>96</sup> Franklyn, *Bridging Two Grenadas*, 71.

currents, but Gairy's intention to "meet steel with steel"<sup>97</sup> highlighted the actual threat posed to his governance. The weakness of his ideological stance, centred on the reconfiguration of the black/white juxtaposition, meant that when challenged by protesters hoping to fundamentally alter societal substructure for mass black economic and political benefit, Gairy sought to protect himself from huge political dangers to his leadership.

Gairyism, I would argue, was responsible for seismic shifts in Grenadian culture, identity and politics, and formed a base for the development of revolutionary consciousness – that is, self awareness among the masses at the strength of their collective, unified power in securing social change for collective benefit. The weakness of the government to deliver such economic advances was a foundation upon which the PRG chose to develop and to refine this revolutionary style of social awareness.

The PRG's methodologies of cultivating such awareness were deeply different to those of Gairy. Particular attention was paid to the underlying class structure of Grenadian society, and Bishop spoke often in Marxist terms of "artificial class divisions" that he viewed as being "absurd and illogical"<sup>98</sup> and frequently emphasised the importance of creating a unified, cohesive society on the island. "The revolution is for the poor," remarked Bishop, "...for youths, women...middle classes...small and medium businessmen...this revolution has room for us all, once we are patriotic."<sup>99</sup> This dissolution of class relations for those pledging allegiance to the state represents a classic statement of Marxist intent, but also emphasises the importance of a unified society, and of the creation of a consciousness that stressed collectivism above individual interest.

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<sup>97</sup> Jacobs and Jacobs, *Route to Revolution*, 86.

<sup>98</sup> Bishop, *Bishop Speaks*, 46.

<sup>99</sup> Bishop, *Nobody's Backyard*, 36.

Comments stressing national unity, such as Bishop's assertion that Grenada was basically "homogenous"<sup>100</sup>, should not be misinterpreted as a failure to acknowledge, or an attempt to gloss over, issues of racial division. Commenting with disdain that middle class opposition to free secondary school education was on the grounds that the "Black man's son" would have to "rub shoulders" with "their nice little sons and daughters"<sup>101</sup>, Bishop's anger was directed at middle-class racism, not at white privilege – the agenda was never anti-white. To illustrate, in a 1980 interview, Bishop urged the black movement in America to determine "the closest and firmest links with the white working class movement and the white progressive movement" rather than "fighting each other."<sup>102</sup>

The PRG's efforts to develop class and racial unity in Grenada represent a coherent strain of policies striving to cultivate a collective culture distinct from the divisiveness that was emblematic of Gairyism. The PRG, however, developed such strains of revolutionary consciousness – mobilizing protest into mass demonstration, highlighting the plight of the underprivileged, and decrying the underdevelopment that was symptomatic of the colonial system. Revolutionary consciousness may have been born, in its most raw form, in Gairyite Grenada, but was it refined by Bishop from 1979 onwards.

## **4.2 Dissent, suppression, and imprisonment: Revolutionary Consciousness as a product of fear**

*"The first obligation of every revolution is to survive."*<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>101</sup> Bishop, *Bishop Speaks*, 160.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 119.

<sup>103</sup> GK Lewis, *Jewel Despoiled*, 30.



The reconstruction, or 'modernisation' of any societal structure to reflect a 'new' order, or to create a 'new' frame of self-identity, necessarily triggers opposition from existing hierarchies of power. The PRG, as a revolutionary government eschewing liberal democracy, and Gairyism, as a fundamentally anti-democratic structure in its latter years, necessarily saw expressions of anti-governmental dissent as endangering their hold upon state power. Evidently, in the absence of democratic structures, there existed no legal conduit for governmental criticism to be disseminated, and the spread of such ideas proved extremely troubling for the status quo.

For the PRG, beyond the pragmatic necessity of maintaining power, the image of internal cohesion was essential. Necessarily, of course, revolutionary consciousness is collectivism based upon mass-interest: powerful dissent or individualism fundamentally hampers its cultivation. Resultantly, the PRG strove to minimize the significance of internal dissent whilst simultaneously seeking to unify the Grenadian populace against the invocation of a powerful, external danger. Academically, it is important to contextualise such a policy, showing its rudimentary stages in Gairyite Grenada, and the PRG's refinement of such a technique.

