

Perspectives on the
Grenada Revolution,
1979-1983

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Edited by

Nicole Phillip-Dowe
and John Angus Martin

Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing



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This book first published 2017

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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Book cover design by Hugh Whyte

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ISBN (10): 1-4438-5178-7

ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-5178-7

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book is the end result of the UWI Open Campus Grenada Country Conference, March 3-5, 2016. The conference was held as part of the outreach programme of The University of the West Indies Open Campus Grenada. Fifteen papers were presented at the two-day conference of which twelve form part of this book.

We would like to sincerely thank the contributors: Marie Benjamin, Merle Collins, Claude Douglas, Kadon Douglas, Claudette Joseph, Lawrence Joseph, Joseph Ewart Layne, Suelin Low Chen Tung, Kimalee Phillip, Shalini Puri and Malaika Smith-Brooks-Lowe.

ABBREVIATIONS

CCC	- Caribbean Conference of Churches
CIA	- Central Intelligence Agency
CPE	- Centre for Popular Education
CSEC	- Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate
GNM	- Grenada National Museum
GNP	- Grenada National Party
GULP	- Grenada United labour Party
JEWEL	- Joint Endeavour for Welfare Education and Liberation
MACE	- Movement for Advancement of Community Effort
MAP	- Movement for Assemblies of the People
NISTEP	- National In-Service Teacher Education Programme
NLA	- National Liberation Army
NJM	- New Jewel Movement
NWO	- National Women's Organisation
NYO	- National Youth Organisation
PRA	- People's Revolutionary Army
PRG	- People's Revolutionary Government
RMC	- Revolutionary Military Council
UWI	- University of the West Indies
YWCA	- Young Women's Christian Association

INTRODUCTION

The history of the small island state of Grenada has been tumultuous. In just over three hundred years the island witnessed three popular uprisings that brought about profound changes in the society. The socialist revolution of 1979 orchestrated by the New Jewel Movement culminated four-and-a-half years later in a U.S.-led military invasion/intervention which threw Grenada full-fledged onto the international political stage. Research on this third revolution and its untimely and violent demise has captured the imagination of numerous writers, scholars, academics, poets, artists and playwrights. Over four hundred books, articles, plays, and videos have documented this event in excruciating detail, yet the vast majority of the authors have been non-Grenadian.

This collection of essays captures the Grenada Revolution from a Grenadian perspective. All the contributors, except one, are Grenadian. In this regard, it is unique, and captures the voices of persons who were active participants, children, teenagers, young adults, and some yet unborn in the 1979 to 1983 period. They all, regardless, have a deep interest and attachment to the Grenadian experience. Those who witnessed it are still enthralled by the Grenada Revolution three decades later, and continue to question and assess its place in Grenadian society. Those who did not live it are captivated by its historicity and seek to understand how it affected the lives of Grenadians in and out of the island. The legality of the revolution is questioned; the historical connection between Grenada's first revolution in 1795 and its third revolution in 1979 is examined; the nation's collective memory of the revolution is pondered by its second generation; the conflict between the role of religion and revolution is analysed; the empowerment of women by the revolutionary process is critiqued; the role of poetry and art in raising salient and often difficult and painful aspects of the revolution is investigated.

John Angus Martin, historian and archivist, examines the 1979 Grenada Revolution as a continuation of the struggle against colonialism begun by the 1795 Fédon's Rebellion. The causes, internal and external conflicts of both revolutionary processes are investigated, detailing the congruence that might explain their popularity and why they ultimately failed. Martin asks if the architects of the 1979 revolution had possessed more than a superficial knowledge of the 1795 revolution would they have

avoided the internal struggles that derailed the Grenada Revolution, recognizing full well that the follies of human nature were the deciding factor.

Lawrence Joseph, a legal professional, examines the 1979 historic occurrence in Grenada from a legal, political and philosophical perspective in order to determine whether or not that occurrence was a revolution or a mere coup d'état. Joseph critically analyzes the key doctrinal concepts which were utilized in various "extra-constitutional cases" in Africa, Asia and Europe, over the years in common law jurisdictions. This important question Joseph posits had an impact on the outcome of the Maurice Bishop murder trial. Though primarily the legal aspects of the debate are examined, many still react emotionally to whether the Grenada Revolution was a revolution or a classic coup d'état.

The title of Joseph Ewart Layne's chapter, "Overstretch to Bursting Point," aptly reflects the arguments he presents. As a member of the revolutionary process he critically analyses, in hindsight, the internal and external pressures the fledgling four-and-half year-old Revolution had to grapple with. Among the matters discussed includes Grenada's relationship with two diametrically opposed ideological fronts in the form of Capitalism – the United States, and Socialism – Cuba and Soviet-socialist bloc nations; flaws in the organisational structure of the People's Revolutionary Government, as well as personality differences between the revolution's two main personalities Maurice Bishop and Bernard Coard. It is a unique perspective from an insider looking critically at one of the most vigorously debated issue of why the Grenada Revolution failed.

