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On October 12, 1983, Maurice Bishop, prime minister of Grenada and founding leader of the New Jewel Movement, was placed under house arrest at the orders of a clique of army, government, and party officials organized by Deputy Prime Minister Bernard Coard.

On October 19, Bishop and five other central leaders of Grenada’s revolutionary government and the New Jewel Movement were murdered in cold blood, again at the order of Coard’s clique.

On October 25, thousands of U.S. Marines and Army Rangers landed in Grenada to establish a military occupation of the island and brutally reverse the far-reaching popular advances gained as a result of the March 13, 1979, revolution.

In less than two weeks, the Grenada revolution had been betrayed, its workers’ and farmers’ government overthrown by ren-

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egades, and the island nation invaded and occupied by U.S. imperialism.

Pathfinder Press is publishing this new collection entitled *Maurice Bishop Speaks* because Bishop’s own words are the best available record of the accomplishments and inspiring perspectives of that revolution, which for four and a half years marched forward arm in arm with revolutionary Nicaragua and Cuba. Making this material accessible to the widest possible audience is an elementary responsibility of all those engaged in the struggle against world imperialism and for freedom and justice for the vast majority of humanity.

Maurice Bishop’s speeches and interviews provide political weapons not only for revolutionary-minded fighters in Central America and the Caribbean, nor even just for those in other oppressed nations of Latin America, Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. They also form part of the revolutionary continuity and political arsenal of fighters for national liberation, democracy, peace, and socialism throughout the world, including working people in the United States, Britain, Canada, and other imperialist countries. Bishop himself stressed this international significance of the Grenada revolution during a July 1980 interview reprinted here from the socialist newsmagazine, *Intercontinental Press*. The interview was conducted by Andrew Pulley, Diane Wang, and myself.

Bishop told us that the New Jewel Movement understood “the importance of progressive forces worldwide joining together. We see that struggle as being one struggle, indivisible. And what happens in Grenada, we recognize its importance for all struggles around the world.”

“We certainly place a great deal of importance on the activity, the potential, and the possibilities for the American working-class movement,” Bishop said. Not only its potential for solidarity with national liberation struggles and opposition to Washington’s war moves, but also “in terms of the potential of doing mortal damage to the international capitalist and imperialist system from within the belly of the main imperialist power on earth.”

Both in this 1980 interview, and again very forcefully in his June 1983 speech to more than 2,500 people in New York City,
Bishop emphasized the historic importance and potential impact of the Grenada revolution on the Black population of the United States. The island is 95 percent African in origin, he reminded the New York audience, and it is also English-speaking, thus facilitating direct communication with U.S. Blacks.

What Bishop wanted to communicate above all was the indissoluble connection between the battles for national liberation and socialism, and the worldwide interdependence of peoples engaged in those struggles. He understood that the March 1979 victory in Grenada, together with that in Nicaragua the following July, represented the extension of the American socialist revolution opened two decades earlier in Cuba. He told a May Day 1980 rally in Havana that “we recognize in Grenada just as the imperialists recognize, that without the Cuban revolution of 1959 there could have been no Grenadian revolution, nor Nicaraguan revolution in 1979.”

Bishop also recognized what this meant for U.S. imperialism; the stakes were very high, involving the preservation of the capitalist system of exploitation and oppression right on its own doorstep. Washington has “certainly put Cuba, Nicaragua, and Grenada as being the key countries to get at,” Bishop explained during the July 1980 interview.

“Cuba for obvious reasons. It is obviously the vanguard in this region. Nicaragua because of its tremendous importance for Central America. Everybody in Central America wants to be a Sandinista.” And Grenada, in addition to the special reasons already cited, because it was part of this unfolding revolutionary process.

As Fidel Castro put it, Grenada, Nicaragua, and Cuba were “three giants rising up to defend their right to independence, sovereignty, and justice on the very threshold of imperialism.”

