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BEHIND THE SCENES IN MARXIST GRENADA

INTRODUCTION

The U.S. military operation which rescued American students in October 1983 also captured a prize providing rare insight into a Marxist regime. U.S. forces found 35,000 lbs. of documents, many of them secret, dealing with every facet of political, economic, and social life in Grenada during the four and one-half years in which the People's Revolutionary Government (PRG) held power. In those years, Grenada became a microcosm of other, more powerful, communist regimes in Europe, Asia, Africa, and Latin America. These documents have now been made public by the U.S. Departments of State and Defense. They tell an extraordinary tale and allow the West to peek behind the scenes in Marxist Grenada.

THE NATURE OF THE REGIME

A Policy of Deceit

Grenadian Prime Minister Maurice Bishop's visit to the U.S. in June 1983 was designed to lull the U.S. Congress and media into believing that the PRG was more nationalist than communist: "...broad strategic objectives for the visit [are...to convey] to the U.S. press and people the image of our P.M. as a sober and responsible statesman...tone down the attacks on the U.S. during the period. Reason. It cannot jeopardize the visit."¹

¹ Minutes of the Political Bureau, May 4, 1983. Document 93-4, 5. All document numbers referred to are as listed in the publication: Grenada Documents: An Overview and Selection, released by the U.S. Department of State and Department of Defense in September 1984. Catalog numbers of the same documents in the collection of the National Archives are different.

The coup d'etat that brought the New Jewel Movement (NJM) to power in Grenada on March 13, 1979, was designed to transform the island into a communist state strongly allied with the Soviet bloc. The NJM's promises to maintain a democratic form of government and a non-aligned foreign policy were part of a plan to deceive the West and prevent military intervention. This is clearly stated in captured Document No. 1:

It is clear that our objective as Marxist-Leninists must in the first instance be to construct socialism as rapidly, but scientifically as possible.²

From the start too, comrades, we had an alliance with sections of the upper petty bourgeoisie and national bourgeoisie...this was done deliberately so that imperialism won't get too excited and would say "well they have some nice fellas in the thing; everything alright." That was the mistake, for example, the comrades in Gambia made a few months ago. Remember the Gambia coup d'etat a few months ago? What was the first thing those comrades did? They say, "we are Marxist-Leninists and we have just had a Marxist-Leninist revolution and we go wipe out the bourgeoisie." The same day they overthrow them.... So fortunately, the NJM had a little more sense than that.³

The Importance of Ideology

The People's Revolutionary Government of Grenada was constructed along doctrinaire Leninist lines using the NJM as "the vanguard party" and adhering as closely as possible to the Soviet Union's political system. The NJM functioned through a Political Bureau (Politburo) and Central Committee, both of which were chaired by Maurice Bishop. The secret records of the NJM Central Committee are proof that the Marxist-Leninist rhetoric of its members was not adopted merely for public posturing--Bishop and his comrades were dedicated believers in the Soviet model of Communism formulated by Lenin.

We decided in theory and in principle that we should build a Leninist Party. That decision was taken in April '74.⁴

It is only under the leadership of the working class, led by a Marxist-Leninist vanguard Party that the process can be completed and we can go on to socialist construction.⁵

² Line of March for the Party. Presented by Comrade Maurice Bishop, Chairman, Central Committee, 13th September 1982. Document 1, p. 49.

³ Ibid., p. 7.

⁴ Ibid., 1-40.

⁵ Ibid., 1-15.

Being a Communist, comrades, means becoming a different kind of person....We believe that as Party, individually and collectively, we must now develop ourselves into becoming more professional, more disciplined, more Leninist....We also believe firmly that the path we have chosen is the only correct one.⁶

As Grenada began to crumble economically and the people lost interest in their "dictatorship of the proletariat," worried members of the NJM Central Committee (CC) sought explanations in the teachings of Marx and Lenin.