In the next three chapters, Chapters four to six, the effects of the revolution on women, youth and religious relations is critiqued. Phillip-Dowe, historian, investigates the role of women in the revolutionary process and the effect the revolution had on them. It provides an analysis of the policies of the People's Revolutionary Government and the agencies responsible for the execution of these policies. It seeks to ascertain whether these policies encased in socialist theory and a socialist mindset "empowered" Grenadian women during the four-and-a-half-year period of the revolution. Women accounted for half of the island's population and as such their voices provide a valuable perspective on the revolutionary process. It also begs the question as to whether this empowerment can be considered a legacy of the revolution.

Claude Douglas, a sociologist, expounds on the Revolution's irreligious undercurrents that strained its relationship with the religious community, including the Rastafarian sect and the small Muslim community, members of whom were initial supporters of the revolution. Douglas noted that

riding on the wave of Karl Marx's perspective on religion, many young revolutionaries distanced themselves from religion and things religious. Religion, though important in the lives of many Grenadians, was viewed with a degree of scepticism. This scepticism, set against a largely religious community determined to protect its influence, led to discomfort, misgivings, and conflict that threatened the PRG's ideological control.

Claudette Joseph, a legal professional, provides a perspective of the pioneer movement that she was a member of as a young girl. She speaks of the benefits of the movement that positively impacted her own life, and discusses the lessons that could be learnt from the successes and failure of the revolutionary process. It is a look through adult eyes of a childhood experience that was transformative as a young person and influenced her adult political outlook.

Through poetry and art Merle Collins and Suelin Low Chew Tung are both able to capture some of the salient emotions of the period, celebrating, critiquing and analyzing the promise and optimism of the Grenada Revolution. Through her poetry, Collins, poet and novelist, explores the period before the revolution, with responses from a location in the Diaspora, and then moves through the revolutionary years, recording and sharing the excitement and hope of a period of anti-colonial, anti-imperialist and cultural awakening. The work then comments on feelings of unease and emergent critiques during the period of the revolution, and finally culminates with emotions felt surrounding the 1983 collapse and the subsequent United States Invasion.

Suelin Low Chew Tung, a mixed media artist, uses the artistic interpretations of the revolution to paint a picture of emotions extant during the four-and-a-half-year period of change and socio-political turmoil. Most of the art work focuses on the painful experiences of the collapse of the revolution which speaks to the aspect of the revolution that has remained at the forefront of our memory. It is an emotional presentation of art that evokes memories and longing for a failed promise that many still struggles to understand.

In chapters 9, 10 and 11, four young writers, Malaika Brooks-Smith Lowe, Kimalee Phillip, Marie Benjamin and Kadon Douglas have all encountered in their research the power of forgetting with regard to the revolution. All born after the Grenada Revolution, they continually strive to understand this unique experiment that so captivated the island, and struggle to explain its demise. In interviews conducted with young adults, ages 18 to 21 years, memories of the revolution are relegated to a squabble for power, murder and invasion. Their research unearthed the apathy of the youth towards the revolutionary process and that of educators, including

the Caribbean Examination Council, towards the inclusion of the topic of the Grenada Revolution in the study of Caribbean History.

The book closes on a hopeful note with the chapter by Shalini Puri, noted scholar on the Grenada Revolution. Puri looks at the memory of the Grenada Revolution, suggesting that we should emphasize “the joyfulness and profound creativity of the revolutionary years” instead of tragedy, which focuses on “dead heroes” and “not the living chorus” of the many who continue to try to understand their revolutionary experiences.

CHAPTER ONE

CITIZENS AND COMRADES IN ARMS: THE CONGRUENCE OF FÉDON'S REBELLION AND THE GRENADA REVOLUTION

JOHN ANGUS MARTIN

Introduction

Fédon's Rebellion and the Grenada Revolution are both defining events in Grenada's history for what they set out to achieve and the impact they have had on Grenadian society ever since.¹ These two events are foremost