The October 1983 U.S. invasion of Grenada marks the first direct use of Washington’s own military forces in the new Vietnam-style war that the U.S. rulers have begun to carry out in Nicaragua and El Salvador, as well. Rolling back the socialist revolution in the region is top priority for the U.S. capitalist class, its government, and its two political parties. That is why virtually all Democratic and Republican politicians, both liberals and conservatives, fell in line behind the Reagan administration’s militarily
successful onslaught against Grenada, despite a few initial tactical misgivings.

The world relationship of class forces has shifted further to the detriment of the U.S. imperialists over the past decade. Since their military defeat at the hands of Vietnamese liberation forces in 1973–75, and the break in one of the longest capitalist economic booms, the U.S. rulers have sustained further blows—in Indochina, Iran, and in Central America and the Caribbean.

These blows have increased the political price Washington will pay at home and internationally when it directly uses U.S. troops and planes against revolutionary struggles. Opposition to military interventions abroad, which became widespread among U.S. working people during the Vietnam War, will come more quickly and go deeper as the deaths and setbacks of the next war unfold. Recognition that this will occur has put important obstacles in Washington’s path. It has already been of decisive importance to the workers and peasants of Nicaragua, Grenada, El Salvador, and Cuba. It has bought them precious time to consolidate their revolutions and to prepare to defend their conquests against the inevitable escalation of Washington’s aggression.

The U.S. rulers, however, do not intend to wait until they have achieved majority support at home before launching military action against the Central American and Caribbean revolutions. They cannot accept the extension of the socialist revolution to Nicaragua, then El Salvador, followed by other countries. For Washington, the events that opened wide the door to an invasion of Grenada created a golden opportunity to make a first decisive move. The prior beheading of the revolutionary forces and disarming of the people there meant that military victory would come relatively cheap in U.S. lives and dollars. The accomplished fact of the invasion was then used to whip up greater support for Washington’s political and military objectives. The justifications for the invasion were presented after it had already taken place. The propaganda of the deed came first, then propaganda of the word.

The response in the United States to the invasion showed that such actions by the rulers can succeed, at least for a time, in spreading confusion and even winning an important measure of accep-
tance. At the same time, the polarized character of the response, the debates and discussions in thousands of workplaces, and the immediate nationwide protests against the invasion all testified to the profound changes in consciousness of the U.S. working class over the past decade. These changes are the result not only of the Vietnam War, but also of escalating attacks on jobs, living conditions, racial equality, and political rights in the United States.

Polls confirming majority opposition to U.S. military intervention in Central America will not stop Washington from aiding the counterrevolutionary war already under way against Nicaragua and the Salvadoran freedom fighters. Nor will antiwar opinion alone halt the steady buildup of U.S. military forces in Honduras and throughout the region, or the use of these U.S. troops, planes, and ships in what could escalate into a new Vietnam-style war.

But the changed political consciousness of the U.S. working class and labor movement will play a much more decisive role much more rapidly than even during the late stages of the Vietnam War in helping to ensure defeat of the U.S. invading forces and victory for the workers and peasants of those countries.

That is one reason why Nicaraguan leader Tomás Borge told visiting Canadian trade unionists last summer that while he was “not optimistic in regards to peace,” he was “absolutely optimistic in terms of victory.”

Behind Borge’s confidence in victory is his conviction that the armed workers and peasants of Nicaragua are determined to defend their revolution, their social conquests, and their national sovereignty.

Prior to the events culminating in the arrest and subsequent murder of Bishop and other NJM leaders, this same conviction about the readiness of the Grenadian workers and farmers to defend their social gains gave reason for confidence that if imperialism ever invaded, it could only conquer after a mighty battle. As Bishop often warned, it would be far easier for U.S. invaders to come onto Grenada than to get off it alive.