...the failure of the CC to study for close to one year...has weakened the extent to which the ideology of Marxism-Leninism acts as a guide to the actions of the members of the higher organs. This failure to study is definitely linked to the non-Leninist manner of functioning....⁷

The Party must be placed on a firm Leninist footing...the Communist route--the road of Leninist standards and functioning, the road of democratic centralism, of selectivity, of criticism and self-criticism and of collective leadership.⁸

HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES

The Police State

Dissidents in Grenada were put under "heavy manners"--a local term that includes execution, imprisonment, and torture as punishments. During the four and one-half years that the PRG ruled Grenada, approximately 1 percent of the island's population was detained at varying times for political transgressions: "...consider how people get detained in this country we don't go and call for no votes. You get detained when I sign an order... once I sign it--like it or don't like it--it's up the hill for them."⁹

"Steven Couffi, an ex-policeman...due to the fact that he complained in a written statement that he was subjected to torture and ill-treatment while held on Fort Rupert, it was decided to stay his release in the interest of unfavorable propaganda....For this might serve to counter any desire on his part to publicize his treatment on the Fort."¹⁰

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Minutes of Extra-Ordinary Meeting of the Central Committee of NJM from Tuesday 12th - Friday 15th October, 1982. Document 105-3.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Line of March at the Party. Document 1-25.

¹⁰ Report on detainees sent to the P.M., September 19, 1981. Document 12-3.

With Soviet, Cuban and East German assistance, Grenada was developing a sophisticated surveillance system of its citizens' activities. The Special Branch (Secret Police) put dissidents in Grenada under "heavy manners." The island was divided into "intelligence districts" to spy on "enemy forces"--those unfriendly to the regime. To help with this, a request was made to Yuri Andropov, then the USSR's KGB chief, for:

Training courses for four (4) comrades: a) Basic course in Counter Intelligence for the period of one year (and) b) Basic course in Intelligence for a period of one year.

We thank you once again for the tremendous assistance which our armed forces have received from your Party and Government in the past...we sincerely hope that these courses will be made available to our comrades in 1982, given the pressing needs in our Ministry and the continuing threat being posed to the Grenada Revolution by United States Imperialism.¹¹

The Special Branch used its training from the Soviets to: "Monitor all [medical school] students...checking of mails of dangerous elements. Tapping and disconnection of dangerous elements phones.... Monitor all sermons by the various parish priests and preachers in the society."¹²

Religious Persecution

The influence of the churches in Grenada was of particular concern to the PRG, and the regime was given substantial help by Cuba to counter religious activities. In early 1983, the Special Branch prepared a Top Secret report that states:

The Roman Catholic Church...continues to be hostile towards the Grenada Revolution and is now placing emphasis on...distorting the teachings of Marxism/Leninism and offering Christianity as the only way to solve societies problems...what we are up against is an experienced and skillful counter revolutionary organization.¹³

Four months later, the Special Branch told Prime Minister Bishop that the threat to the regime had increased to the point that:

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- ¹¹ Letter to "Commander Andropov" from 'General of the Army Hudson Austin,' 17 February 1982. Document 27-1.
- ¹² Plan of G.I. Operations, undated. Document 9-2 and 3.
- ¹³ Analysis--the Church in Grenada, 15th March 1983, from Officer Cadet Michael Roberts. Document 4-3.

...in the medium term, if serious measures are not taken, we can find ourselves faced with a Poland situation.... We see the Church in the immediate period as being the most dangerous sector for the development of internal counter revolution.¹⁴

The Cuban Communist Party (PCC) was also concerned about the Church's threat to the Sovietization of Grenada. PCC sent a delegation from the Americas Department--its intelligence arm--to Grenada to analyze the situation. It recommended that the PRG:

...Promote contacts among clergymen and members of the laity from Nicaragua and other Latin American circles linked to the theology of liberation and, in general, to the idea of a church committed to the revolutionary positions...these contacts should positively influence the Christian sectors in Grenada.¹⁵

