

POPULAR MOVEMENT TO 'MASS ORGANIZATION':
THE CASE OF THE NATIONAL WOMEN'S ORGANIZATION
OF GRENADA (NWO) 1979-1983¹

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I. Introduction

For those of us who were following with interest or actively involved in the revolutionary process which was taking place in Grenada before and after March 13th 1979, the events of October 1983 have been a shock from which some of us may never recover. For those of us who do recover or do so even partially the task before us is great. Our task is to, scientifically and compassionately analyse the events of Grenada's recent history in order that we and others after us may learn from these tragic events.

This paper was originally written as contemporary analysis of an ongoing process. It was aimed not only at documenting and critically analysing facts but also at contributing to the debates and discussions taking place within the NWO in particular and Grenada and the wider Caribbean in general at the time. Now it has become history. But as historical analysis it is not enough. To qualify as historical analysis attempts will have to be made to use information of a much more basic level, through the analysis of internal documents, correspondence and if possible oral history interviews.

Recent discussions on the 'new social movements' in various Third World countries have stressed the bases for organisation and struggle within a wide range of oppressed and exploited groups in these societies in addition to the working class. Included among these groups are the burgeoning women's movement, the urban (*barrios*) and rural community groups, the unemployed and groups of petty producers and traders, (the so-called informal sector).

The importance of these groups for political action has been receiving attention from political organisations and activists and now from scholars. A similar but different development could have been said to have characterised the New Left movements in Europe and North America in the late 1960s and early 1970s as numerous small groupings such as the civil rights movement, the peace movement and the women's movement in the USA challenged the overriding organisational legitimacy of the traditional left parties, in particular the Communist parties.

The rise and consolidation of right-wing forces internationally at the end of the 1970s once more however questioned this 'fragmentation' of the progressive political movement. One good discussion of this was *Beyond the Fragments* by Rowbotham, Wainwright and Segal (1980). This book was both a plea for the autonomy of organisation for the various groups struggling against their particular form of oppression (which might sometimes appear contradictory) as well as a call for greater unity of all such groups against the growing power and organisational cohesiveness of conservatism.

In this circuitous manner we now come to the question which is of relevance to this paper and within which may be found some clue, some starting point for the analysis of the events in Grenada - the relationship of social movements to the state. It is clear that the majority of social movements do challenge or at least seek to influence the existing state machinery. In some instances as in Grenada, such movements can come together under or within a broader revolutionary organisation or party in an attempt to surpass the existing oppressive state and work out an alternative. The question which necessarily follows this one however is whether such an attempt if successful of necessity negates the possibility for its continuation as a real social movement. In other words, how can such movements become part of a revolutionary process and yet retain their autonomy and dynamism. This is of particular importance at this time when the growing strength of right-wing forces internationally requires a much greater challenge than atomised individual movements can offer.

It is within this context that this study could be examined at this time. To the very end, putting aside for the present personal contradictions, the relationship between 'the people' and 'the party' was a major point of discussion, debate and struggle. Maybe the fact that on October 19th 1983 up to 30,000 of the Grenadian people (one-third of the population) including large numbers of women and school girls and boys took to the streets to make their contribution to the debate and struggle taking place within the party is a good starting point for another paper. But here we simply recount the past. The following analysis was written in early 1983.

II. Grenada: The general context

Grenada, Carriacou and Petit Martinique form a small Caribbean island - state comprising 133 square miles and situated in the south of the Windward Islands, 80 miles north of Trinidad and Tobago with a population of 109, 200 in 1980. It is an independent country, formerly a British colony until 1974. On March 13th, 1979, Grenada experienced a revolutionary change when its former leader 'Sir' Eric Gairy was overthrown. The economy has been primarily based on agricultural production including forestry and fishing which contributes thirty percent to the Gross Domestic Product. Its main exports in 1980 were cocoa - 40%, nutmeg - 19%, bananas - 24% and mace (a by-product of nutmeg) - 4%. The main export trading destinations are all in Western Europe with 43% going to the United Kingdom, 9% to the Netherlands, 9% to Germany and 15% to Belgium in 1980. The other major industry is Tourism. At present there are 18 hotels and 6 guest houses; in addition Grenada is regularly visited by cruise ships with short stay visitors.

The population is relatively young with 47% under 15 years of age; it is predominantly of African origin (84%) with a small percentage of Indians (3%) and still smaller numbers of Europeans and other ethnic groups. According to the 1970 Census, 33.4% of the population was employed in agriculture; 8.0% in manufacturing, 2.6% in Commerce; 16.1% in Construction and Installation; 8% in

Electricity Gas, Water and Sanitary services; 5.1% in transport, storage and communications; and 22.5% in services. In 1970 there was an official unemployment rate of 20% composed primarily of young people and women. Mass migration of Grenadians to neighbouring islands, the United Kingdom and the United States was one way in which this problem was dealt with prior to the revolution, so much so that it is estimated that an equivalent number of Grenadians as those presently on the island are to be found abroad.

For years the people of Grenada had suffered under the tyrannical rule of Gairy supported by his armed 'thugs' the mongoose gang and the 'Green Beasts'. Gairy like many post-World War II Caribbean nationalist leaders, had developed his base as a trade-unionist in this case through the formation of the Grenadian, Mental and Manual Workers Unions in 1950. His initial support therefore had been among the depressed agricultural proletariat. But their situation in March 1979 showed that they had gained little in return. Unlike the case of Nicaragua no protracted armed struggle had been waged but for years the people had been organizing and struggling to change their situation. For example in December 1970 the famous nurses strike took place where thousands of nurses and their supporters marched through St. Georges and occupied the office of the Ministry of Health. This was followed by protest demonstrations of farmers directed against the official incorporation of the banana and nutmeg co-operative associations under essentially corrupt Government control. These events took place within the framework of the 'black power' upheavals during the late 1960s and early '70s in The Caribbean.