“As we begin the fourth year of our revolution,” Bishop told the third anniversary rally on March 13, 1982, “it is very clear that the great strength of the revolution, first and foremost, lies
in the unbreakable link between the masses and the party; be-

tween the masses and the government; between the masses and

the state. That is what gives our revolution invincible force, be-

cause the masses see the party, see the state and the government

as theirs; not something foreign or strange, or apart or isolated

from them, but living, throbbing entities that embody their aspi-

rations, their interests, and their hopes.”

When the U.S. invasion actually came October 25, however, 

Grenada’s workers’ and farmers’ government had already been

overthrown thirteen days earlier. On October 12, the Coard group

placed Maurice Bishop under house arrest and organized to use

whatever deadly force was necessary to establish its own total

domination. One week later, the revolution suffered another dev-

astating blow, when Bishop, five other NJM leaders, and other

Grenadians were gunned down by Coard’s supporters. The very

first proclamation of the new, self-appointed “Revolutionary Mili-

tary Council” was a four-day round-the-clock curfew, with the

warning that violators would be “shot on sight.” The entire popu-

lation of Grenada was placed under house arrest.

“In our view, Coard’s group objectively destroyed the revolu-

tion and opened the door to imperialist aggression,” President Fi-

del Castro explained to more than 1 million people gathered in

Havana November 14 to honor the Cuban volunteer construction

workers killed during the U.S. invasion of Grenada.

“As soon as the internal dissensions, which came to light on

October 12, became known,” Castro explained, “the Yankee im-

perialists decided to invade.”

As a result of these events, Castro said, the new Grenadian

government had become “morally indefensible. And, since the

party, the government, and the army had divorced themselves from

the people, it was also impossible to defend the nation militarily, 

because a revolutionary war is only feasible and justifiable when

united with the people.”

The U.S. imperialists, Castro said, “wanted to kill the symbol

of the Grenadian revolution, but the symbol was already dead. 

The Grenadian revolutionaries themselves destroyed it with their

split and their colossal errors.
"We believe that, after the death of Bishop and his closest comrades, after the army fired on the people, and after the party and the government divorced themselves from the masses and isolated themselves from the world, the Grenadian revolutionary process could not survive.

"In its efforts to destroy a symbol," he said, "the United States killed a corpse and brought the symbol back to life at the same time."

Imperialism brought the Grenada revolution to the attention of millions of workers and farmers around the world. It had to try to destroy the example of that revolution, to obliterate the "symbol" it had become. But the lessons contained in this collection, *Maurice Bishop Speaks*, prove that this example has importance far beyond Grenada and the Caribbean. These are *living* lessons for those committed to learning from and continuing the worldwide fight that Maurice Bishop was part of.

**Grenada’s workers’ and farmers’ government**

As Cuban journalist Arnaldo Hutchinson explains in the historical review of Grenada that follows this introduction, the island had been a colony—first of France, later Britain—for more than 300 years prior to obtaining formal political independence in 1974. The French colonialists exterminated the native Carib and Arawak Indian population, replacing it with slave labor shipped in chains from Africa. Britain maintained Grenada as a source of agricultural products processed and packaged by British companies, which walked off with virtually all the profits. Little industry was permitted to develop on the island beyond tiny handicraft workshops, and the lush and fertile island was kept dependent on imported food. A small number of plantation owners and prosperous merchants served the colonial power as a base of local support and stability.

Little changed for the people following independence. The neocolonial government of dictator Eric Gairy, already ensconced under direct colonial administration, remained in power. In the early 1950s, Gairy had won wide popular support as a leader of the fight for independence and to unionize agricultural workers.
He had subsequently misused his influence, however, to sell out Grenada’s working people and build up his own holdings in real estate, tourism, and commerce. His government served the profit needs of a handful of wealthy Grenadians, above all his own. The island’s economy remained subordinate to British, Canadian, and U.S. finance capital. Gairy used the government to gain an edge on his local business competitors and advance his own personal interests and eccentric obsessions. He pushed through antistrike and other repressive measures. To defend his corrupt and exploitative regime in the face of rising protests, Gairy unleashed the thugs of his feared and hated Mongoose Gang to murder and brutalize opponents.