RELATIONS WITH THE SOVIET BLOC

Grenada's Significance to the Soviets

The Soviet Union viewed Grenada as a place of geostrategic importance and was steadily expanding its involvement with the island. Senior Soviet officials perceived Grenada as a bridgehead in the war to penetrate the traditional U.S. sphere of influence in Latin America and the Caribbean. A document reporting on a meeting between top Soviet and Grenadian military commanders states:

The Marshal said that over two decades ago, there was only Cuba in Latin America, today there are Nicaragua, Grenada and a serious battle is going on in El Salvador. The Marshal of the Soviet Union stressed that United States imperialism would try to prevent progress but that there were no prospects for imperialism to turn back history.¹⁶

Build rapidly our links with the Socialist World, especially with the Soviet Union. And here I should hardly have to say more; when I had just come back from an important visit to the land of Lenin. The Soviets in the last two days have arrived, nine of them including the Ambassador, and their embassy is about to be opened and so on. So these links and relations are building reasonably satisfactorily.¹⁷

¹⁴ Analysis of the Church in Grenada, 12th July, 1983, by Major Keith Roberts. Document 5-4 and 5.

¹⁵ Report of the Delegation Sent to Grenada by the America Department, by Cde. Aurelio Alonso Tejada, October 14, 1982. Document 2-7.

¹⁶ Meeting Between Chiefs of Staff of Soviet Armed Forces and the People's Revolutionary Armed Forces of Grenada, 10 March 1983. Document 24-2.

¹⁷ Line of March at the Party. Document 1-36.

Grenada's Role in Soviet Military Strategy

Grenada was important militarily to the Soviets as a potential exporter of communist revolution and as a base for the overt projection of tactical power:

Of all the regional possibilities, the most likely candidate for special attention is Surinam. If we can be an overwhelming influence on Surinam's international behavior, then our importance in the Soviet scheme of things will be greatly enhanced. To the extent that we can take credit for bringing any other country into the progressive fold, our prestige and influence would be greatly enhanced.¹⁸

...referring to the question of deputation of Soviet specialists to Grenada to conduct studies related to the construction of military projects the Marshal informed the Grenadian side that the team of specialists would be sent in one month's time....¹⁹

Grenada signed a number of treaties and secret agreements with the USSR and Soviet proxies designed to provide the PRG with a vast quantity of armaments, including an AN-26 aircraft that "can seat 39 paratroopers,"¹⁹ 60 armored personnel carriers and patrol vehicles, four coastal patrol boats, nearly 10,000 assault and other rifles, more than 450 machine guns, 11.5 million rounds of 7.62mm ammunition, 294 rocket launchers with 16,000 rockets, 84 82mm mortars with 4,800 mortar shells, 12 75mm cannons with 600 shells, 60 crew-served anti-aircraft guns with 600,000 rounds of ammunition, 30 76mm field guns with 11,000 rounds of ammunition, 30 57mm anti-tank guns with 10,000 rounds of ammunition, and 20,000 sets of uniforms.²⁰

Soviet financing and equipment was channeled through Cuba for the construction of the Point Salines airport, being built by Grenada by more than 600 Cuban workers. Liam James, a member of the Central Committee who received military training in the Soviet Union, wrote in his notebook in early 1980:

The Revo has been able to crush counter-revolution internationally, airport will be used for Cuban and Soviet military.²¹

¹⁸ Grenada's Relations With the USSR, by W. Richard Jacobs, 11 July 1983. Document 26-6.

¹⁹ Meeting Between Chiefs of General Staff & c. Document 24-4.

²⁰ Summary of Prime Minister's Meeting With Soviet Ambassador, 24 May 1983. Document 21-3.

²¹ Documents 13, 14, 15, 16 17, 20 and 22.