In 1972 an organisation known as Joint Endeavor for Welfare, Education and Liberation (JEWEL) was formed in the south-east of the country comprising among its members Selwyn Strachan and Unison Whiteman, some teachers, peasants and youth.² They were engaged mainly in community activities; for example a farming cooperative and they published a newsheet called The Jewel. Six months later, that same year, another organisation was formed. This was known as The Movement for Assemblies of the People (MAP) and was based in the more urban, St. George's area; it comprised

mainly professionals, for example lawyers, Kenneth Radix and Maurice Bishop. Within six months of the latter's formation, The New Jewel Movement (NJM) was formed through a merger of the two organisations.³ From that period on the NJM provided leadership for the Grenadian people in their struggle against Gairy, gaining considerable support from among the youth (who were the main groups being harassed and terrorised by the police and secret police), in other areas of the population in all communities and to a lesser extent in the workplaces. But the tyrannical activities of Gairy and the lack of improvement in the day-to-day living conditions of the people also served to broaden the opposition to his government.

As far as the stated political programme of the NJM was concerned, the 1973 Political Manifesto outlined that a future NJM government would be based on 'peoples assemblies' including village assemblies of all adult citizens and workers' assemblies of all those who worked for a living. The village and workers' assemblies would elect a national assembly, which would serve as the government.⁴ During the struggles which ensued, various people were killed, and NJM members were beaten, arrested and jailed in 1973. A successful general strike was called in January 1974. Later that same month on the 21st of January, in an army and mongoose gang attack on a 6,000 strong demonstration Rupert Bishop, father of Maurice Bishop, was killed. This general strike preceded the granting of independence to Grenada by Britain under the leadership of the corrupt Eric Gairy, and to a large extent this was the focus of a great deal of protest activity.

In 1976 General Elections were called and the NJM participated in an alliance with the opposition Grenada National Party (GNP) and the right-wing United Peoples Party (UPP) led by Winston Whyte. After the very corrupt election the People's Alliance of these three opposition parties won six of the fifteen seats in the National Assembly. The NJM won three, the GNP two and UPP one. An analysis of the elections however (Caribbean Contact, August 1979) showed that had it not been for electoral corruption the chances of a Gairyite victory would have been extremely slim.

After this the NJM continued its work outside of parliament, assisted by the fact that sessions were seldom called. It began to organise bank workers through the Bank and General Workers Union, and to reach other workers in the Grenada, Mental and Manual Workers Union (GMMWU) and the Commercial and Industrial Workers Union (CIWU). During this entire period, police repression continued with attacks on ordinary citizens, including the rape of women and violence towards NJM activists and supporters.

The eventual seizure of power on March 13th, 1979, was the culmination of all of these developments. On Saturday March 10th word was received that Gairy had left instructions that six of the leading members were to be detained in six specially prepared dungeons. He was leaving for New York on March 12th. Later they were informed that further instructions had been left for them to be killed while he was out of the country. At that point the decision was taken to take political power. This was done when about forty-six NJM members of the incipient Peoples Revolutionary Army (PRA) attacked the Government army barracks at True Blue. The army, surprised, quickly surrendered, only one army commander being killed. The local radio station was then taken without a fight and a broadcast was made calling on the people to 'rise up against the Gairy regime'.⁵ After this top government ministers and 'henchmen' were arrested. There was general public support because of the work carried out by the NJM over the years, and the broad alienation of the local middle-classes and bourgeoisie. However, some solid Gairyite support, in particular among rural agricultural workers and the peasantry continued to exist.

III. A Socio-Economic Note on Women in Grenada

In Grenada as in all other Caribbean countries, the majority of women have come out of a tradition of labour under slavery and indentureship and of resistance to these. In particular for working class and farmer women their lifestyle reflects the independence and strength characteristic of this region. Among middle-class women, however, the absorption within the Western European feminine model of the weak, dependent housewife has been greater.

For the majority of Grenadian women a major problem has been the maintenance of their and their children's existence as independent income-earners in a society where colonial/capitalist ideology has deemed them housewives.

M.G. Smith writing on the family structure of Grenada in 1962, found that legal marriage was only one of the three main forms of domestic organisation, the others being what he and other functionalist sociologists termed consensual unions and 'visiting unions'. In addition, it was found that a household usually included brothers and sisters and their children, and/or parents and other relatives (Smith 1962:107). In other words, the nuclear family with the male breadwinner, dependent housewife and their children was not the norm. More recent sociological data are not presently available but based on personal experience, it would seem that this situation has changed little.

In 1975 the OAS-CEPCIES report noted that while female work rates in Grenada were higher than the average for the rest of the English-speaking Caribbean, unemployment rates for women were con-

Table I. Unemployment by Age Groups and Sex-Grenada 1970

	Males	Females
14-19	27.8	46.7
20-24	11.2	16.9
25-59	1.8	3.1
60+	0.6	0.6
Total Percentage	7.3	12.4

Source: OAS-CEPCIES, Report Situation, Principal Problems and Prospects For The Economic and Social Development of Grenada, 1975, p.III-28.

siderably high in all age groups except for those over 60.

These figures however still do not show the real situation. Like all existing labour force statistics they exclude a large proportion of women from the labour-force by defining them as housewives

and hence 'not in the labour force'. In 1970 therefore although the female population of working age was 27,296 the female labour force was only 11,200 a difference of 16,096 women who are not even counted as unemployed. Among men the difference is much less, only 4,216 men fall into this category.

What is interesting to note however is the fact that women continue to work outside the home even after the age of 60 at an equal rate with men in spite of the larger number of unemployed men at earlier ages. It is possible that the longer life-span of women may be a contributory factor.

Bearing this situation in mind it should not be surprising that since 1946 the number of women migrating from Grenada increased greatly. Between 1960 and 1970 close to 20,000 people emigrated, about 20% of the total 1970 population. Of this 70% were in the 15-34 age group (OAS-CEPCIES, 1975, III-26) and of this women comprised 52% (Ibid, III-12).

This question of female unemployment and female responsibility becomes even more crucial when the simple factor of sex ratios is examined. For the period 1946 to 1970, it has been found that in spite of the fact that more males were born, in the higher age groups the female population exceeded the male to a larger degree than is usual. Again the longer female life expectancy could be a factor but not for such a wide gap. At the same time the relatively even ratio of migration prevents this from being a fact (unless of course women comprised an even larger proportion of illegal migrants). The OAS-CEPCIES report suggests that the answer may lie in the predominance of males in immigration prior to 1946. If this is the case then the gap should be narrowed in the future. The fact at the present however is that even if they wished to be, there are not even enough men on whom individual women may become dependent.