In 1973 the New Jewel Movement was formed, primarily through the merger of two organizations that had been established the previous year: the Movement for Assemblies of the People (MAP), whose best-known leader was Maurice Bishop, and the Joint Endeavour for Welfare, Education and Liberation (JEWEL), whose most prominent spokesperson was Unison Whiteman. The new organization quickly showed its capacity to mobilize mass support through two rallies of more than 10,000 people each that same year. Over the rest of the decade, the NJM helped initiate and lead repeated struggles for democratic rights, against imperialist domination, and for improved conditions for workers and farmers. NJM members won leading positions in several island trade unions, as well as three seats in Grenada’s parliament.

Maurice Bishop and Unison Whiteman explained the NJM’s political evolution and perspectives in a 1977 interview with Cuba’s main weekly magazine, Bohemia, retranslated into English for this collection. The initial political inspiration for the organization, Bishop said, came from “the ideas of ‘Black Power’ that developed in the United States and the freedom struggle of the African people in such places as Angola, Mozambique, and Guinea-Bissau.”

“But unquestionably,” Bishop added, “through the Cuban experience we got to see scientific socialism close up.” This, above all, he explained, “has been teaching us, on the practical level of day-to-day political struggle, the relevance of socialism as the only solution to our problems. Our party began to develop along Marxist
lines in 1974, when we began to study the theory of scientific socialism.”

In the weeks leading up to March 13, 1979, NJM leaders learned of a plot by Gairy to assassinate them while he was out of the country. The revolutionists thwarted the planned massacre by organizing a successful armed takeover of the True Blue army barracks and of the island’s sole radio station. An appeal for mass support over the renamed Radio Free Grenada brought the people into the streets by the tens of thousands, occupying the police station and other strategic points and ensuring victory.

The revolutionary government born in this triumphant popular insurrection was politically independent of both the imperialists and local Grenadian capitalists and plantation owners, basing itself instead on the workers and farmers. The New Jewel Movement took the initiative in establishing a People’s Revolutionary Government (PRG), composed primarily of NJM leaders but also of representatives from other sectors of the anti-Gairy opposition, including some professionals and businessmen. Maurice Bishop became prime minister.

The New Jewel Movement immediately carried out a measure proven by history to be indispensable to the survival and advance of every genuine workers’ and farmers’ revolution. As Bishop explained in a 1981 interview with Cuba’s Granma Weekly Review, “It is our firm belief that no revolution has a right to call itself that if it does not have or does not develop a capacity to defend itself. This is why the Gairy army was disbanded and a new army, the People’s Revolutionary Army, was created. This is also why we have been building the People’s Revolutionary Militia so that the people of our country will themselves be involved in the defense of what they have fought for and what they are trying to build.”

The March 1979 revolution was a radical popular uprising. In its direct impetus and immediate tasks, it was a democratic, anti-oligarchical, anti-imperialist revolution. Like the Cuban revolution twenty years earlier, and the Nicaraguan revolution a few months later, however, the Grenada revolution was at the same time profoundly anticapitalist from the outset. Deeply influenced
by the Cuban revolution, the NJM leaders recognized that consistent efforts to carry out democratic tasks and throw off imperialist domination would inevitably bring the workers and farmers into conflict with the profit needs of both foreign and local capitalists.

Starting from the organization and mobilization of Grenada’s working people to combat imperialist oppression and establish democratic liberties, the new government began laying the foundation for working people to carry out the transition from the domination of capitalist property relations to the establishment of a workers’ state based on state-owned industry, economic planning, and a government monopoly of foreign trade. That was how the Cuban revolution had developed, making possible enormous gains for the Cuban workers and peasants in education, health, life expectancy, elimination of discrimination against Blacks and women, and growing democratic participation in administering their own affairs.