Centrally, both Gairy and Bishop chose to position themselves as 'leaders at siege', a policy that was, in some ways, emblematic of leaders in ex-colonial polities: "nurtured in crisis, [they] mentally behave when in power although they are still in opposition<sup>104</sup>". Indeed the People's Indictment No.12 against Gairy paraphrased such a concept, stating that the governance was "Born in blood, baptized in fire, christened with bullets."<sup>105</sup> Initially pitting his unions against the threat of the plantocracy, Gairy during the 1970s became at war with the NJM and other dissent. Bishop, on the other hand, nurtured in opposition to Gairy, chose to emphasize the

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<sup>104</sup> Singham, *Hero and Crowd*, 259.

<sup>105</sup> Gosine, *Revolution: Why it Failed*, 47.

threat of violence from outside the island, implying a homogenous, united populace: his first speeches highlight the threat of an armed invasion, at first from the return of Gairy, and latterly, for the main part of the revolution, from the aggression of 'imperialism'.

Both governments' attempted suppression of internal dissent took different forms, although interesting parallels exist. Notably, both Bishop and Gairy sought to use methodologies of trivialisation in order to soften the impression upon the public imagination. During 1957, Gairy lead a steel band through the meeting of a political rival<sup>106</sup> and, when Herbert Blaize attempted to hold a political meeting three months into the revolution, "members of the NJM tried to break up the meeting by entering the crowd and jumping in a carnival-like manner"<sup>107</sup>. Both activities, whilst ostensibly conducted with some humour, highlight a streak of self-awareness at possible mass perception of governmental actions, and the need to stage-manage the relationship with the Grenadian masses.

Gairy's methods of dealing with governmental dissent were unprecedented in a Grenadian (although not Caribbean) context. Most famously, his Mongoose Gang, the Grenadian parallel to the Haitian Tonton Macoutes, were formed of 1,200<sup>108</sup> sympathisers prepared to use extra-legal force to secure political goals. In addition, Gairy's 1974 Public Order Acts restricted Grenadian civil society to use or carry any form of weaponry, with the resultant monopoly of force in the state structure limiting anti-governmental dissent. From such foundations, the PRG was cautious in deploying violence to restrict counter-revolutionary expression, but its overt militarization in other aspects of state security should undoubtedly be seen in the context of such origins.

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<sup>106</sup> DaBreo, *Grenadian Revolution*, 39.

<sup>107</sup> Lewis, *Alister Hughes: Life of*, 14.

<sup>108</sup> DaBreo, *Prostitution of a Democracy*, 20.

When dealing with counter-revolutionary expression, the PRG chose to embark in an ideological battle. Fundamentally, all dissent, in the terms of the revolution, became 'destabilisation' – a value judgement implying a conscious attempt to undermine the state structure, and almost an act of wilful vandalism. The PRG also focused its efforts upon suppressing dissent, notably in the very public prohibition of the Grenadian Voice, "an independent newspaper, [published] as a symbol of freedom of expression, as a vehicle dealing with the issues of our time in a frank, free and unbiased way."<sup>109</sup> The paper was scrupulously designed to be legal to every letter of the law, amassing, as one example, 26 shareholders to ensure not one person owned more than a 4%. Indeed, of the 16 total pages of the first and only issue, four were dedicated to solely to the legality and moral significance of the work, assuring readers that "we have neither the wish nor intent to sponsor, motivate or support counter-revolution in any form"<sup>110</sup>. The PRG immediately suppressed the paper regardless of such aspersions. The closure proved that the *process* of disseminating information not authorised by the party, regardless of the *content* of these plural voices, would not be permitted. Succinctly, the PRG sought to control the points of critical awareness of the masses.

The severity with which the PRG perceived this threat was highlighted when Bishop spoke out vociferously in public against the 26 shareholders, calling them "Judases"<sup>111</sup> and "political prostitutes"<sup>112</sup>. Typically, however, Bishop chose to blame forces outside Grenadian society for the upheaval, painting the 26 as mere conduits for outside manipulation. Telling Grenadians to "do a piece of magic in your heads, you forget the names of the 26 and instead...you write one

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<sup>109</sup> Editorial, *Grenadian Voice*, June 13 1981, 3.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>111</sup> Bishop, *Bishop Speaks*, 161.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 163.

single word, you write CIA"<sup>113</sup>, the threat to the revolution was externalised, with the illusion of internal solidarity pitched against external aggression.