Aircraft to be supplied to Grenada will be delivered to Cuba...kind of plane, a military make, can pose problems landing in the more reactionary countries in the region.... The Ambassador said that they will prefer Cuban pilots to use it.²²

The Role of Cuba

Cuba played a critical role in trying to turn Grenada into a Marxist-Leninist arsenal:

The Government of the Republic of Cuba in agreement with the request formulated by the People's Revolutionary Government of Grenada, will maintain Cuban military specialists in that country.... Grenada will give facilities to the chief of the Cuban military specialists in the work places and for using the communication means existing in the country...will take all measures depending on them in order to assure secrecy of the permanency of the military personnel in both states and the character of the activities.²³

The Role of Vietnam

...the Vietnamese Ambassador has reported the following:
1. The Ministry of Defense and Interior is ready to receive from Grenada starting in April 1982 twenty appropriately qualified people to train in the following: (a) anti-chemical warfare, (b) anti-radioactivity warfare, (c) reeducation of anti-social and counter-revolutionary elements, (d) Yankee tactics and the weapons used in Vietnam.²⁵

The Role of North Korea

The Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea shall give, in 1983-1984, the free military assistance subject to weapons and ammunition covering U.S. \$12,000,000.... Both sides shall strictly keep the secrecy of the military assistance...and have an obligation not to hand over any matters of this Agreement to the third country.²⁶

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- 22 Page from Liam James' notebook dated 22/3/80. Document 23-1.
23 Summary of Prime Minister's Meeting With Soviet Ambassador, 24th May, 1983. Document 21-3.
24 Protocol of the Military Collaboration Between the Government of the Republic of Cuba and the People's Revolutionary Government of Grenada, "Secret," undated. Document 16-1.
25 Note from Grenadian Ambassador in Cuba, 18/2/82. Document 18-1.
26 Agreement Between the People's Revolutionary Government of Grenada and the Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, April 14, 1983. Document 20-2.

RELATIONS WITH THE WEST

Manipulating the United States

The PRG deliberately concealed its true nature from the U.S. and coordinated its activities with the Soviets and Cubans. Documents report:

The Comrades responsible for Grenada in the International Section [of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union]... sometimes adopt an over-protective attitude towards us and argue that if we meet at too high a level the USA would use this as an excuse to further squeeze Grenada... they would like Grenada to avoid that direct attack.²⁷

...the U.S. media go after violence, and when there's no war, controversy will do just as well--especially in an election year. I would say they're interested in the visit [of Maurice Bishop] as it fits into their idea of a "face-off" with Reagan and his administration in the midst of an election campaign.²⁸

Receiving the Socialist International

Like the Soviets and Cubans, the Bishop regime considered the Socialist International a potential enemy, but joined the organization to carry out subversive operations against it under the direction of the Cuban Americas Department:

...the projection of Social Democracy in Latin America and the Caribbean...does represent a permanent enemy of the essential objectives of the communist and left movements in that this trend intends to prevent the triumph of socialist revolutions and the materialization of the communist ideal.... Social Democrats as a whole are on the imperialist side up to now....²⁹

Our principal enemies are to be found among the parties of Soares and Horgo in Portugal and Italy respectively--the Socialist Democrats of the USA are also our sworn enemies.... This mission will seek to counter the forces of Portugal, Italy and the U.S.... Work of the expulsion of the [CIA] USA Social Democratic Party.³⁰

²⁷ Grenada's Relations with the USSR, 11th July 1983. Document 26-2.

²⁸ Letter to Maurice Bishop from Gail Reed Rizo, undated. Document 31-1.

²⁹ Social Democracy in Latin America and the Caribbean, undated. Document 36-14.

³⁰ Report of Meeting of Secret Regional Caucus Held in Managua From 6th-7th January, 1983. Document 39-3.

CONCLUSION

"The unity, the militant solidarity which unifies our countries, our peoples' struggles, it is this unity and this solidarity which is today making imperialism tremble because we recognize in Grenada just as imperialists recognize that without the Cuban revolution of 1959 there would have been no Grenadian revolution, nor Nicaraguan revolution in 1979...while yesterday it was Cuba, Nicaragua and Grenada, tomorrow it will undoubtedly be El Salvador."³¹

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³¹ Speech by Maurice Bishop given to the 1980 May Day rally in Havana, Cuba.
Private collection.