That is what the New Jewel Movement set out to achieve on March 13, 1979. “With the working people we made our popular, anti-imperialist, and democratic revolution,” Bishop explained. “With them we will build and advance to socialism and final victory.”

The new workers’ and farmers’ government was an indispensable instrument at the service of the Grenadian masses to deepen their mobilization, organization, education, and class consciousness. It put an end to the political dictatorship of the imperialist-backed capitalist minority in Grenada, replacing it with the opening stage of what Marxists call the dictatorship of the proletariat—that is, political rule by, and in the class interests of, the workers and poor farmers, the laboring majority.

The Grenadian capitalists, landowners, and some imperialist interests retained substantial property holdings in agriculture, real estate, commerce, tourism, and industry. But they no longer held political power. They could no longer dictate that the government and state in Grenada would act to defend profits over the needs of the workers and farmers.

Still ahead of the revolution was the task of breaking the eco-
nomic power of the remaining big capitalists and landlords. Bishop and the NJM leadership correctly sought to lead this transition in a manner that would maximize development of productive jobs and social benefits, and minimize unnecessary hardship for working people.

Following the house arrest and subsequent murder of Maurice Bishop, the big-business press in the United States and elsewhere began peddling speculation that this course carried out under Bishop’s leadership had been too “moderate” for “more Marxist” figures such as Coard, and had not been to the liking of Cuba either.

First, there is no indication that any explicit fundamental economic or social policy question was at the root of the betrayal by Coard and other NJM renegades. The factors behind their treachery will be discussed shortly.

Second, there is no evidence that Cuban leaders disagreed with the “mixed economy” course followed by Bishop and the NJM. More importantly, the Cubans would not have meddled in the internal affairs of the Grenadian government and party even if such differences had existed.

As Fidel Castro explained in his November 14 speech, reprinted as an appendix in this book, “Socioeconomically, Grenada was actually advancing satisfactorily. The people had received many benefits, in spite of the hostile policy of the United States, and Grenada’s Gross National Product was growing at a good rate in the midst of the world crisis.

“Bishop was not an extremist,” Castro said. “Rather he was a true revolutionary—conscientious and honest. Far from disagreeing with his intelligent and realistic policy, we fully sympathized with it, since it was rigorously adapted to his country’s specific conditions and possibilities.”

Those “specific conditions and possibilities” in Grenada involved advancing the socialist course charted by the New Jewel Movement in the face of enormous objective problems. Grenada’s revenues were largely dependent on the export of three agricultural commodities—bananas, cocoa, and nutmeg—and on tourism and the wholesale and retail trade generated by it. The revolution met
intense economic and military pressure from U.S. imperialism right from the outset. Moreover, Grenada is a very small island of some 110,000 people, with very little industry and a small working class.

All this created objective limits to the pace of economic development needed to undergird permanent advances in social conditions and to free the country from imperialist domination and the legacy of colonial oppression. Moreover, the revolution came at a time when the demand and prices for its agricultural products were slumping on the world market, while outlays for needed industrial, consumer, and energy imports were steadily climbing.

The NJM leaders understood that it would take organization, education, and discipline for the working class to prepare itself and its allies, the small farmers, to administer the entire society and all the industrial, agricultural, and commercial enterprises that made it up. It would take time for the new government to build up an infrastructure of roads, new plant and equipment, state farms and cooperatives, and administrative and scientific know-how to lay a solid basis to begin development along socialist lines. Even over the longer haul, there were no plans to expropriate small shops or tourist homes, let alone small farms.

The revolutionary leaders of the Nicaraguan workers’ and farmers’ government, too, have so far left many shops, factories, and agricultural holdings in private hands, while declaring socialist property relations to be their goal and taking important steps toward a workers’ state as they consolidate their workers’ and peasants’ government.