Government suppression extended as far as efforts to quell counterrevolutionary criticism. In an attempt to silence internal dissent, the PRG's policy of detention without trial was subject to international condemnation from parties as various as the US and Amnesty International. In the absence of verifiable data, anywhere from 70 to 3,000 were claimed to have been detained without trial; Amnesty posited that 75 to 100 prisoners were in almost constant detention during the period<sup>114</sup>. The work of Wilder, cited by Hart, identifies the by name at least 418 Grenadians detained for a minimum of 2 days by the PRG government<sup>115</sup>. There are considerable problems in cross-checking such information and the final total may be higher, but still represents a considerable total within an island of 100,000. Additionally, despite the PRG's vehement denial of the usage of torture, the Grenadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission includes statements from those who allege to have been beaten and inflicted with cigarette burns during time in jail<sup>116</sup>. As an additional issue of extraordinary state security, from 1979-83, the PRG is alleged to have interrogated 3,000 Grenadians<sup>117</sup>.

The policy of detention without trial was evidently designed to minimize dissent upon the island without resorting to the direct violence that had marked Gairyism. However, the state symbolically retained the monopoly of force and continued to use public threats to maintain order. Bishop referred to "the laws of the revolution"<sup>118</sup>, and spoke of disciplinary measures against counter-revolutionaries by the coined term, "place them under firm revolutionary

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Ferguson, *Revolution in Reverse*, 92.

<sup>115</sup> Hart, *Setting the Record Straight*, 23.

<sup>116</sup> *Grenada Truth and Reconciliation Report*, 1.xi.i.

<sup>117</sup> Manning, *African and Caribbean Politics*, 245.

<sup>118</sup> Bishop, *Bishop Speaks*, 164.

manners"<sup>119</sup>, derived from a popular song in Jamaica, *Celia Heavy Manners*. The ambiguity of the exact nature of the threat disguised the internal machinations of the PRG's disciplinary procedures, hiding counterrevolutionaries from the public eye, whilst simultaneously limiting governmental accountability. Additionally, the popular cultural origin of the words guaranteed their penetration into mass consciousness, illustrated in popular calypso such as Shortshirt's *Stand up Grenada*<sup>120</sup>. Revolutionary consciousness was resultantly cemented around the accepted, omnipresent threat of counter-revolutionary discipline – creating the curious conjunction that, despite attempting to conceal instances of internal dissent, the PRG proclaimed its counter-revolutionary might in the boldest terms. What was created was an elaborate climate of fear: of brash statements of counter-revolutionary discipline and of the conspicuous disappearance of dissidents. The intention, of course, was to manufacture a strain of revolutionary consciousness that portrayed a Grenadian population unified and supportive of the revolution, strong in the face of a minority of 'destablisers'.

To some extent, political events in Grenada did legitimate such extraordinary security measures. Most notably, the Queen's Park bombing of 1980 – a bomb planted to kill leaders of the PRG that in actuality killed two young women – represented an act of unprecedented terrorism upon Grenadian soil. Bishop inevitably blamed outside elements for the incursion, stating that "imperialism struck its most savage, its most brutal, its most cowardly blow"<sup>121</sup>, and commemorative ceremonies were held in future years, celebrating the 'hero's day'. Such events effectively mobilised public opinion upon the topic of extra-legal defensive action and undoubtedly proved to be politically expedient by emphasizing the implied threat from

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 166.

<sup>120</sup> Searle, *Words Unchained*, 183.

<sup>121</sup> Bishop, *Nobody's Backyard*, 31.

overseas. This foregrounding of fear, all in all, epitomised the PRG's techniques of cultivating revolutionary consciousness in the face of dissent.

### **4.3 Failings of Westminsterial democracy: revolutionary consciousness and mass participation as an engine of political action**

CLR James, in 1962, wrote of the "three greatest lies in West Indian society", one of which being that "in our political and social life, we practice anything but the most superficial outward shell of democracy."<sup>122</sup> In Grenada, the strength of the democratic system was shaky at best, with the granting of universal suffrage as late as 1951<sup>123</sup> resulting in limited democratic participation. From Gairy's beginnings of mass political articulation, the latter years of Gairyism eroded popular trust in the democratic system to such an extent that the PRG, picking up the reigns during a political crisis, chose to critically distance itself from partisan politics, instead defining its own 'democracy' based upon mass participatory revolutionary consciousness.