As far as education was concerned, Grenada has an official literacy rate of 85%; 15% were therefore officially illiterate but the Centre for Popular Education found in April 1980 that only 7-10% of the population had no education at all (Epica, 1982:82). This group however comprised mainly rural agricultural workers, rural

women in general and 'marginalised youth' (Epica, Ibid).

Table II. Male/Female Ratios Grenada 1946, 1960, 1970

	1946	1960	1970
0-14	1,025	992	1,007
15-44	685	783	868
45+	585	643	676

Source: O.A.S. Cependies Report, p.III-13.

Functional literacy on the other hand was found to affect one-third of the population, while those who were functionally literate had been schooled in the Colonial and neo-colonial education system. One of the characteristics of this system however was that girls had almost equal access to primary and secondary schools unlike in many other parts of the world. This is true for the entire English-speaking Caribbean. In 1977/78 therefore girls comprised 48.7% of the population of primary and all-age schools. But at secondary school level girls exceeded boys during the same period. See the tables below:

Table III. Proportion of Persons Aged 14-19 Attending Schools & Sex 1970

	Both Sexes	Male	Female	% Difference
Grenada	57.4	56.6	58.2	+1.6

Table IV. Enrolment in Junior & Senior Secondary Schools 1977/78

	Male	Female	% Female
Grenada	2,745	3,405	55

Table V. Enrolment in Fifth and Sixth Forms by Country & Year
& Sex

	Fifth Form			Sixth Form		
	M	F	% Female	M	F	% Female
Grenada 1977/78	443	484	52.5	87	119	57.7

Source: Joyce Cole, 'Female Education in The Contemporary Caribbean: Major Trends and Issues'. Women in The Caribbean Conference, Barbados, 1982 pp.6-9.

But overall as is evidenced above the figures are quite low and exclude a large proportion of the population. Before the revolution all secondary schools were fee-paying, and in spite of the large proportion of girls the emphasis was still on sex stereotyped occupations and the ideology of the housewife. What is clear though is that by March 13th 1979, women did not form that 'large backward group' which could be claimed in other countries, and to a large extent the training, skills and experience of women has been used by the PRG. In 1982 for example women held positions such as ambassador to the Organisation of American States, Minister of Education, Youth and Social Affairs, Vice-Minister for Community Development; Cabinet Secretary, Permanent Secretaries in the Ministries of Health, Housing, Planning and Legal Affairs; and programme heads such as the National Co-ordinator of the CPE, Director of Tourism, Programme director of Television Free Grenada and other major government agencies.

IV. Women and The Grenadian Struggle

As was noted in the previous sections, at least two predominantly female occupational groups contributed greatly to the political struggle prior to March 13th 1979. In 1970, the famous Nurses strike in one way heralded the beginning of the era of protest and struggle against Gairyism and closer to the end the predominantly female bank workers were in the forefront of the struggle for the recognition of the Bank and General Workers Union. In

addition to these, women were extremely active at the day to day level in a number of ways. According to one source:

'As the anti-Gairy movement grew, Grenadian women began to play an active, behind-the-scenes role. This activism cut across all divisions of age and class, involving uneducated rural women as well as professionals like teachers and nurses. Women sold the New Jewel paper on street corners, conveyed messages secretly and offered their homes as meeting places and shelters for the N.J.M. On revolution day, women cooked for the soldiers of the Peoples Revolutionary Army, helped make arrests and occupied police stations until Gairy's forces surrendered.' (Epica, 1982; 97)

In addition to the general oppression which they had in common with the men, women under Gairy suffered from additional problems. One of these was the payment of lower wages for the same job especially among agricultural wage-labourers. In addition, women experienced the added burdens of their responsibility for child-care and the family, brought on by the high cost of living and what is known as 'sexual exploitation' in Grenada, 'the widespread practice of demanding sexual favours from women in exchange for scholarships or employment.' (Epica, Ibid). Moreover as noted before 70% of the women between the ages of 15 and 30 were unemployed and those employed could be fired at will, for example on becoming pregnant. The participation of women in the political struggle was extremely powerful. But then so is the case in the majority of revolutionary struggles. The Grenadian Revolution however stands out as one which from the inception recognised the contribution which women have made and could continue to make to the process of revolutionary transformation. One explanation of this development, whether some would accept this or no could be the internationalisation of the women's struggle, which on the whole has made both women and men more sensitive to the continued oppression and exploitation of women even if that is the extent of its effect. Another but not contradictory factor, could be that the significance of the contribution which women did make, gave them a degree of power which demanded commensurate respect and attention.

V. The Characterisation of the Grenadian Process

In the period since March 13th, 1979, the Peoples Revolutionary Government of Grenada (P.R.G.) began a process of revolutionary transformation. However in an interview in 1979, Bernard Coard described the process at that initial point in time as one whose primary aim was not that of building socialism, but one of 'simply trying to get the economy, which has been totally shattered by Gairy, back on its feet'.⁶ He identified the primary tasks therefore as being:

1. to get agricultural production going again;
2. to develop a fishing industry;
3. to develop a lumber industry with the limited forestry;
4. to develop tourism;
5. to develop agro-industries based on the food processing of cocoa, nutmegs, bananas, other fruits, vegetables, coconuts, sugar-cane etc.