¹ For detailed accounts of Fédon's Rebellion see: D.G. Garraway, *A Short Account of the Insurrection That Broke Out in Grenada in 1795*. Grenada: G. Wells & Son, 1877; Gordon Turnball, *A Narrative of the Revolt and Insurrection in the Island of Grenada*. London: Verner and Hood, 1796; Thomas Turner Wise, *A Review of the Events that Happened in Grenada from the Commencement of the Insurrection to the First of May*. Grenada: The Author, 1795; A Grenadian Planter (anon), *A Brief Enquiry into the Causes of, and Conduct Pursued by the Colonial Government, for Quelling the Insurrection in Grenada, 1795. In a Letter from a Grenada Planter to a Merchant in London*. London: J. Budd, 1796; John Hay, *A Narrative of the Insurrection in the Island of Grenada Which Took Place in 1795*. London: J. Ridgeway, 1823; Francis M'Mahon, *A Narrative of the Insurrection in the Island of Grenada in the Year 1795 by Francis M'Mahon, One of the Three who Escaped the Massacre on the 8th of April*. Grenada: Printed by John Spahn, 1823; Raymond Devas, *A History of the Island of Grenada, 1498-1796*. Grenada: Carenage Press, 1974; and George Brizan, *Grenada: Island of Conflict*. Oxford: Macmillan Caribbean, 1998. For detailed accounts of the Grenada Revolution and US Invasion see: Joseph E. Layne, *We Move Tonight: The Making of the Grenada Revolution*. GRMF, 2014; W. Richard Jacobs & Basil Ian Jacobs, *Grenada: The Route to Revolution*. Casa de las Américas, 1979; Gordon K. Lewis, *Grenada: The Jewel Despoiled*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987; Anthony Payne, Paul Sutton and Tony Thorndike, *Grenada: Revolution and Invasion*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1984; Frederic L. Pryor, *Revolutionary Grenada: A Study in*

on the islands' historical landscape because of their tremendous impact on people and society, then and now, the changes brought to the political and social landscape, and the influences on future political thinking. Though just over two centuries separate these events, they have been ideologically linked in the island's historical struggles against colonialism. Many revere Fédon's Rebellion as a "slave revolt" second only to the Haitian Revolution, and regard Julien Fédon (see Fig. 1-1) as a national hero for his leadership of that revolt.² The Grenada Revolution emulated Fédon's Rebellion, and saw itself as the continuation or embodiment of the anti-colonial struggles begun by Fédon and his compatriots.³ Despite its disastrous end and the subsequent US invasion, the Grenada Revolution remains highly regarded by many, both locally and internationally, and some Grenadians greatly regard its populist leader Maurice Bishop as a national hero.⁴

Both events share an interesting historical congruence such that at least an academic exploration is warranted. The stark similarities make for quite fascinating analysis, including the causes of the respective events, their internal and external influences, and internal rivalries that led to their subsequent demise. This research explores these issues and ponders what lessons, if any, could have been learned by the leaders of the Grenada Revolution had they a more profound understanding of Fédon's Rebellion?

Background

On the night of 2-3 March 1795, French free coloureds, whites and their enslaved, led by a free coloured (mixed race) named Julien Fédon (with the title of "general"), staged a rebellion against an increasingly oppressive

Political Economy. New York: Praeger Publishers, 1986; Tony Thorndike, *Grenada: Politics, Economics and Society*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 1985; Gary W. Williams, *U.S.-Grenada Relations: Revolution and Intervention in the Backyard*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007; and Shalini S. Puri, *The Grenada Revolution in the Caribbean Present: Operation Urgent Memory*. New York: Palgrave, 2014.

² Grenada does not have an official system for recognizing national heroes of any kind.

³ The People's Revolutionary Army's primary camp at Calivigny, St. George was named Camp Fédon; ironically it became the site of the burning of the bodies of Bishop and his supporters following their executions on October 19, 1983.

⁴ See footnote 2 above. October 19, the day Bishop and his allies were executed, is annually commemorated, and his supporters advocate for that date to be made a public holiday instead of October 25, the day the US invaded, which is a public holiday and celebrated as Thanksgiving Day.

anti-French, British colonial government. They attacked the towns of Gouyave, St. John and Grenville, St. Andrew, beginning what became known as Fédon's Rebellion (or the "Brigands War" as the British termed it). At the west-coast town of Gouyave, led by free coloureds Etienne Ventour and Joachim Philip, rebels captured about 40 British residents following their midnight attack on the town, and took them back to their headquarters at Belvidere estate, the remote coffee/cocoa plantation of Julien Fédon. On the eastern coast, almost at the same time and under the command of Julien Fédon and Jean Pierre Lavallee, the rebels stormed the small seaside village of Grenville (or La Baye), massacring eleven of the fifteen British residents, but blamed it on a non-existent invading French Republican force. On the way back to their hillside camp, they took more hostages and gathered supporters to their cause, including enslaved who awoke to the sounds of rebellion in the pre-dawn hours of March 3rd.