The blatant nature of electoral fraud under Gairy emphasized a chronic lack of respect for the democratic system. During the 1976 elections, *The Nation* in Barbados reported that 10,000 names of Gairy supporters had been added to the electoral role, in addition to 5,000 names of known NJM supporters that had been removed<sup>124</sup>, with the names of the dead bulking the exaggerated total. In addition, all electoral officials on polling days were government

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<sup>122</sup> CLR James, *Party Politics in the West Indies*, 140.

<sup>123</sup> Cotman, *Gorrion Tree*, 12.

<sup>124</sup> Collins, *Grenada: A Political History*, 279.

employees<sup>125</sup>. Gairy was also guilty of the suppression of democratic debate, banning loudspeakers and using the military apparatus of the state to disband prominent political meetings<sup>126</sup>.

Gairy's alleged mismanagement extended also to the economic domain. "The vocabulary of Caribbean politics," writes Jacobs, "is full of the accusation and innuendo of corruption."<sup>127</sup> Indeed, the British system of governmental patronage created hazy distinctions between legitimate economic activity and nepotism. The resultant cynicism surrounding even legitimate appointments was strengthened by verifiable examples of Gairy's financial mismanagement, the most memorable example being the 'Squandermania' episode in 1962, where considerable financial irregularities were proven to have occurred. The vociferous criticism of the NJM, along with the Grenada National Party, whose electoral manifesto read 'Good government vs Squandermania', eroded trust in the Gairy government, in addition to trust in politicians and the political system as a whole.

During the 1972 elections, the GULP secured 20,000 votes and 13 seats, in comparison to the GNP's 14,000 votes and two seats.<sup>128</sup> The inability for anti-Gairy sentiment to be expressed effectively within the constraints of the Westminsterial system served to further undermine democratic expression. From such a context, methodologies of mass-based expression were cultivated in the early 1970s. The instigation of JEWEL, and the Movement for Assemblies of the People [MAP], later merging into the New Jewel, sought to engage Grenadians within mass-based participatory politics based upon community meetings and consensus. An interview with Alister Hughes succinctly expresses the aims of the New Jewel Movement,

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<sup>125</sup> Manning, *African and Caribbean Politics*, 218.

<sup>126</sup> Hutchingson, *Bishop Speaks*, 13.

<sup>127</sup> Jacobs and Okpauluba, *Patterns of Political Corruption*, 52.

<sup>128</sup> DaBreo, *Prostitution of a Democracy*, 31.

arguing that “[it] was formed as a political party more aimed at raising consciousness with the intention of taking political power out of elections”<sup>129</sup>.

Interestingly, the NJM did grudgingly participate in Grenada’s 1976 elections in coalition with other anti-Gairy organisations, making Bishop the official ‘Leader of the Opposition’ prior to the revolution. The NJM’s criticism of the electoral system continued into this period, however, and was somewhat strengthened by Bishop’s inability to elicit coherent change. Despite this, the curious consequence of such political involvement was a strengthening of the movement towards anti-democratic revolutionary consciousness, whilst simultaneously encouraging Grenadian participation in the traditional electoral system in support of the NJM. The result, I would argue, was of cognitive dissonance in the minds of Grenadians: of an underlying electoral urge matched by the pragmatic irrelevance of contemporary elections. Such a mindset would partially explain the eventual collapse of the revolution.

During the revolutionary period, the PRG’s criticism of the Westminster system centred upon its lack of applicability to the Grenadian context. Coard argued that, in partisan politics, “the Government can only mobilise half the people [for development] with the other half being by definition completely opposed to it...[due to] political tribalism”<sup>130</sup>. Bishop attributed its failings to be that it offered too little democracy for Grenada, affording only a “five seconds in five years right to put an X”<sup>131</sup>.

In such a vein, the establishment of mass participatory councils during the revolutionary period was undoubtedly influenced by Nyrere’s system of Democratic Centralism in Tanzania. These

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<sup>129</sup> Gosine, *Revolution: Why it Failed*, 49.

<sup>130</sup> Coard, *To Construct from Morning*, 150.