The development of a socialist society was seen as a longterm aim. He went on to conclude on this subject by saying:

'So, fundamentally, at this time, we see our task not as one of building socialism. It is one of re-structuring and re-building the economy, of getting production going and trying to develop genuine grassroots democracy, trying to involve the people in every village and every workplace in the process of the reconstruction of the country. In that sense we are in a national democratic revolution involving the broad masses and many strata of the population' (Searle, 1979; 12)

In 1982 no definite claim was being made by the P.R.G. to be in a process of socialist transformation. At the 1st International Conference in Solidarity with Grenada in November 1981, the Minister of Finance and Deputy Prime Minister described the country as still being in the process of National Reconstruction.⁷ In other speeches given on this occasion, the Economy was described as a 'Mixed Economy' inviting the participation of local and foreign private and co-operative involvement (Radix 1981 pp. 65-66). Further to this, in the Report on the National Economy for 1981

and the Prospects for 1982 by the P.R.G., which was presented by Bernard Coard on the 29th January 1982, the economy was described in the following manner:

'As Comrades are aware, we are developing our economy on the mixed economy model. Our economy as a mixed economy will comprise the state sector, the private sector, and the co-operative sector. The dominant sector will be the state sector, which will lead the development process. In our view, this is a realistic and feasible approach, if we want to make any progress.'

(p.64)

This approach is similar to that adopted by the Nicaraguan government (Harris, 1981, 7). In both situations this has been justified by the fact that in these early stages the government is not in the position, as far as finance, technical expertise and experience is concerned, to exclude the private sector altogether. In the words of Bernard Coard:

'We adopted this approach because it is the only approach in our view that is realistic, possible and feasible within the context of our country - a small developing country starting from an extremely primitive economic base.' (Coard, 1981, 44)

The view is held that the well-entrenched private sector in Grenada is capable of serving the national interest (Jacobs, 19; 10). A similar explanation was also put forward in Nicaragua, where in January 1981, the Minister of Agricultural Development, Jaime Wheelock stated that:

'Where there is revolutionary leadership, we can also make use of the middle classes, including sectors of the bourgeoisie. Their experience in agriculture, their administrative skills in industry can strengthen the country's unity... The internal class contradictions are less important than the material gains we receive in the reconstruction of the national economy.'

(quoted in Harris, 1981; 8)

According to Harris however this strategy has turned out to be a very expensive one as the 'straight-forward self-interest' of so-called 'patriotic private enterprise' has outweighed their

national interest. Thus overall the level of production has not been as high as expected, investment has been small and there has been a greater concentration on current projects rather than on capital maintenance and improvement (Harris, Ibid).

In both instances the primacy of the State sector over the private sector is stressed. In Grenada an Investment Code was developed which aimed at underlining the role envisaged for the private and co-operative sectors. Some criticism of this approach did take place. Some saw it as an outright betrayal of the revolution, a criticism dismissed as ultra-leftist by the government. Others however, while accepting its expediency preferred to see it situated within the framework of the ultimate objectives of the revolutionary process. Political pronouncements and declarations as well as action however, have to be placed within a national and international context. In this regard, both the practice of the former prime minister Eric Gairy of confiscating private property without compensation, as well as the hostile international climate and the local anticommunist bogey, possibly influenced the adoption of such a position.

It is important also to stress that based on earlier examples the P.R.G. possibly rejected the approach of nationalisation from above. The strategy as it unfolded appeared to be one where workers were organised at the shop-floor level and prepared for eventual control when the time was ripe.

The influence of the theory of the non-capitalist path to development however cannot be discounted in the determination of these strategies and increased links with the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe also, to some extent, influenced political developments. The P.R.G. maintained most of the approaches and principles of the incipient New Jewel Movement in 1973-74. However in the day to day unfolding of the economic process, a great deal was adopted from these earlier models, for example the systems of material incentives and of special significance to this chapter the organisation of the national women's organisation.

As far as economic policy is concerned, the P.R.G. has identified

agriculture as the main pillar or 'motor' of the economy (Louison, 1981: 96, Coard, 1981: 45) based on the reality that at least 35,000 of the population depends directly or indirectly on agriculture for a living. As such, agriculture was supposed to contribute to the economy by being the supplier of food to the people, the major foreign exchange earner, the main basis for industrialisation and agro-industrial development, the main employment creator and a means of increasing internal self-reliance based on the use of land as the main natural resource. (Louison, 1981: 95-6) In addition to this Coard (1981: 45) stressed the importance of agriculture to the expansion of the tourist industry. Within this area all three sectors of the economy would participate; the private sector in one sense, as 66% of the 8,202 farmers own the land which they farm; the State sector through the Grenada Farms Corporation, Forestry Corporation and Sugar Factory Ltd., and the co-operatives for example the Grenada Nutmeg Co-operative and new ones that were developed among small farmers and the unemployed youth and women by the National Co-operative Development Agency (N.A.C.D.A.) founded in April 1980. In this last context, some idea of the ultimate objective of co-operative development was given by the Minister of Agriculture George Louison who described it as a means towards the eventual collectivisation of agriculture. (Louison, 1981: 100)

As noted earlier industrialisation was to be focussed on agriculture. According to Kenneth Radix, the strategy was to be one of import-substitution but through the utilisation of 'indigenous natural and human resources' (Radix, 1981: 64). This was one of the areas where both local and foreign private capital were to have their greatest involvement. The leading role was ascribed to the Public Sector but joint ventures as well as totally private, local and foreign investment were also to be encouraged. This was put forward as a strategy aimed at finding urgent solutions to the problems of high unemployment and under-employment, high levels of inflation and towards the diversification of the country's economic base (Radix, 1981: 65). By outlining the principles of the draft investment code, the P.R.G. presumed its capability of

controlling in particular foreign investment and accommodating it within the framework of its overall economic goals, in spite of the difficulties experienced in this area, for example in Poland. It is important to note however that as far as industrial development was concerned, most of the activities that were developed, for example the Agro-Industrial plant and the Fisheries Corporation, were state initiatives.

This attempt at an analysis of the Grenadian economy is at best incomplete. It was however included to provide a basis for the analysis of the National Womens Organisation (N.W.O.) within the socio-economic reality of post-revolutionary Grenada. The following section will begin this analysis.

The Process of National Democratisation

In partly a spontaneous and partly a planned process a system of national democracy was instituted. This was done through a system of Workers Parish* Councils which due to their large membership were eventually divided into zonal councils. Eventually also the N.W.O. began to organise Women's Parish Councils where the women's groups in a particular zone or parish would meet. At these Councils at least one member of the P.R.G. was usually present and discussions took place on draft legislation, the draft budget or other programmes, strategies for mobilisation or accountability, and question and answer sessions with heads of state corporations and government ministers.