Fig. 1-1 Artist's impression of Julien Fédon (Michael Donelan)

With a combination of planning and good fortune, the rebels captured Lieutenant Governor Ninian Home, the head of the British colonial government, just hours after the rebellion's outbreak, thus inhibiting an immediate government response. By the end of the first week, over 7,000 people—French free coloureds and free blacks, whites and self-emancipated

slaves (of both French and British plantations)—had gathered at the rebel camp, its leaders vowing to force the British colonial government from Grenada and replace it with a pro-French Republican one.⁵ The British, taken by surprise, were in disarray and unprepared to respond to the rebellion of its French subjects and a large force of rebel ex-slaves. The rebels immediately called on the government to surrender, which they declined, vowing to resist the brigands at all cost. The rebels dug in for the defense of their camps while the British struggled to defend the besieged, but fortified town of St. George.

The rebellion raged for fifteen months, and saw extreme brutality and destruction across the island, and to all segments of the society. The rebellion had temporarily achieved a quasi-freedom for a large portion of the enslaved population that dared to rally to the rebel cause. The majority of the enslaved, however, remained on the side lines, fearful of choosing sides and thus retaliation.⁶ The rebels, though commanding an overwhelming “army,” orchestrated what appeared to be an haphazard offensive. At its height, the rebels gained loose control of a large portion of the island, but were unable to dislodge entrenched British forces from their stronghold in St. George’s, or force them to surrender. The British gained some control of the seas, thus restricting the needed external support for the rebels. Personality and possibly ideological differences quickly led to internal conflicts that created divisions within the rebel hierarchical structure, forcing a confrontation between the rebel leaders Julien Fédon and (his brother-in-law) Charles Nogue, and their French Republican supporters in Guadeloupe and St. Lucia. Disunited and beaten back to their interior camps, the might of the British Empire descended on the island and crushed the revolt in June 1796, resulting in the deaths and capture of many rebels, and the executions and banishment of over 200 rebels and their families. As many as seven thousand enslaved (25 percent of the total enslaved population) were killed during the rebellion, and over five hundred charged with bearing arms were sold off the island.⁷

On the night of 12-13 March 1979, members of the National Liberation Army (NLA) of the New Jewel Movement (NJM) staged a coup against the increasingly repressive rule of the Eric Gairy government. It attacked government installations, capturing the Grenada Defense Force’s barracks at True Blue by setting it on fire (see Fig. 1-2) and Radio Grenada at Grand Anse, thus beginning the Grenada Revolution. The NJM claimed

⁵ Garraway, *A Short Account*, 9-12.

⁶ The first so-called rebel to be executed was an enslaved whose only crime was to accompany his master to the rebel camp.

⁷ See Garraway, *A Short Account*, 77, 80.

that they had no option but to act immediately, having received reliable information that Prime Minister Gairy had left orders to have its leadership “silenced.” The NJM called on members of the Gairy government to surrender, and all police stations to do the same by hoisting a white flag. By the end of the day, the NJM was in full control of the islands, staging a successful, armed overthrow of the elected Gairy government it had opposed for almost a decade (see Fig. 1-3). Though taken by surprise, a large segment of Grenadian society welcomed the coup, and the NJM soon gained widespread local and international support.⁸ The rule of the Eric Gairy government, characterised by corruption and mismanagement, had brought the country to the brink of political and financial bankruptcy, and many saw the People’s Revolutionary Government (PRG) as a positive force to bring about needed change.



Fig. 1-2 Military barracks at True Blue, St. George after being attacked and burnt on March 13, 1979 (GNM)

With ideological and material support from Cuba, the USSR, other socialist and non-aligned states, and under the banner of international Socialism, the NJM embarked on innovative economic and social policies

⁸ Ann E. Wilder, *The Grenada Chronicles: NJM Takeover of Government, 1979*. St. George’s, Grenada: The Grenada National Museum Press, 2016.

that tackled many issues plaguing Grenadian society, with the goal of dramatically altering it to the benefit of “the masses.” The four-and-a-half years old Grenada Revolution enjoyed initial successes, stemming from the exuberance among Grenadians who, for the first time, felt that they were part of something special and larger than themselves. Foreign workers, realizing the dream of a socialist revolution, flocked to Grenada to give of their energies and contribute to the Revolution (see Fig. 1-4, 1-5, 1-6, 1-7). Confronted with growing internal opposition from critics, some of them former supporters and members, the PRG responded by arresting many as “counter revolutionaries,” even incarcerating Rastafarians at a re-education camp for illegal drug production.⁹ Added to this were economic, structural and political pressures, especially from the United States government which viewed Grenada as a threat to stability in the region.



