

Patsy Lewis, Gary Williams & Peter Clegg (Eds.). (2015). *Grenada: Revolution and invasion*. The University of the West Indies Press, viii+268pp, ISBN: 978-976-640-555-7 (print), 978-976-640-564-9 (kindle), 978-976-640-573-1 (ePub). US\$38.00.

This edited volume is described as consisting of articles that “originally appeared in special issues of *Social and Economic Studies*, published in the Caribbean, and *Round Table: The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs*, published in the United Kingdom.” (p. 6). To that end, this book provides a rich compendium of previously published work by compiling an all-in-one publication that would permit the reader the opportunity to read all about the Grenada revolution (1979-1983) and its collapse, through the differing narratives and perspectives surrounding it.

On page 26, readers are confronted with a core element of what the Grenada revolution was about. Was it a Marxist-Leninist insurrection or an anti-Gairy struggle that brought about the overthrow of Grenada’s Prime Minister Sir Eric Gairy? Merle Collins phrases it this way: “As the party strove to study Marxism-Leninism and develop in vanguard mode, one major challenge was to recognize and respect that the focus of many of its supporters was opposition to the repression of the Gairy era.” (p. 26).

The Grenada revolution was also about changing societal norms and taboos. Childbirth outside of wedlock that was frowned upon in pre-revolution Grenadian society was deemed acceptable under the People’s Revolutionary Government (PRG). In her chapter “Women in the Grenada Revolution, 1979-1983”, Nicole Phillip-Dowe shares the perspective of one of her interviewees as follows: “Mary Jane also claimed that, prior to the revolution, pregnancy outside of marriage was seen as shameful. During the revolution, young women were encouraged to have children, especially those who joined the militia and army. They were reportedly told they would produce the flowers of the revolution.” (p. 62). This is a significant quote because it speaks to the sustenance of the revolution in future years. However, the reality today is that the level of revolutionary consciousness in Grenadian society is negligible. Indeed, after the collapse of the revolution, the “flowers of the revolution” are nowhere to be seen.

The issue of freedom of speech during the revolution is ably discussed by Laurie Lambert in his chapter entitled “The revolution and its discontents”. On 13 October 1979, the PRG ordered the closure of *The Torchlight* newspaper and Prime Minister Bishop openly criticized the newspaper of printing lies about the treatment of Grenadian Rastafarians and of having imperialist interests and ignoring the voices of the Grenadian masses. According to Lambert: “Despite the PRG’s statements about working with the *Torchlight* editors, the newspaper was never published again.” (p. 94). This was a modern-day version of cancel culture and the intolerance of another viewpoint was a weakness in the revolution that did not set it apart from the excesses of the Prime Minister they overthrew: Eric Gairy.

The involvement of Cuba in a relationship with the revolution is adequately discussed throughout the book, however, in the chapter by Gary Williams there is some context given as to how the relationship with Cuba was given energy to materialize. There

had been negotiations between the British Government and the PRG in the early days of the revolution about the sale of two armoured cars (Ferrets) to the PRG. Williams carefully dissects the indecision of the British Government to sell these armoured cars to the PRG that ranged along a continuum from fearing a Gairy counter-coup, on one hand, to allowing the UK to retain some influence with the PRG alongside Cuba, on the other. In the end, the licences to sell the Ferrets were not granted. Williams sums up the effect this way: “Ultimately, the delay and refusal of a licence gave Bishop an excellent opportunity to publicly criticize UK policy and justify his turn to Cuba for military assistance.” (p. 106).

The chapter by Richard Hart provides a diary for the collapse of the revolution from one who was an insider, as the attorney general of the PRG. The obvious conflict of emotions is captured in his diary entries surrounding the collapse of the revolution and his own departure from Grenada with the compliments of the United States armed forces. His most poignant comment comes in the diary entry for 27 October 1983 in which he says: “I think things would have been very different if the people had not been stunned and divided by the death of Maurice. There would have been thousands more, determined to resist.” (p. 115). Hart may not want to take into account that the violent death put upon Maurice Bishop and his colleagues by the Bernard Coard faction of the PRG was so unpopular that American and Caribbean forces landing on the island to restore order were not resisted, but rather welcomed.

Patsy Lewis responds to a publication by Edward Seaga, the Jamaican Prime Minister at the time of the intervention. Much is said in her chapter (as well as elsewhere in the book) about the invitation issued by the Governor General, Sir Paul Scoon, for foreign forces to occupy the island. However, in footnote 36 in her chapter, the following is stated: “There is the further legal question of whether, even if he had been the initiator of intervention, Scoon was legally authorized to do so as ceremonial head of state. In the event that he did not have the authority, the question then arises as to whom he should have made this appeal for intervention. His position as Her Majesty’s representative would suggest that his appeal should have been made to the British government.” (p. 147). This viewpoint is challenged on the grounds that the Governor General was the representative of Her Majesty in her capacity as Queen of Grenada and so 10 Downing Street had no jurisdiction in this matter.

The constitutional nicety of this situation has eluded the awareness of other commentators, who have not quite understood the constitutional monarchy concept throughout the Commonwealth, of which Grenada is a member. As Governor General, Scoon held reserve powers that only he could have exercised under the circumstances of having no Ministers to advise him.

This discussion also leads to the other narrative about the lack of awareness of the British Government over the intentions of the Reagan administration and its interventionist decisions. Sir Shridath Ramphal, in his chapter, speaks about UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher’s annoyance at Reagan’s decision on Grenada and not informing her. Ramphal’s view on the Reagan-Thatcher schism over Grenada was overtaken on 8 November 2014 when previously unheard tapes of some of Reagan’s conversations with world leaders were

made available to the author William Doyle under a freedom of information request and he released them to the *New York Post*. Among those tapes was a conversation in which Reagan apologises to Thatcher for not telling her beforehand about the actions taken in Grenada. This is a crucial addition to the ongoing discussions and debates on this matter.

Perhaps, a telling commentary in this book comes in John Cotman's chapter entitled "Coming in from the cold". Here we are told of Havana's anger at the coup that took place on 19 October 1983. Cotman says: "Caught by surprise, Havana ordered its 762 civilian and 22 military-aid personnel to its compound at Point Salines, attempted to mobilize world opinion against the coming invasion, and showed its open contempt for the coup leaders by refusing to coordinate defences as US forces approached." (p. 244).

The Grenada revolution was over. It had committed suicide in the name of ideological purity in which the hard-line Marxist-Leninist wing led by Bernard Coard overthrew the more pragmatic and centrist revolutionaries led by Bishop. The split in the Central Committee of the New Jewel Movement infected the PRG and after 19 October 1983, the pretext for external military intervention led by the United States in furtherance of its time-worn Monroe Doctrine and the Roosevelt Corollary came to pass.

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