The question of accountability was central to this process as the government ministers and or heads of government programmes had to answer the questions of the people. From time to time people in a particular parish could request in advance any official they wished to question. In the past this included the head of the Water Department, the manager of the electricity company and the Commissioner of Police (Epica, 1982: 111). In addition to the workers and women's parish councils parallel structures were established for farmers and youth. The meetings were always interspersed with cultural items - songs, poems, or skits written and performed by the people

* Parish - A regional division similar to a county.

of the area. Through these means, the people were constantly aware of and involved in the programmes of the government.

VI. The Development of The National Women's Organisation

Prior to March 13th, 1979, the precursor of the N.W.O. was the New Jewel Movement Women's Arm. This was formed in 1977 and comprised a number of small groups and their work was described thus:

'We printed pamphlets, attacking the high cost of living, and calling for equal pay for equal work. We used to do house-to-house underground, and speak to the people who were against Gairy about why change was important and how women would benefit from it' (Epica, 1982: 97)

As would be expected at this time membership was largely limited to members and supporters of the N.J.M. In the post-revolutionary period this structure was found to be inadequate as it restricted access to large numbers of women who were not directly involved in the politics of the N.J.M. However in spite of this initial situation women were extremely active in the support of the Revolution. This was noted by Bernard Coard in an interview when he stated:

'The upsurge of activity by women in Grenada is one of the most remarkable features of the revolution. Their participation and involvement at so many levels, particularly at the grassroots level of the villages is truly extraordinary. Right now, quite frankly, the men must be embarrassed because the initiative has been entirely seized by the women...' (Searle, 1975: 15).

The continuous activity of Grenadian women in both the pre- and post-revolutionary process has been a constant subject of writing and discussion on Grenada. In fact, the Free West Indian, national newspaper of Grenada, is one of the few newspapers internationally, including the socialist world, in which one can find so many articles included on the situation of women. In order to manifest its concern for the position of women in the society, two measures were taken in this direction in 1979. The first was to abolish

'sexploitation', the practice which had developed under the previous government with women having to exchange sexual favours in return for jobs and scholarships both in governmental circles and in private enterprise. Another early move was the establishment of the Grenada Women's Desk within the Ministry of Education, Youth and Social Affairs.

Almost immediately after March, in June 1979, the first National Women's Conference of Grenada was held. Its theme was 'In Search of Solutions to the Problems facing Grenadian Women'. It was attended by 76 delegates representing every parish and including Carriacou and Petit Martinique (Searle, 1979: 22). At this conference, the problems selected for study were; the high cost of living, bad working conditions for women workers, poor health facilities (especially for pregnant women), lack of water, roads and electricity, poor housing and the need for the provision of education and skill training to enable them to qualify for better jobs.

In June 1980 the N.W.O. launched a campaign to increase the participation of Grenadian women in national life. The objectives of this campaign were to: 'Organise all women; Educate all women; Build services for women; Create work for women and raise up national production' (Hodge, 1980: 15). This was to be done through house to house meetings, the establishment of community day care projects, community improvement projects which would directly benefit women, and help create work for women and the formation of co-operatives for poultry farming, handicraft work and agro-industrial production of preserves. In addition other activities related to children were identified, for example a campaign to get all children to attend school and of providing free milk to the poorest children in the communities, identified by the N.W.O. members. The area of education was also identified as one for special attention. This was begun with film shows, panel discussions, talks and cultural shows carried out in collaboration with the Centre for Popular-Education (C.P.E.).

On the 19th of June that year, at a rally in honour of two heroes - Tubal Uriah Butler and Alistair Strachan, a bomb, intended for the leaders, exploded killing three young women - 13 year old Laureen

Phillip, 23 year old Laurice Humphrey and 15 year old Bernadette Bailey. The fact that three women and young women were killed is representative of the fact that women comprised a major percentage of the participants at this political rally. Among the thirty-seven who were injured and hospitalised the majority were women (Hodge, 1980: 14). But far from intimidating them, this strengthened their militancy and defiance and in the solidarity marches which followed on June 20th hundreds more women who had never marched before including white-collar workers, middle-class housewives and schoolgirls joined the demonstration. This event served as a catalyst to the campaign of the N.W.O. outlined on June 1st. Women formed the majority of the recruits volunteering to join the People's Militia and they became even more active in the N.W.O. and other activities.

Later that same year in October 1980, the Maternity Leave Law was passed. This law was passed after the original draft produced in April had been circulated and discussed by women's groups, community groups, employer's associations, trade unions and professional groups. Based on these discussions, changes were made to the original draft. For example the draft did not include benefits for unmarried teachers and student nurses and based on public response, all sectors of women workers were included. Also in the original, women working in small businesses with less than five workers were not eligible. Based on public response, a survey was carried out which showed that the only employers who may not be able to pay these benefits were some professionals who employed domestic servants. In response to this the draft was altered so that the government would cover half of the pay for these workers (F.W.I. 11.10.80). In the case where trade union contracts existed, workers could choose those provisions which were in their favour. Under the law all women workers were eligible to two months whole pay and one month half pay. Daily paid workers were to get one/fifth of their annual salary. Employers who failed to honour these provisions faced a \$1,000 fine or 6 months in prison while employers who fired a worker faced up to \$2,000 fine or one year in prison.

This law was signalled as a major 'step forward' in 'protecting women'. Also in 1980, a law decreeing 'equal pay for equal work' was passed. This affected mainly agricultural labourers. Based on a report on these developments Grenada was elected to the executive of the Inter-American Commission of Women, of the O.A.S.

In December of that year the 2nd Annual Conference was held; at this time the organisation comprised 1,500 members and it set itself the target of 5,000 members by December 1981. It identified, based on a recent survey, the most pressing problems of women at that time to be: the need for work, day care centres (pre-primary and nursery) community improvements, and the development of agricultural co-operatives was again stressed as a means of providing employment and the strengthening of women's traditional skills.