<sup>131</sup> Bishop, *Nobody’s Backyard*, 188.



local assemblies, stretching upwards from Zonal Councils to Parish Councils, then to island wide Councils, enabled local voices – and local strategies for problem solving – to be articulated upwards, conveyor-belt style, to the governmental hierarchy. Other initiatives, such as Coard’s instigation of mass consultation in the 1981 and 1982 national budgets, attempted to integrate popular involvement in development. In the words of Stephen Kingstone, one of the technocrats involved, “this new consciousness of the people’s ability and power to understand [concepts and terms such as GNP and real and social wages] was a very marked feature of the budgetary process for technicians.”<sup>132</sup>

Extensive debate has surrounded the significance and importance of the mass organisations in the decision making process in Grenada. It is beyond the scope of this piece to evaluate such concerns, and indeed these may be partially superfluous: even if, as argued by Henfrew, the organisations were “a façade for centralism [and were] scarcely even democratic”<sup>133</sup>, just the existence of such assemblies galvanised a degree of revolutionary consciousness through the participation in such activity. The organisations provided Grenadians with the opportunity to interact with a tangible element of the revolution, in addition to a platform for the articulation of current revolutionary successes and notable developments. Such organisations were the most obvious, and indeed, most widely used, mechanism for the dissemination of revolutionary consciousness.

The organisations, initially at least, were unparalleled in reaching out to historically marginalised groups and integrating these into a unified structure. As an example, under Gairy, the PRG had been vocal with regard to the “sexploitation”<sup>134</sup> of women, and the

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<sup>132</sup> *Construct from Morning*, 84.

<sup>133</sup> Henfrew, *Between Populism and Leninism*, 31.

<sup>134</sup> Manning, *African and Caribbean Politics*, 238.

establishment of the National Women's Organisation emphasised the value and the role of women, both in the home and in governmental structures, pressing for equality in wage and respect. The society enjoyed exceptional participation, amassing more than 7,000 members across 170 local branches<sup>135</sup>.

In addition, the Grenadian youth contingent represented a particularly important constituency, partially due to their disproportionate demographic weighting – under 15s alone made up 25.1% of the island's total population in 1981<sup>136</sup>. Significantly, beneath the PRG, the National Youth Organisation numbered more than 9,000 members in 100 local branches at its point of highest penetration during the revolution<sup>137</sup>.

The attempted inclusiveness of the PRG even extended outside of the logistics of mass organisations, to the relatively small community of Rastafarians, whose interests had historically been marginalised during all previous Grenadian governments. This courtship, however, was brief and not wholly successful: the strong countercultural strain of Rastafarianism combined ultra-left elements in its Grenadian community, and the subsequent implication of the Budhalls in the Queens Park bombing, marked the PRG's eventual retreat from mainstream Rastafarian inclusion towards the close of 1981.

Over time, however, engagement with these national organisations declined, with the period from 1982 marking a particular slump<sup>138</sup>. The cause and effect is unclear – if the PRG stopped listening or if the masses grew bored of participating – but the collapse of the revolution has, by historians including Meeks and Lewis, been attributed to be due to its weakening links with the

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<sup>135</sup> Hart, *Nobody's Backyard*, xv [introduction].

<sup>136</sup> Thorndike, *Grenada*, xx [introduction].

<sup>137</sup> Hart, *Bishop Speaks*, xv [introduction].

<sup>138</sup> Hart, *Setting the Record Straight*, 31.

masses. Revolutionary consciousness may have been cultivated but, evidently, continual work was required to ensure continued participation.

Ironically, should the PRG have held and participated in elections during its earlier years, levels of support could likely have guaranteed electoral success, and legitimacy, in the eyes of international critics – and indeed Bishop did, in early speeches, promise the opportunity of elections. Bishop’s later rhetoric suggested, however, a subsequent about-turn. To hold truly democratic elections opens up society to a cacophony of oppositional voices; and, as illustrated by the experience in Jamaica, the US government was quick to finance oppositional parties more disposed to its world-view, in addition to using media – in this instance, *The Gleaner* – to spread destabilizing and destructive messages legitimately allowed in a democratic society. Hart stoutly asserts that it took 15 years for North American revolutionaries to set up constitutional government from the first revolutionary murmur<sup>139</sup>. The politicization of the masses and courting what the PRG purported to be ‘mass approval’ was a less risky route in touting for public legitimacy without endangering revolutionary wellbeing. However, the significance of democracy in the popular mindset cannot be overstated: in 1984, 70.1% of polled Grenadians had an unfavourable attitude to the PRG’s refusal to hold elections<sup>140</sup>.