Of course, for a revolutionary leadership to follow this path means facing the challenge and responsibility to organize working people to advance their own class interests in the ongoing struggle between exploiters and exploited. Capitalists and landlords can be expected to engage in speculation, black-market operations, and other profiteering—even sabotage and decapitalization. They will use their remaining economic clout to attempt to rebuild their lost political power.

The question for a revolutionary leadership of the working class in any such situation is not how quickly in the abstract to move toward expropriation. The tempo and methods necessary for car-
rying out a fundamental social transformation are determined by objective material realities and class relations. Acting on a preconceived schema could bring the economy to a screeching halt, send potential allies of the workers fleeing to the counterrevolution, and decimate and demoralize the working class and poor farmers themselves.

A nationalized factory won’t produce more than a privately owned one if the skills don’t yet exist to run it or if sufficient resources have not yet been accumulated to invest in new equipment, raw materials, upkeep, and wages. An expropriated foreign bank won’t marshal more funds for socialist construction if the bank’s assets were largely kept outside the country and the impact of the expropriation is to cut off access to grants and loans from capitalist governments and financial institutions before alternative aid has been secured. An expropriated plantation will neither provide decent lives for the landless nor provide products needed for export income until the government can provide the credit, tools, fertilizer, and elementary farming skills to carry out a successful agrarian reform. And expropriating the whole thing will produce nothing but chaos until at least minimal methods of control, accounting, and planning can be instituted from the individual farm and enterprise up to the national level.

Even after the workers and farmers hold state power, in other words, wealth is still produced by applying human labor to land, machinery, and raw materials, not by applying signatures to decrees.

As Bishop explained in the July 1980 interview with Intercontinental Press, it is wrong to think that “a revolution is like instant coffee; you just throw it in a cup and it comes out presto.”

The challenge confronting the revolutionary leadership in Grenada was how to prepare, educate, and organize the working population to run that society given the existing material conditions in that small country. The answers could only be determined by a concrete assessment of the level of Grenada’s economic and social development; the political relationship of class forces at home and internationally; the prospects for economic assistance from the USSR, Cuba, and other workers’ states and
from other sources; the class consciousness and organization of the working class; and the firmness of its alliance with working farmers and other nonproletarian working people.

That required political leadership capacity and experience, not ultraleft haste and administrative methods.

Two years prior to the revolution, Maurice Bishop presented a sober but optimistic assessment of the prospects facing Grenadian socialists in the 1977 interview with the Cuban magazine Bohemia.

“Socialism is the future we would like to see in Grenada,” Bishop explained in that interview. “At present the reality is that the most backward forms of capitalist exploitation exist in Grenada. We have to remember that Grenada—with its small territory, high unemployment, great poverty and misery, with the small size and low level of consciousness of its working class, with all its commercial ties to imperialism, and with a profoundly repressive government—must accomplish democratic advances in step with the march of the other countries of the region.

“We know how poor and backward our country is,” Bishop said. “And we know how difficult it would be to resist the general economic and political pressures that imperialism would unleash against Grenada if it tried to break the bonds of domination without first making serious attempts to develop true and significant links with the socialist camp.

“However, despite all the difficulties,” he concluded, “we feel that the perspectives for the cause of social revolution in Grenada are good.”

Two years later, the New Jewel Movement would begin to put in practice the socialist course it had charted for Grenada.

Bishop, Whiteman, and other NJM leaders were quite aware of the snares and traps involved in leading a social revolution in tiny and poor Grenada. One conceivable response to this recognition could have been to conclude, as many “official” Communist parties have done in the colonial world, that the workers and farmers are simply not ready to take power there. That the only “realizable” goals must be limited to democratic reforms, and therefore the capitalist class or some sector of it must still play the leading role in any revolutionary government.
That was not the response of the New Jewel Movement, however. Bishop and the other NJM leaders correctly saw the Grenada revolution as part of the world struggle against imperialism, and for national liberation and socialism. They had the courage to take the power and chart a course toward the construction of socialism. But they also had the political sense to understand the real conditions and immediate tasks in Grenada, as well as the steps needed to prepare the working class and its allies to rebuild their society on the foundation of state property and democratic planning.