In its recruitment campaign during the ensuing months it was stressed that the N.W.O. was for all women and not only N.J.M. women. An information brochure stated the following:

'The N.W.O. is not for some women only, it's all women. It joins young and older sisters together. Our members are road workers, nutmeg, pool workers, housewives, students, agricultural workers, unemployed sisters, teachers, nurses and domestic servants. You don't have to support any political party or any particular church. You don't have to join the militia although many N.W.O. members do. The N.W.O. is for all women who support the revolution, defend equal rights and opportunities for women and want to see Grenada progress and move forward...'

During 1981, many groups were formed so that by December 1981 they had achieved their target of 5,000 members long before this deadline.

The activities of the N.W.O. took place within the framework of continuous mass mobilisation which was allocated a special portfolio in the P.R.G. The success of mobilisation efforts among women and their strong visibility in many aspects gave women confidence. Unfortunately however this strength was not used by the N.W.O. to deal with the fundamental problems of the man-woman relationship which beset the community. In spite of the contribu-

tion of women to the revolution with their very lives, there was a deep fear that any acknowledgements of the contradictions existing within the 'family' and the 'private' sphere would serve to destroy national unity. As a result one had a situation, as mentioned in the introduction, where there existed a great fear in linking any of these activities with women's liberation and feminism. Feminism has been defined as 'foreign' and as 'separatist' thus one source was at pains to point out that:

'If it is true that the revolution has changed the status of women in Grenada, it is even more accurate to say that through their involvement in the revolution, Grenadian women are changing themselves.

Advancement has come not so much through pressures for women's rights as an isolated issue (the model of the U.S. feminist movement) as through active participation and leadership in the revolution as a whole.' (Epica, 1982: 98)

The aims of the movement are discussed in terms of equality and women's rights and not in terms of emancipation or liberation, words which denote not only discrimination but also subordination and exploitation.

A. Activities of the N.W.O.

According to Bernard Coard in the Report on The National Economy for 1981 and the Prospects for 1982 - the role of mass organisations in 1981 (Year of Agriculture and Agro-Industries), in the country (including the women's organisation) had been to 'strike forward' in social services (Coard, 1982: 67). During 1981, when the Ministry of Mobilisation began to function effectively, there was a marked mobilisation of people into the National Youth Organisation (N.Y.O.), the Trade Unions, the Militia, the Productive Farmers Union (P.F.U.) and the 'Community' Youth Brigades.

Prior to 1981 and during 1981, the work of the N.W.O. had been concentrated on the social services. To a large extent this emphasis grew directly out of the real day to day problems of women and their children in a society where the Western nuclear family is not the norm. In doing this they worked particularly

with the Ministry of Education, Youth and Social Affairs. For purposes of discussion these activities can be divided in the following main areas - social welfare, education and community work.

A.1. Social Welfare:

For the most part this has centred around the welfare of children in Caribbean society, as much as in others (or more) the responsibility of women. The women's organisation took as its special responsibility the monitoring of government projects such as - primary health care, free school meals, free books and uniforms, free milk and so on. This in many ways was a logical development as in the Caribbean women are responsible not only for the nurturing of children but also for their economic well-being. With the aim of facilitating women's entry into social production, a great deal of emphasis was also put on the establishment of day-care facilities, and the continued support of existing ones. One of the most interesting aspects of the establishment of these centres has been that within the respective communities attempts were made to involve the other mass organisations in this work, thus the local youth organisation, peoples militia and N.J.M. support groups all worked together to establish, furnish and run the centres. In this way men and women were involved in the provision of these facilities. At the level of teaching though in general no men were involved.

A.2. Education:

This was advanced as the main way through which women could gain 'equality'. Thus in conjunction with the Ministry of Education, a mass education programme for women was developed. Within the organisation itself, special study seminars were organised as well as political education at the regular meetings. The subjects covered according to Minister of Education, Jacqueline Creft, included: Grenada's history from The Caribs* to 1979; Grenada's economy; how to overcome underdevelopment; topics in World history and international affairs; the importance of education in esta-

* indigenous people of the southern Caribbean.

blishing People's Power; women's needs and participation in the establishment of a People's Power; women's needs and participation in the establishment of a People's Democracy; methods of organising women's groups; maternity law rights; and first aid training. (Creft, 1981: 54).

In relation to more formal education , and through the programme 'Every child in school' the practice of keeping girls at home to take care of younger children was radically challenged. Within the formal education system some attempts to break down the sexual division of labour took place, especially through the awarding of scholarships to girls and women for technical courses as well as through encouraging them to attend local vocational institutes such as the agricultural school and the Fisheries School. Evidence of similar attempts with relation to men and boys were not apparent. The high value attached to 'male-dominated' fields of employment and education served to encourage women to enter these fields. At the same time however some attempt should have been made to re-evaluate the 'female-dominated' fields as those continued to exist and to be primarily staffed by women. Similar encouragement should also have been given to boys and men to enter these fields. The N.W.O. should also have been able to boast of the number of boys studying home economics, advanced secretarial studies or early childhood education, and similarly also of male typists, nursery school teachers and cooks (not only chefs).

At the same time as this is taking place, it is important that the women are maintaining the skills which they already have and that they are recognised as such. The constant reference to women who have skills and experience in agriculture, sewing, basketry, handicrafts and food preparation and preservation as 'unskilled' should therefore cease.

Also in the area of education some important work was initiated in the area of curriculum transformation. Merle Hodge Coordinator of The Curriculum Development Programme, wrote in 1980:

'The new woman of Grenada will be the product of a changing education system which is geared towards equal educational

exposure for girls and boys and a more conscious attack, through education on the roots of sexual stereotyping than is evident anywhere in the English-Speaking Caribbean' (F.W.I. 2.9.80).

Along similar lines at the 2nd National Congress of the N.W.O. in 1980 one of the instructions (No. 10) given to the new executive was 'To ask the Curriculum Development Unit to ensure that a true image of women's abilities and her role in a revolutionary society is portrayed in all learning materials for our children'. This is of course a very important area and one which has often been neglected. However it will have little result if the material circumstances which determine women's oppression are not removed. In Cuba, via the *Federación de Mujeres Cubanas* (F.M.C.) attempts were made to deal with the questions of sexual stereotyping at this ideological level through the press, school curricula and television. This however had little effect as 1) the low-status of the household 'role' of women continued, therefore women within the society were viewed first as housewives and second as workers and 2) there was a general acceptance of a certain degree of biological determinism in the allocation of women's jobs as women were often seen as physically weaker and on this basis excluded from many jobs, (Reddock, 1979: 145). In the Cuban case also the continued existence of *machismo* as a phenomenon and of male pride was a major obstacle which was passed from parents to sons within the family and could not be removed through accepted channels.

