

What the Grenada REVOLUTION Can Teach Us

Ajamu Nangwaya



ZABALAZA BOOKS

www.zabalazabooks.net

"Knowledge is the key to be free!"



What the Grenada REVOLUTION Can Teach Us

by Ajamu Nangwaya

Ajama Nangwaya, Ph.D., is an educator, organiser and writer. He is an organiser with the Network for the Elimination of Police Violence.

What the Grenada Revolution Can Teach Us About People's Power
published 19 October 2016

The Grenada Revolution and Women's Struggle for Liberation
published 13 March 2016

Both texts from: <http://www.telesurtv.net/SubSecciones/en/opinion/articles/>

WWW.ZABALAZABOOKS.NET



Notes:

Caribbean revolutionaries should not be spooked by the explicit linking of feminism and the liberation of women. Socialist feminism is an ally in the struggle against capitalism, imperialism and racism. Reddock highlights the fact that the Grenada Revolution did not end the sexual division of labour, engender the equal sharing of unpaid work at home, and alter the traditional family. They served as enablers of the oppression of Grenadian women.

Caribbean revolutionaries should heed the advice of Reddock that 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” in order to fully understand the reasons for exploitation of women and the crafting of an integrated programme of action to advance women’s liberation and that of other groups.



What the Grenada Revolution Can Teach Us About People’s Power

by Ajamu Nangwaya

Imperialism’s acts of aggression cannot serve as an excuse to not actualize the self-organisation of the masses.

The collapse of the Grenadian Revolution on Oct. 19, 1983 should be carefully examined for the lessons that it might offer to organisers in the Caribbean who are currently organising with the labouring classes. If the working class shall be the architect of its liberation, the process of revolution-making should enable them to fulfil that role. Fundamental change should not be the outcome of a vanguard force that usurps the initiative of the people.

Self-emancipation of the people, as advocated by Walter Rodney and C. L. R. James, is the prudent and humanistic approach to struggle, if “all power to the people” is not simply an exercise in empty sloganeering.

The Grenadian Revolution of 1979-1983 was the most significant revolutionary political development or experimentation in the post-independence Anglophone Caribbean. This Caribbean Revolution broke away from the inherited Westminster political governance of British imperialism and embraced the ideological path of revolutionary state socialism. The latter path was a rejection of capitalism that is associated with genocide, slavery, indentureship and continued neocolonialism in the Caribbean.

Ken Boodhoo makes this assessment of the legacy of the Grenadian Revolution: "The 1979-1983 experiment in Grenada will undoubtedly be regarded by historians as one of the major progressive milestones in the region's history." This revolution was the result of centuries of resistance to capitalist exploitation, anti-African racism, oppression of women and European domination in the Caribbean. This Grenadian Revolution was greeted with enthusiasm and solidarity within the ranks of progressive forces across the Americas.

Unfortunately, internal conflicts over political direction and organisational leadership structures and practices within the New Jewel Movement (NJM) between its two major leaders, Prime Minister Maurice Bishop and Deputy Prime Minister Bernard Coard, led to a palace coup and the disarming of the revolution and the people. On 19 October 1983, the army fired on the people, executed Bishop and other leaders (Jacqueline Creft, Norris Bain, Fitzroy Bain, Unison Whiteman and Vincent Noel) and imposed a four-day round-the-clock curfew on the country. The leaders and civilians were murdered after the people released Bishop from house arrest and stormed Fort Rupert, the army's headquarters.

The Revolutionary Military Council was declared the new sheriff in town on Oct. 20, 1983 and the people were effectively chased away from the staging of history as its principal actors. This repressive development officially communicated to the people that power was never located in their mass organisations and workers, zonal, and parish councils, the erstwhile grassroots democratic organs of the Grenadian Revolution. The men and women at the top of the NJM's organisational food chain, a distinct minority, were and have always been the effective rulers of revolutionary Grenada, notwithstanding the leadership's claim that it was constructing a system wherein the people are the decision-makers.