The Russian experience

The Grenadian revolutionists, of course, were not the first to confront the difficult tasks of leading the working class and its allies through the transition from the decaying capitalist social system toward socialism. On a world scale, the workers’ first historical experience in this regard was the Russian revolution.

In 1919 the new Soviet government took the initiative in launching the Communist International. During its first five years as a revolutionary leadership of the world working class, the Comintern, as it was called for short, discussed the lessons of this first experience in conquering and wielding power; it drew important conclusions for revolutionary strategy and tactics. Extensive discussions of this question were held at the Comintern’s fourth world congress in December 1922, and at a meeting of its international executive committee the following July.

At the July 1923 gathering, a resolution on workers’ and farmers’ governments was adopted. It stressed that following the conquest of power, the working class must remember “the necessity to harmonize its movements with the sentiments of the peasantry in their respective countries, to establish a correct coordination between the victorious proletariat and the peasantry, and to observe a rational policy in the gradual introduction of the economic measures of the proletariat, such as was arrived at by the victorious proletariat of Russia in that period of the Russian revolution which is called the New Economic Policy.”

What was Russia’s New Economic Policy? Why in his speech to the 1922 Comintern congress did Bolshevik leader V.I. Lenin
say that the NEP was rich in “important practical conclusions for the Communist International” and “of first-rate importance to all the Communist parties”?

Lenin explained that following the October 1917 victory, the new Soviet government had “made an attempt to pass, as gradually as possible, breaking up as little of the old as possible, to the new social relations. . . .”

By mid-1918, however, the onslaught of imperialist invasion and full-scale civil war had forced the Russian revolutionary leaders to abandon this initial course toward as efficient and gradual as possible a transformation of property relations. Faced with escalating economic sabotage by the capitalists and the imperatives of producing food and industrial goods for the war, the Bolsheviks carried out sweeping nationalizations and centralized virtually all trade through the state.

By the end of 1920, however, both domestic counterrevolutionary forces and imperialist invaders had been largely defeated by the new Red Army. On the other hand, the capitalists elsewhere in Europe had succeeded in defeating revolutionary struggles in Hungary, Germany, and Italy, tightening the isolation of the world’s first workers’ state. Moreover, the civil war had taken a heavy toll inside Russia. Many of the most class-conscious workers and poor peasants, who were the vanguard of the Red Army soldiers, had fallen in battle or died from disease and starvation at the front. The economic and social dislocation from the war was exacerbated by drought and famine.

As Lenin explained at the Comintern’s 1922 congress, “after we had passed through the most important stage of the Civil War—and passed through it victoriously—we felt the impact of a grave—I think it was the gravest—internal political crisis in Soviet Russia.

“This internal crisis,” Lenin said, “brought to light discontent not only among a considerable section of the peasantry but also among the workers. This was the first and, I hope, the last time in the history of Soviet Russia that feeling ran against us among large masses of peasants, not consciously but instinctively.”

The source of this crisis, Lenin explained, was not just the war-caused destruction. It was also a consequence of the too-rapid eco-
nomic and social transformations that had been imposed on the young workers’ and farmers’ republic by its struggle for survival. While the peasants had supported this fight against the reimposition of landlordism and tsarism, their alliance with the working class was now near the breaking point as a result of the policies of the previous few years. And this alliance, Lenin stressed, was key to the defense of the Soviet republic and its advance toward socialism.

“In this respect,” Lenin said at the party’s tenth congress in 1921, “we are very much to blame for having gone too far; we overdid the nationalisation of industry and trade, clamping down on local exchange of commodities. Was that a mistake? It certainly was.”