Similarly in Grenada the view that a change in ideas and attitudes is what is necessary was accepted. It was recognised that changes in the law were not enough. This was noted by President of the N.W.O. and then Secretary for Women's Affairs Phyllis Coard in an interview with *Prensa Latina* in July 1980 in Copenhagen, when 'she pointed out that the fundamental problem which a revolution must eradicate is not inequality in the eyes of the law - because that is changed easily - but the traditional attitude to women in many sectors' (F.W.I. 2.8.80). This struggle to change ideas and attitudes of course must be continued but other structural changes in the day to day power relations at a more basic level must also take place.

A.3. Community Work:

As mentioned earlier, the entire community was mobilised via the mass organisations for the establishment of nursery and pre-primary schools. But in addition to this a great deal of other work occurred - for example in the area of road-repair, fund-raising for local institutions, hospitals, health centres, repairs to school buildings and community centres, repairs to the homes of single women and old people. In all of this the women provided voluntarily the manual labour required with minimal assistance from men.

In spite of a very creative approach in developing the new Grenadian society in general, the programme for women bore a striking similarity to that of most of the older socialist countries which themselves have inherent difficulties. In the case of Cuba for example, Lewis, Lewis and Ridgon (1977) summarised the activities of the F.M.C. when it was institutionalised as:

1. Mobilising women for education, production and defence, by encouraging women to attend adult school, enter the labour force and join the militia.
2. Carrying out periodic surveys of women's educational and employment backgrounds, skill levels and willingness to work outside the home.
3. Establishing and operating sewing and dress-making schools, retraining centres for domestic servants and day-care centres for children of all working mothers.
4. Establishing and operating study-groups for ideological training of all people but specifically of women.
5. Presenting government policy to the women, more than representing women's position to government. (Lewis, Lewis & Ridgon, 1976).

B. Recent Developments

On the 12th August 1983, the Women's Desk of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Social Affairs was transformed into a new Ministry of Women's Affairs with education minister Jacqueline Creft as Minister and Phyllis Coard, President of the N.W.O. as Deputy-

Minister. The Ministry was divided into two sections: 1. The Women's Bureau and 2. The Early Childhood department (*Scotilda*, 4.12.82; 3). The Women's Bureau had the responsibility for political and social education, legal reform, leadership training, the development of cooperatives among women, the organisation of women at a national level, and further ran a social advice centre. The Early Childhood Department was responsible for the support of both already existing and new day-care centres and nurseries as well as the coordination of the free school books and uniforms programmes. At a general level, the Ministry was also responsible for maintaining government to government contact and relationships with regional and international agencies.

As can be already observed there was a great deal of interaction between the N.W. O. and the Women's Ministry so much so that many resources are shared and certain personnel are held in common.

In December 1983, the 1st Congress of the N.W.O. was held, but prior to this a number of preparatory activities took place to which women within and outside the N.W.O. could contribute. Of these the main ones were the special Parish Councils and Delegates meetings held to discuss : 1. the Draft Work Programme and 2. Amendments to the Constitution. The main proposals included in the Draft Work Plan were: 1. that women should be made aware of all possible areas of work, in particular in agriculture and construction and should be trained in those areas; 2. that more political education and leadership training was needed; 3. that the work of the C.P.E. must continue and develop; 4. that more child care facilities must be established to facilitate working women, and community health brigades should be supported and 5. that the Marketing Board should take over the importation of school books and uniforms in order to lower prices. (*Scotilda*, Ibid; 2).

By the time of the 1st Congress, the N.W.O. had 6,500 members and more than approximately 2,000 had attended the Special Parish Councils and Delegates Meetings. At the actual Congress, the Constitution was amended to enlarge the N.W.O. Secretariat to

include secretaries for production, defence, academic education and social problems, Parish committees were created, and N.W.O. members outside the country for more than six months could not be elected to the executive. (F.W.I., 11.12.82; 1).

The resolutions passed at the Congress were concentrated in three main areas. The first was in the area of legal reform, calling for the removal of the stigma of illegitimacy on children born out of wedlock, and the removal of inheritance laws based on legitimacy and illegitimacy. In addition a call was made for the establishment of a private court to establish paternity where it was contested, and the strengthening of maintenance laws in cases where either the mother or father deserts the child. (Ibid; 4) Other resolutions were passed in the areas of academic and political education, and on international solidarity and World peace.

C. An Analysis of The Work of The N.W.O.

Through these activities discussed above, women in general and the N.W.O. in particular earned themselves high esteem in the society. But these changes in women's self-realisation as well as the attacks on the sexual division of labour will have a fundamental effect on the relationships between women and men, women and women and men and men in the society. In China in 1949 for example the Marriage Law recognised divorce by mutual consent and the Land Reform allocated land to individuals and not to families (thus women gained access to land, a means of production). Women took this opportunity to refuse the domination of their mothers-in-law and husbands. The effect of this was so widespread that the situation was soon altered making divorce more difficult and controlling the allocation of land (Davin, 1976; 46). During this period of relative freedom there was an increase in the number of murders of women and suicides as men fought to retain control over their women. In the end, the men won, and even though women continued their work in social production male domination was restored.

Already in Grenada in the new situation women gained the confidence to fundamentally question and to refuse to accept their

subordinate position. While in Grenada in 1981, one woman was overheard complaining to another - 'He take a woman off de bus an put on a man'. She apparently had in no uncertain terms told the minibus driver the error of his ways. Similarly N.W.O. members, burdened by their daily work as well as voluntary duties were to be heard complaining about their double burden of housework which still had to be done, often late at night. Yet when asked whether this was ever discussed publicly the response would be No, that would cause too much disturbance.