Fig. 1-3 Radio Free Grenada on the morning of March 13, 1979 (GNM)

Internal differences, however, proved to be the bane of the Grenada Revolution. Issues over different approaches and style of leadership between Prime Minister Maurice Bishop and his deputy Bernard Coard soon surfaced, and would, over time, disastrously impact the course of the Revolution. The subsequent house arrest of PM Bishop in October 1983, his release by his supporters, and the assassinations of Bishop and his

⁹ See Ras Herb, *Rehabilitation or Death*, St. George's, Grenada: Anansi Publications, 1991.

allies led to the implosion of the Revolution, leaving the door wide open for a massive US military invasion that finally crushed the Revolution in 1983.¹⁰ It also resulted in the convictions of seventeen of the leaders who were only released from prison in 2009 after most having served twenty-five plus years.

Internal Causes

For both Fédon's Rebellion and the Grenada Revolution, internal issues were at the foundation of their grievances, and the catalyst for revolt came directly from within. Fédon's Rebellion can be viewed as an anti-discriminatory rebellion for social, political and religious rights by the French who orchestrated and led the rebellion against the British colonial government. Almost all analyses of Fédon's Rebellion to date define it as a slave revolt or a revolt against the slave system, but this analysis, however, would like to suggest a more nuanced view. Fédon's Rebellion was a revolt by French free coloureds and whites primarily to destroy the British colonial government and replace it with a pro-French Republican one, which, in all probability, would have ended slavery as was the case in Guadeloupe.¹¹ I would also contend that the rebellion of the enslaved was in support of that end, but they also orchestrated an haphazard attempt to gain their own freedom. The Grenada Revolution can be viewed as an anti-colonial, anti-capitalist revolution directly stemming from the Gairy government's persecution of the opposition, and its capitalist economic and social policies that the NJM wanted to change.

In the case of Fédon's Rebellion, it was a direct reaction to the increasingly oppressive British colonial government, particularly towards its French subjects, all occurring within an oppressive slave plantation complex.¹² Beginning with the British takeover of Grenada in 1763, the French population that remained, the "New Subjects," experienced determined efforts by the British to restrict the power and influence of their larger population. Representative government was delayed because of the fear that the French would dominate it. Once the representative system was in place, election laws made it difficult for the French to

¹⁰ Jorge Heine, "The Hero and the Apparatchik: Charismatic Leadership, Political Management and Crisis in Revolutionary Grenada," in *A Revolution Aborted: The Lessons of Grenada*, ed. Jorge Heine, Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1990.

¹¹ See letters in Garraway, *A Short Narrative*, 9-12.

¹² Edward L. Cox, "Fédon's Rebellion, 1795-96: Causes and Consequences," *Journal of Negro History* 67, 1 (1982): 7-10; Brizan, *Island of Conflict*, 59-62.

participate; it was a concerted effort to disenfranchise the French population.¹³ To hold official positions in the government, the French had to swear to the Test Act, which most viewed as a negation of their religious beliefs. The majority protested, but this religious and social discrimination continued throughout the 1760s. Even when the legal discrimination was removed, the “Old Subjects” made every attempt to thwart the participation of the French in local government. The situation got dramatically worse when the British regained the island in 1783, following four years of French interregnum, which the British characterized as “being in the most despotic manner.”¹⁴

For the French free coloureds, the situation was worse than their fellow white compatriots. Within the slave system, free coloureds and blacks were less regarded, and were more akin to third-class citizens despite their free status and often ownership of property, including enslaved. Julien Fédon, Louis La Grenade and other prominent free coloureds were representative of that group. They encountered religious, ethnic, and racial discriminations at the hands of the British population in a country where they may have once experienced a milder form of discrimination under the French. The free coloureds may have felt added pressures that made the rhetoric of revolution and the “Rights of Man,” then igniting the region, appealing. Between 1784 and 1795, the British government engaged in religious and social discriminations against its French inhabitants, especially its free coloureds and blacks. This systemic persecution only reinforced the belief that there was no relief to be achieved from within the system, cutting off all possible compromise. For the French inhabitants in Grenada in the 1790s, the revolutionary upheavals taking place in the region presented a solution to their situation, and they seized the opportunity.

In the case of the Grenada Revolution, it was a direct response to the increasingly oppressive Eric Gairy government and its social and economic policies, within a growing advocacy for ideological change in Grenada and throughout the region.¹⁵ But it was the concerted efforts by the Gairy government to stifle the opposition that created the conditions for revolt.¹⁶ At the base of its opposition, the NJM saw the Gairy government as a continuation of the colonial system and status quo it had just extricated itself from through Independence. Though Gairy had

¹³ Brizan, *Island of Conflict*, 52-7.

¹⁴ E. Gittens Knight, *The Grenada Handbook and Directory*, 1946. Barbados: The Advocate, 1946, 26.

¹⁵ Brizan, *Island of Conflict*, 384.