The means that we use to pursue or achieve revolutionary outcomes will unavoidably shape the processes, relations, programs and political, economic and social institutions in the emancipated society. When some revolutionaries dismiss the general operationalising of the notion "the end justifies the means" or "by any means necessary," their concerns or critiques extend beyond an action that might not be guided by a moral code of action.

men and women." However, he made a statement that may be read as an opposition to an independent women's liberation movement.

Bishop declares in this speech:

"I know there are some women, particularly in North America, who feel that the enemy is the man and some have started to go around half-naked, calling that liberation, and others have begun to say that to liberate themselves it is necessary for them to stamp on the man. I don't believe the women of this country will accept this solution."

This revolutionary leader appealed to anti-feminist prejudices and ignorance of the different ideological tendencies within feminism. The African-American socialist feminists and lesbians in the Combahee River Collective were committed to "solidarity with progressive Black men" and rejected the "fractionalisation that white women who are separatists demand." However, they, quite rightly, embraced the need for women to organise in their autonomous organisations and movements. The nature of oppression often calls for the independent organising of the oppressed, while working in solidarity with other dominated peoples.

Bishop betrays a common error of the post-colonial period when he emphasized that "it is only when we have fought and smashed the common enemy that we are going to have the liberation of the woman." This approach was aimed at preserving unity within the state, which might be difficult to attain with women independently organising against patriarchy. According to Mies, the "'women's question' constitutes a secondary contradiction which has to be tackled, ideologically, after the main contradiction of imperialist and class relations has been solved."

The Grenada Revolution facilitated a material improvement in the lives of women in areas such as education, housing, employment opportunities in non-traditional occupations, primary health care, free books and uniforms to children, equal pay for equal work, maternal benefits, free food to families and expansion of child care centres. The PRG created a Ministry of Women's Affairs to address women's inequality. Women's participation in the government, NJM, women's organisation, the army and militia and organs of popular democracy such as the zonal and parish councils were notable accomplishments of the Grenada Revolution. However, the women's mass organisation, NOW, was an arm and channel of the state in advancing its policies.

labour nor political rights have given African women real power and autonomy.” These regimes have engaged in the rhetoric of women’s emancipation, but have fallen short in the realm of concrete action.

In state socialist countries such as China, Vietnam and the former Soviet Union, the promise of liberation has failed to live up to the expectation of women. Maria Mies examination of the condition of women in her text *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale* asserts that “what is striking in the account of women’s position in socialist countries is the similarity with women’s problem in market economies.” Ending the private ownership of property did not result in liberation of women.

Grenada’s women were active in the political mobilization of the New Jewel Movement (NJM) that ended the repressive regime of Eric Gairey and his private militia, the Mongoose Gang. Caribbean academic Rhoda Reddock boldly declares in the article *Popular Movement to ‘Mass Organisation’: The Case of the National Women’s Organisation of Grenada (NWO) 1979-1983* that the leadership of the Grenada Revolution was unmatched in its public acknowledgement of women’s role in bringing about the revolution and extended an invitation to them to participate in the “process of revolutionary transformation.”

In the December 1982 speech of Maurice Bishop at the first Congress of NWO he recognized the significant contribution of women before, during and after the revolution. Bishop outlined some of the concrete programs that have improved the lives of Grenada’s women. The political commitment of the PRG to the liberation of women was highlighted in the June 15, 1979, speech by Bishop at the conference of the Progressive Women’s Association. He acknowledged that the PRG “cannot pretend that we have done anything in a serious way at this point, to solve the objective problems facing women in society.” However, the government had started to attack the cultural beliefs, attitudes and prejudices that supported the subordination of women in society.

Bishop went to proclaim the PRG’s intention to pass laws on equal pay for equal work and maternity leave with pay, rewrite the language in relevant legislation to affirm gender equality, and dismiss ministers and civil servants who sought sexual favours in exchange for jobs. The Prime Minister informed the audience that a Women’s Desk had been created in the Ministry of Education and Social Affairs and it would be the driving force to “monitor and organise improved rights for our women.”