In the absence of electoral choice, the language of democracy was rhetorically overlaid upon the expression of the revolution – sometimes, it feels, for the benefit of external observers. Bishop, in more Marxist moments, spoke on numerous occasions of “the dialectic of democratic participation that is sweeping through our villages and workplaces”<sup>141</sup>, and of the “people’s

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>140</sup> *Political Change and Political Opinion*, 28.

<sup>141</sup> Bishop, *Nobody’s Backyard*, 81.

participation as the guarantee of democratic development”<sup>142</sup>. In material published by Fendon, the act of revolution itself is seen to be an expression of democracy, arguing that, on March 13, 1979, “people were prepared to use their own blood to make an X”<sup>143</sup>. In addition, the PRG’s linguistic gymnastics attempted to imbue the revolutionary movement with a greater element of people’s participation than may have been factually accurate: the ‘people’s uprising’ was, of course, fought only by the vanguard NJM. What may be seen, therefore, is that the PRG attempted to render mass participation as a legitimate democratic structure in lieu of Western liberal democracy.

If one were to argue from the viewpoint that the PRG represented an emerging totalitarian power, such attempts to encourage the participation of various groups into governmental activity could be perceived as a measure to renegotiate all social relationships to be between the individual and the state. Such a statement, however, is likely overambitious. Jay Mandel defined, perhaps more accurately, the PRG’s model to be one of “paternalistic socialism”<sup>144</sup>: of a vanguard party coordinating methodologies of mass participation to elicit appropriate social care. Nonetheless, the interaction between individual and state changed dramatically beneath the PRG, and methodologies of mass participation, cultivated via revolutionary consciousness, became paramount within a new state structure.

## **4.4 National sovereignty and international solidarity (thematic conclusion)**

*Patria o muerte!*<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> Bishop, *Nobody’s Backyard*, 108.

<sup>143</sup> Bain, *Beyond Ballot Box*, 54.

<sup>144</sup> Mandel, *Big Revolution, Small Country*, 54.

<sup>145</sup> Guevara, *Guevara – A New Society*, 227.

“We are not in anybody’s backyard and we are definitely not for sale”<sup>146</sup> is undoubtedly the most memorable sentiment of any of Maurice Bishop’s speeches. His strident tone, however, disguised the inherently problematic issue of national sovereignty in the Caribbean. Historic border disputes between Haiti and the DR, the relationship of the Francophone DOMs with the mother-country, the economic ties of Puerto Rico with the US, and even US presence in Guantanamo, Cuba, represent the continual difficulties of Caribbean claims to effective sovereignty. The claims of Bishop, and to some extent Gairy, to reassert Grenada’s position free from the economic, cultural or political imperialism of the US or Europe represented a principled stand upon a logistically problematic topic.

Revolutionary consciousness inevitably demands the sovereign right to territory.

Fundamentally, the literal colonisation of one’s motherland is echoed with the figurative ‘colonialism of the mind’: British colonialism, therefore, cultivated the highly erosive state of undermining Grenadian self-confidence. Collins’ poetry describes such internalized shame, where she speaks of “no more hidin’ you passport”<sup>147</sup>. Claims for national sovereignty, resultantly, represent claims for personal and intellectual liberty. The PRG’s aforementioned attempts to re-establish Grenadian art form, and its democratisation of Standard English, marked coherent attempts to nurture confidence in Grenadian expression, and to create the conscious, ‘New Caribbean Man’.

In addition to cultural significance, the right to sovereignty has obvious political implications in the cultivation of revolutionary consciousness. Governments that can assert the right to their territory prove their strength and legitimacy in the eyes of the masses. In addition, in order to

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<sup>146</sup> Bishop, *Nobody’s Backyard*, 13.