¹⁶ Brizan, *Island of Conflict*, 367-388.

challenged the colonial system and radically altered the course of the country with his mass revolt in 1951 and Independence in 1974, the NJM advocated more drastic changes so that a larger portion of Grenadian society, which had been exploited since slavery, could benefit.¹⁷



Fig. 1-4 First rally after the Revolution, March 1979 (GNM)

Due to its consistent opposition and growing influence, the Gairy government pursued policies that targeted the NJM members in a determined effort to block their path to power. The opposition encountered repeated harassment of their persons and organization to participate in the political process.¹⁸ The general elections of 1976 is a prime example of the lengths the ruling party pursued to block the opposition when it introduced the Newspaper Amendment Act, and other measures to limit political activities.¹⁹ Though the NJM had always regarded the Westminster political system with skepticism, the Gairy government's attempts to manipulate the electoral process only fueled their disregard and reinforced their desire to act outside of it. With many grievances against the system and the existing government, the NJM believed that its agenda would be better served by bringing down the existing system rather than working against its undemocratic tendencies and change it. Thus, like the leaders of Fédon's Rebellion, the NJM embarked on a course of rebellion to address their grievances and to create a new society in Grenada through violent revolt.

¹⁷ Brizan, *Island of Conflict*, 375-378.

¹⁸ *Report of the Duffus Commission of Inquiry into the Breakdown of Law and Order, and Police Brutality in Grenada*. Kingston, Jamaica: Duffus Commission, 1975.

¹⁹ Patrick Emmanuel, "The Grenada General Elections, 1976," *Bulletin of Eastern Caribbean Affairs* 2, 1 (1977): 1-3.

External Influences

Though the causes of both Fédon's Rebellion and the Grenada Revolution were primarily internal, they were influenced, sometimes strongly, from outside, and received material and ideological support from powerful external advocates. As detailed above, the causes of Fédon's Rebellion were decades of persecution and discriminations by the British against the French, but the turbulent political environment in the region in the 1790s aided their efforts. It is certain that the rebels were influenced by the French Revolution, the tenants of "Rights of Man," the slave revolt taking place in the French colony of St. Domingue (Haiti), and other struggles taking place in the region in the turbulent 1790s. The initial supply of arms, ammunition and finances came directly from the French Republicans at Guadeloupe under Victor Hughes where rebel leaders Charles Nogues and Jean Pierre Lavallee travelled to just days before the rebellion in Grenada.²⁰ It is evident that the rebels identified with the ideology of French Republicanism, wearing their uniforms, adopting the slogan "*Liberté, égalité ou la mort*," and used the French tri-color as their own flag.²¹ Once the rebellion got on its way, Hugues sent French Republican forces to Grenada to support the rebels, and they eventually established Port Libre (formerly Gouyave) as an administrative region under their full control.²² A close relationship also existed between Victor Hughes and some of the rebels, particularly Charles Nogues, whose son was hosted by Hugues in Guadeloupe during the rebellion. The communications between the French in Guadeloupe and St. Lucia, and rebels in Grenada provide a rare glimpse into their uneasy relationship. It reveals that though the French Republicans tried to play a greater role, the rebels, particularly Julien Fédon, may have discouraged it because he did not want checks on his own authority.²³ The external support, however, was vital to the success of the rebellion, and it proved detrimental when British forces succeeded in cutting it off.

²⁰ Garraway, *A Short Account*, 2.

²¹ Turnbull, *Narrative of the Revolt*, 15-16.

²² Thornhill, *A Narrative of the Insurrection*, Appendix, 11-13; Curtis Jacobs, "Fédon's Rebellion," in *Encyclopedia of Slave Resistance and Rebellion* 2 vols, ed. Junius P. Rodriguez. Greenwood Publishing Group, 2007, 1: 194.

²³ See La correspondances adressée par Victor Hugues à Feydon, 1795-96. Colonies C10A4, Archives Nationales, Paris; and John Debrett, *A Collection of State Papers Relative to the War Against France* (J. Debrett, 1796), v.3, 2: 170-172.

In the case of the NJM, external influences were a major stimulus, beginning with the ideology of its members. In the early 1970s, it was Maurice Bishop, Unison Whiteman, Bernard Coard and others, returning from studies in the UK and the US with new ideas of politics and government, who embarked on creating social movements to challenge what they saw as colonial exploitation of the masses. Premier Gairy, however, saw them differently: “These irresponsible malcontents, these disgruntled political frustrates coming from abroad,... coming here, metaphorically and literally hot and sweaty, and shouting ‘Power to the People.’”²⁴ They returned influenced by the Cuban Revolution, the ideology and economics of Socialism, and other anti-colonial struggles across the globe, particularly in Africa, even the Black Power and Civil Rights movements in the US and Canada where Caribbean nationals were heavily involved. These struggles reverberated throughout the English-speaking Caribbean and threatened the political status quo in the region as was the case in Trinidad in 1970, with Premier Gairy using it as a cautionary tale when he said “When your neighbours’ house is on fire, keep on wetting your own house.”²⁵



Fig. 1-5 Second rally after the Revolution, 1979 (GNM)

²⁴ Chris Searle, *Grenada: The Struggle Against Destabilization*. London: Writers & Readers Publishing Cooperative Society, 1983, 15.