However, Prime Minister made a comment on women’s liberation in his PWA speech that is worth noting. He called for the unity of men and women in order to create the new society, because “there is a common enemy that faces both

These revolutionaries are preoccupied with the real fear that the means unguided by strict moral or ethical guidelines could undermine the goals and practices that are the foundation of the very society being pursued by the forces of human emancipation. With respect to the Grenadian Revolution, authoritarian means could not have given birth to the following end – the self-emancipation of the people. Effective control, initiative and power must be in the hands of the working-class in order for it to carry out the tasks associated with the development of a socialist society.

The NJM mimicked the organisational processes, structures and beliefs and spirit of the Leninist model of organising the people for revolution. It went in this direction after the failure of the series of mass protest actions of 1974 and January 1975 to overthrow the entrenched, authoritarian and repressive Eric Gairy regime, even with one mass protest that attracted 20,000 participants. The expected spontaneous uprising of the masses did not materialize and the NJM looked for other models of fomenting a successful insurrection.

After 1974, the NJM embraced the idea and practice of the Leninist vanguard party with its restrictive and exacting membership criteria, a hierarchical, commandist organisational structure and a conspiratorial, secretive ethos. This approach to the exercise of power was maintained during the tenure of the People’s Revolutionary Government of 1979-1983.

During the present period of struggle, it is critically important for organisers to centre self-emancipation or the people taking centre stage in the theorizing and practical actions that are executed in the movements for peace, dignity, justice, respect and socialism. The Grenadian Revolution has taught us that power-from-above as expressed through a vanguard party and an all-powerful state coupled with community-based consultative structures is not a substitute for the direct exercise of power by the working-class and other oppressed groups.

Based on the accumulated experience of the working-class with revolutionary or radical parties that have captured state power, it should be clear that the power to make the final economic, social and political decisions are usually sequestered in the hands of the politicians, party bosses and the bureaucracy. Today’s organisers cannot ignore the fact that top-down decision-making structures are a fundamental character of the state. The preceding state of affairs is hostile to the possibility of the people shaping the decisions that impact their lives.

The revolutionary socialist or communist society will be a stateless one. If means are ends in a state of becoming that which is self-consciously desired or planned, the state with its hierarchy, centralist nature and power-from-above tendencies cannot serve as the instrument for engendering socialism. Since

1917 to today, we have almost one hundred years of revolutionary history to examine the capacity of the state to engender the self-organisation of the masses. The venerable Caribbean Marxist C. L. R. James was also sceptical of the ability of the state to promote socialism with the self-management of the people over the workplace and the rest of society's critical institutions.

The programs, projects and institutions that emerge from the organising work of the revolutionary organisers in the Caribbean should reflect the participatory democratic or self-emancipatory principles and practices that will be found in the future socialist or communist society. The organisations and institutions of the labouring classes should be laboratories that prepare the people for the communist or anarchist society that will be classless, stateless and self-organised by the people.

Therefore, as we organise against the exploitative and alienating nature of the capitalist workplace, the revolutionary organisers and the people must embrace labour self-management as a way to get the working-class ready for a society in which capital is under the control of the workers. This self-organisation or self-emancipatory philosophy, attitude and beliefs should be extended to all areas of activities in the organising that is done in the Caribbean and the rest of the Americas.

The Grenadian Revolution has made it clear that the hierarchically organised and centralist vanguard party and the overwhelming power imbalance between the state and civil society will not give birth to a socialist society that is defined by the self-emancipation of the labouring classes. Imperialism's acts of aggression and destabilization cannot serve as an excuse to not actualize the self-organisation of the masses.



The Grenada Revolution and Women's Struggle for Liberation

by Ajamu Nangwaya

**Socialist feminism is an ally in the struggle against
capitalism, imperialism and racism.**

The Grenada Revolution, which lasted from March 13, 1979, to Oct. 25, 1983, gave the Anglophone Caribbean an example of a different developmental model. A compelling issue for radicals in this sub-region should be the approach of the People's Revolutionary Government (PRG) in fostering the liberation of Grenadian women.

In spite of women's participation in anti-colonial struggles, the record of most post-colonial governments have not been impressive on the question of women's liberation. In Maria Rosa Cutrufelli's book *Women of Africa: Roots of Oppression*, she states that women won the rights of the citizen, but that "neither her