<sup>147</sup> Collins, *Because the Dawn Breaks!*, 23.

promulgate ideas of a united populace, leaders necessarily require territory free from penetration of outside forces. Within this context, it is more straightforward to evaluate why a miniature nation located barely 850km from the US chose to aggressively pursue policies preparing itself for armed resistance to invasion. Ironically the build-up of arms for the objective of self-defence was latterly used by the US as a pretext to deploy force - admittedly as such weaponry originated from the Soviet Union. The 'catch 22 situation' that evidently unfolded meant that the continual, blatant aggression of the US in operations such as 'Ocean Venutre '81', in conjunction with the overt militarization of Grenada, created a small island microcosm of Cold War paranoia and arms build-up. The right to use force and to arm oneself became a question of sovereignty for Grenada, and military strength, in the spirit of the Cold War, took on ideological significance, becoming a performative function designed to bolster nationalistic feeling and to mould a defiant revolutionary consciousness. With terrible irony, of course, the product of this excessive militarism, of "heavily armed young men mouthing slogans and ill-digested Marxist dogma"<sup>148</sup>, was the armed and violent culmination of the revolution, and the tragic death of Bishop.

Fundamentally, the PRG's calls for nationalistic sovereignty should not be mistaken to be isolationist or divisive. Using nationalism as a method of self-legitimation, rather than as a ideology of separatist self interest, the PRG embraced a conjunction between the black power movement and third worldist belief, seeking to re-establish links with the Caribbean's African heritage in addition to securing ties with developing nations, including Nicaragua, Zimbabwe, and Tanzania. Additional attempts to engender pan-Caribbean solidarity feature heavily within the rhetoric of Bishop, although the reality of the situation was of overt distrust or indifference from surrounding islands. Such attempts to build links across countries represent the evident

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<sup>148</sup> Thorndike, *Grenada Politics, Economics and Society*, 182.

construction of revolutionary consciousness: a critical understanding of the universality of revolutionary struggle through solidarity with similar nations.

Bishop memorably summarised the significance of sovereignty in the developmental process, arguing that, “if we think in terms of catching a plane or a boat out of it [Grenada], then we can never be developed”<sup>149</sup>. In a context quite peculiar to the Caribbean, the paucity of resources on a small island – and the limited supply of skilled manpower – represented the need for a form of revolutionary consciousness, unifying the masses in collective struggle for sustainable development diverging from economic dependency. With self-interest alone, the PRG argued, Grenada could not be developed.

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<sup>149</sup> Bishop, *Bishop Speaks*, 51.

## 5.0 Conclusion

As an incidental aside at the close of this paper, to what degree was the PRG successful in cultivating revolutionary consciousness? To measure something of such intangibility is, of course, problematic, but somewhat amusingly, in relation to the state of “political consciousness” of unionised workers in July 1983, an internal report grades the progression: “on a scale of 0 to 10, is as about a 2.0. This represents an increase during the period under review of about 0.65...”<sup>150</sup>. More dispiritingly, and more humorously, it was reported of the obligatory workers’ education sessions in the Trade Union movement, “the ideological development...has not shown any improvement... a lot of people fall asleep”<sup>151</sup>.

Aside from such humour, if one were to argue from a position of pragmatism, if the PRG had been wholly successful in its creation of a burgeoning form of consciousness, it may have protected the revolution from whole scale collapse. Such an assertion however, is broad brush political observation and ignores the complexities of cultural sovereignty. GK Lewis, in his seminal work on the Grenadian Revolution, writes, “the major achievements of the revolution, apart from its social experiments, were two.”<sup>152</sup> The first of such achievements was in external affairs, and constituted the “challenging of the assumption” of Western hegemony in the Caribbean. The second, and most lasting construction, was the effective “mobiliz[ation] [of] its people in the task of national reconstruction”<sup>153</sup>.

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<sup>150</sup> Dujmovic, *Window on Totalitarianism*, 51.

<sup>151</sup> Thorndike, *Grenada*, 92.

<sup>152</sup> GK Lewis, *Jewel Despoiled*, 32.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.



The material benefits of the Grenadian Revolution, in four and a half short years, may have been marginal – although, demonstrating the fickle nature of colonial super-powers, after the US invasion, Grenada did indeed receive its airport. The role of revolutionary consciousness in challenging of the mindset of dependency, generating national pride, and in stimulating Grenadian creativity are conversely unquantifiable, but of the utmost importance. In the current political climate of unrestrained capitalism, and cultural context of insatiable materialism, one would hope that some legacy of critical consciousness remains in the Grenadian mindset.

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