²⁵ See Taimoon Stewart, *The Black Power Revolution of 1970: A Retrospective*. Barbados: Institute of Social and Economic Research, UWI, 1995; for details; Eric Gairy, “Black Power in Grenada,” Speech, Radio Grenada, 3 May 1970.

The NJM was formed in 1972 as a grassroots organization against the ruling Grenada United Labour Party of Premier Eric Gairy and the opposition Grenada National Party of business interests. It secretly became a vanguard party modelled on the Cuban Revolution and the Tanzanian Ujaama system. Following its failure to forestall Grenada's Independence through mass protest against Eric Gairy in 1974, it reluctantly participated in the 1976 general elections and became a significant member of the opposition. However, it did not abandon other options to remove the Gairy government. Leading up to the 1979 revolt, members of the NLA secretly went to Guyana, under the socialist government of PM Forbes Burnham, for military training as preparation for military action in Grenada.

Once the revolution proved successful, the new revolutionary government received direct support of military hardware and financial resources from Cuba under Fidel Castro, and other socialist countries, including the USSR and North Korea. Though the NJM criticized the US government for not responding positively to their early request for financial assistance, thus forcing them to seek that help elsewhere, they wholeheartedly identified with the ideology of Socialism as an appropriate system for Grenada's development and friendly relations with socialist countries, particularly Cuba. Within a few months of the Revolution, Cuban personnel and others from socialist countries exerted influences on the PRG, both internally and in its international relations. Hundreds of Cuban workers assisted with the construction of the international airport at Point Salines, and the PRG accepted military and educational training/scholarships in socialist countries. A strong personal relationship developed between Fidel Castro and Maurice Bishop, viewed by some as one of mentor to mentee, which may have led to a deeper involvement of the Cuban government in Grenada's internal affairs. This became a point of contention between members of the NJM and PRG, especially in the final days of the Revolution. To the very end, however, the influence of Cuba was unmistakable when "Cuban workers" stationed at the Point Salines airport construction site were called upon to defend the island in the wake of the US invasion.

Internal Struggles

Both Fédon's Rebellion and the Grenada Revolution were initially successful in carrying out their immediate objectives, so a high degree of organization, discipline and trust must have existed among the leaders of the respective revolts. In both cases, the populace was taken by surprise, as the rebels succeeded in keeping their plans secret despite having to

inform many people. The level of comradeship among the members of both groups was evident in the immediate aftermath of staging their respective events.

For the planners of Fédon's Rebellion, their organizing may have been as many as eighteen months prior. It included a diverse group, numbering as many as fifty core people, including French free coloureds and blacks, and white property owners from across the island; it does not appear that their enslaved were in on the initial plans. It wasn't until the day leading up to the rebellion that some British residents began to notice unusual activities among the rebels, but by then it was too late to act.²⁶ However, internal dissention surfaced almost immediately among the rebel leadership, culminating in the deaths in the first week of a number of rebels, including the prominent leader Jean Pierre Lavalee by a murderous rebel who Fédon immediately had shot.²⁷ Maybe the chaotic nature of Fédon's Rebellion and the precarious situation of not achieving the immediate surrender of the British brought out differences, or showed the stark diversity of ideas and personalities among the leadership. The violence created by the internal conflicts scared many of the whites who had joined the revolt out of fear for their lives in the first place. In the following months, many of them surrendered to the British, insisting that they did not join the revolt of their own free will and hoping to be given dispensation.

The hierarchy of Fédon's rebellion comprised primarily French free coloureds, free blacks, and whites. Prominent whites like Clozier D'Arcuiel, Jean Baptiste Olliviere and Chevalier du Suze played important roles in the organization and planning of the military operations and administration of the revolt. Many prominent free coloureds and blacks led military companies, including Stanislaus Besson, Joachim Philip and Charles Nogues. Fédon, as general, sat at the head of the leadership and seemed to exhibit final, almost dictatorial control, but nonetheless maintained a consultative "body" known as the "Commission of 24," and sought advice from those around him.²⁸ Many on that body, free coloureds and whites, had a personal relationship with Fédon, and were either from the town of Gouyave or the parish of St. John as was Fédon. He appeared to be always surrounded by some of the prominent whites who were,

²⁶ Hay, *A Narrative of the Insurrection*, 21-22.

²⁷ M^oMahon, *A Narrative of the Insurrection*, 29-30.