The reality is that change is a dialectical process and change in one area also results in change in others. Historically at crucial periods it is always the women who eventually have to sacrifice their freedom for the 'public good'. It is important to realise that all these changes bring the formerly suppressed or repressed contradictions to the fore and machinery will have to be established to deal with the new situation. In addition the political education of men will have to prepare them for the changes in the present situation which will have to come later.

Another area of importance is 'the family'. As is well-known Marx and Engels recognised the oppressive and exploitative nature of the bourgeois family, when in the Communist Manifesto they stated:

'Abolition of the family! Even the most radical flare up at this infamous proposal of the Communists. On what foundation is the present family, the bourgeois family based? On capital, on private gain. In its completely developed form this family exists only among the bourgeoisie. But this state of things finds its complement in the practical absense of the family among the proletarians, and in public prostitution.

The bourgeois family will vanish as a matter of course when its complement vanishes, and both will vanish with the vanishing of capital'. (Marx & Engels, 1977; 50) (My emphasis)

In the case of Grenada and indeed the entire Caribbean region this statement underlined above holds true, yet 'the family' as the unit of society is still held. In the Cuban Family Code of

1975 this is stated, while in the Principles and Programme of The Working Peoples Alliance (W.P.A.) of Guyana published in 1980 (?) the family is recognised as the basic unit of society and its 'strengthening' is seen as a means of ending domestic exploitation and woman and child abuse. (W.P.A. 1980 (?); 26). In Grenada (to its credit) no such formal statement was made but actions, based on these assumptions did take place. One example was the situation described as 'irresponsible fatherhood', where fathers do not contribute financially to the upkeep of their children. The position put forward was that this problem could not be adequately dealt with until all men were employed. This prospective solution assumed that a man's 'responsibility' to his children was primarily a financial one. One step in the right direction was the call at the N.W.O. Congress for women to be made equally responsible before the law for the maintenance of their children, a situation which in reality had always existed. This could be seen as the first dismantling of the male breadwinner concept of the bourgeois family. But for working-class and peasant women their responsibility is both economic and social and the society castigates very strongly any woman who contributes only financially to her children's life and well-being. In a new society a man's responsibility to his children as well as other relatives is to be also socially responsible and this is possible even when men are unemployed. The stereotype of the male breadwinner is part and parcel of the Western capitalist family model and this has to be eradicated with the rest of the system. At a broader level the whole question of the role of the bourgeois family in socialist society has to be studied and analysed so that strategies aimed at eradicating it and replacing it with relationships more in tune with socialist society can emerge. The relationship of 'the family' to the capital accumulation process in industrial/commercial production as well as in peasant/petty-bourgeoisie production has to be properly analysed. It is no accident that the family arose in history at the same point in time as did private property and class society. Any attempt to get rid of the latter and retain the former is fraught with the contradictions being experienced in socia-

list countries in their strategies 'on the woman question'.

The Caribbean working-class and peasantry recognized very early the limitations and uselessness of the bourgeois family for its needs. Attempts by the Colonial Church and State to force it upon them have virtually failed. In the present situation women (in spite of poverty) enjoy a degree of social and economic independence not enjoyed by their sisters in parts of the world where a 'stable' family exists, for example in India. The commonly-held view that all working-class and peasant women want to be married is totally incorrect.⁸ From earlier times these women recognised the limitations placed on them by legal marriage. The fact that this is often put off until a man can afford to be a breadwinner shows the economic as opposed to the social or affective basis of the bourgeois family.

The Caribbean in general therefore has the historic possibility and responsibility to show that non-oppressive forms of domestic organisation can develop from among the working-class which are able to further rather than retard the progress towards true socialist society.

VII. Conclusion

In conclusion then one can say that possibly more than in any other revolutionary process to date, the visibility of women in Grenada has been outstanding. In addition, and from the outset measures aimed at ameliorating the conditions of women and involving them in national life were introduced and continued. In spite of the creativity and innovativeness of the People's Revolutionary Government, however, there was a growing tendency to closely ally their strategy for women to the traditional strategies used in older socialist countries which have failed to 1) successfully challenge the sexual division of labour 2) equalise the responsibility for housework within the home and 3) transform the oppressive bourgeois family. The reason given for these failures is usually the time factor as old ideas are hard to eradicate. The question arises therefore of the connection between the old ideas and the old family. Is the former responsible for the latter or vice versa?

In Grenada, as in other parts of the region, women have already been in an advantageous position since large numbers of them have not been constrained by the old family system and so were freer to participate in the activities of the revolution and in social production. To try to re-establish patriarchal control over these women by 'strengthening' the bourgeois family (which hardly exists) would undoubtedly have been historically a backward step. In order therefore to develop new strategies and forms of social organisation an analysis based on the peculiar characteristics of the regional and working-class situation, as well as a materialist understanding of the origins and continued bases for women's oppression and exploitation and its interrelationship to class and national oppression has to be developed. In doing so the traditional prejudices against feminism will have to be eradicated and the wealth of research and analysis carried on by the socialist-feminists taken into consideration.

NOTES

1. The paper is an adaptation of an earlier paper entitled 'Women's Movements and Organisations in The Process of Revolutionary Transformation : The Case of Grenada'. It was originally presented at a conference on *Crisis y Respuesta en América Latina y el Caribe*, organized by FLACSO, Quito, Ecuador.
2. a) Grenada: *Let Those Who Labour Hold The Reins* : Interview with Bernard Coard by Chris Searle, Race and Class Pamphlet No. 7; Liberation, London, 1979, p. 7; b) Ernest Harsch 'How the Gairy Regime was Overthrown', *Intercontinental Press combined with Imprecor*, Vol. 17, No. 44, December 3, 1979, p. 1185.
3. Ibid.
4. Harsch, Op. Cit.2 (b), p. 1185, by 'village' they probably refer to farmers and agricultural workers.
5. Ibid p. 1187.
6. Op. Cit. 2 (a), p. 11.
7. In : *Grenada is Not Alone*, Fedon Publishers, St. Georges, 1982; p. 27.
8. This will be developed in the forthcoming work of the author on 'Women, Labour and Struggle in 20 th Century Trinidad and Tobago'.

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