²⁸ See Hay, *A Narrative of the Insurrection*, 76 for Hay's appeals for mercy (for the British hostages who were being killed) made to Fédon's white advisors who replied that "they had no influence whatsoever over him [Fédon]."

according to Dr. Hay, his advisors.²⁹ Prominent leaders like his brother-in-law Charles Nogués was not on that body, or had left it as a rift developed between them early in the rebellion.

The origin of the dispute between Fédon and Nogués is unknown, but Goyrand, the Republican leader in St. Lucia, referred to “several individuals have desired to act a part in this revolution, who, from a spirit of jealousy, of ambition, or the insanity of pride, have endeavoured to revive prejudices condemned to profound oblivion.”³⁰ Hugues writes that “We are pained to see how divided you are; the enemy will hear of it, and will take advantage of it to fall upon you and defeat you. Let ambition give way to love of the Republic. It is impossible for you all to be in charge; obey those who command you and do not force us to use harsh measures against you. Listen to our appeals, they are for your own good.”³¹ It is not clear who Hugues is criticizing, but the letter is addressed to Fédon. The relationship between the rebels and the French Republicans deteriorated further, forcing Hugues to beg Fédon, “We had predicted, citizen, you are divided, you were overcome, thus re-join that love of the Republic to replace your ambitious desires. We want to send you forces to repair the loss that disunion has just made you.”³² With no reply from Fédon, Hugues again writes: “Our colleague has just informed us that despite our advice and our exhortations, there is still dissension among you.... We reiterate that as long as your motivation remains an ambition to wear epaulettes, and as long as your passions take precedence over your devotion to the Republic, you will suffer defeat....”³³ By October 1795 it all came to a climax when Goyrand ordered the dissolution of the so-called Commission and called Fédon to Guadeloupe to answer charges brought by Nogués and La Grange against him.³⁴ Fédon refused to report, and it appeared that Nogués, unable to continue under Fédon, decided to leave Grenada to take up a position in St. Lucia with the French Republicans. Because of Fédon’s refusal to respond to Hugues’ request, he lost the command of French troops in Grenada, but remained head of the rebel forces of free coloureds, blacks and freed slaves from Grenada.

²⁹ Hay, *A Narrative of the Insurrection*, 44.

³⁰ Debrett, *A Collection of State Papers*, 2: 172.

³¹ Hugues à Feydon, 24 November 1795, La correspondances adressée par Victor Hugues à Feydon, 1795-96.

³² Hugues à Feydon, 31 July 1795, La correspondances adressée par Victor Hugues à Feydon, 1795-96.

³³ Hugues à Feydon, 8 September 1795, La correspondances adressée par Victor Hugues à Feydon, 1795-96.

³⁴ Debrett, *A Collection of State Papers*, 2: 170-172.

For the Grenada Revolution, it would take much longer before differences surfaced and affected the course of the Revolution, ultimately derailing it. The immediate success of the revolution brought people together as the tasks at hand required that unity, and things went well for at least the first two years. Though numerous analyses of the demise of the Revolution point to ideological differences between PM Bishop, his Deputy Coard and their allies as the primary cause of the rift between them, others contend that it was more about personality differences. Maurice Bishop, charismatic, handsome and congenial, immediately became the popular leader of the Revolution and loved by everyone. His laidback, outgoing style and desire to please everyone contrasted with Coard's discipline, organized, often undiplomatic and straight forward approach towards everything. This brought them into contention as Bishop was often criticized for not adhering to decisions taken through consensus. It may have been a case more of wanting to be all things to everyone than just going against the decisions of the party, but it was an issue that vexed the members of the Central Committee.



Fig. 1-6 Maurice Bishop at La Force Estate (GNM)

This and other “failings” soon developed into a rift between the populist leader of the Revolution and the ideological wing. A direct

consequence was the resignation of Deputy Prime Minister Coard from the Central Committee, despite his staunch support among its members and across the party. Pressures on the PRG from within and especially from the outside, particularly the US government, seem to have increased the tensions within the NJM. The internal rift soon consumed the government and party, leading to an internal coup when Bishop was placed under house arrest for refusing to comply with the party's decision to create joint leadership between Bishop and Coard. The conflict over leadership led to a bloody confrontation on 19 October 1983 when the PRA attacked Bishop and supporters at Fort Rupert (currently Fort George) to retake control. PM Bishop and seven top supporters were later executed in the Fort's courtyard. Six days later the US initiated military operations against Grenada in a massive invasion that buried the Grenada Revolution.



Fig. 1-7 May Day Celebrations (GNM)

Summary

Fédon's Rebellion and the Grenada Revolution are important events in the islands' history though separated by almost 200 years. The similarities between the two events, however, are remarkable in their internal origins,