Lenin explained this again the following year at the fourth Comintern congress. “The reason for [the crisis],” he said, “was that in our economic offensive we had run too far ahead, that we had not provided ourselves with adequate resources, that the masses sensed what we ourselves were not then able to formulate consciously but what we admitted soon after, a few weeks later, namely, that the direct transition to purely socialist forms, to purely socialist distribution, was beyond our available strength, and that if we were unable to effect a retreat so as to confine ourselves to easier tasks, we would face disaster.”

That was the origin of the New Economic Policy adopted by the Russian revolutionists in early 1921. The NEP made it possible for peasants to sell a portion of their produce on the open market inside Russia. Restrictions on private trade were relaxed to supplement state-organized exchanges. To help revive industrial production, the Soviet republic sought to lease nationalized factories, mines, forests, and oil fields to foreign and domestic capitalists.

In introducing the NEP, a resolution adopted by the fourth congress explained, “the Soviet government is following an economic path which it would doubtless have pursued in 1918–19 had not the implacable demands of Civil War obliged it to expropriate the bourgeoisie at one blow. . . .” The resolution was drafted on behalf of the Russian delegation by Comintern leader Leon Trotsky.

Such measures, Lenin pointed out, were even more important
for nations less economically advanced than Russia itself. In a 1921 letter to communists in Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, and several other nations oppressed under the old tsarist empire, Lenin advised: “You will need to practise more moderation and caution, and show more readiness to make concessions to the petty bourgeoisie, the intelligentsia, and particularly the peasantry. You must make the swiftest, most intense and all possible economic use of the capitalist West through a policy of concessions and trade.”

In other words, Lenin explained, these allied soviet republics must “effect a slower, more cautious and more systematic transition to socialism.”

On the basis of the NEP experience, Lenin drew some general conclusions for Marxist revolutionists in an article written at the end of 1921. “True revolutionaries have mostly come a cropper,” he said, “when they began to write ‘revolution’ with a capital R, to elevate ‘revolution’ to something almost divine, to lose their heads, to lose the ability to reflect, weigh and ascertain in the coolest and most dispassionate manner . . . at what moment, under what circumstances and in which sphere you must turn to reformist action.”

The last two words of Lenin’s statement may appear a bit jarring. What did he mean by recommending “reformist action”? Lenin explained himself as follows:

“Marxism alone has precisely and correctly defined the relations of reform to revolution, although Marx was able to see this relation from only one aspect—under the conditions preceding the first to any extent permanent and lasting victory of the proletariat, if only in one country. Under those conditions,” Lenin stressed, “the basis of the proper relation was that reforms are a by-product of the revolutionary class struggle of the proletariat. Throughout the capitalist world this relation is the foundation of the revolutionary tactics of the proletariat—the ABC.”

“After the victory of the proletariat,” however, Lenin said, “if only in one country, something new enters into the relation between reforms and revolution. In principle, it is the same as before, but a change in form takes place.” Under such conditions, he said, reforms can represent “a necessary and legitimate breathing
space when, after the utmost exertion of effort, it becomes obvi-
ous that sufficient strength is lacking for the revolutionary ac-
complishment of some transition or another.”

Based on the experience of the world’s first proletarian revolu-
tion, the Comintern’s fourth congress drew some conclusions about
the tasks of a victorious workers’ and farmers’ government, which
it defined as a government which “is born out of struggle of the
masses, is supported by workers’ bodies which are capable of fight-
ing, bodies created by the most oppressed sections of the working
masses.”

“The overriding tasks” of such a government, the congress reso-
lation on tactics explained, “must be to arm the proletariat, to
disarm bourgeois, counterrevolutionary organizations, to intro-
duce the control of production, to transfer the main burden of
taxation to the rich, and to break the resistance of the counter-
revolutionary bourgeoisie.”

Accomplishments of the Grenada revolution

How had Grenada’s workers’ and farmers’ government mea-
sured up to these kinds of challenges during its first four and a
half years? The record shows that it had begun to do all this and
more. The steps by the New Jewel Movement to dismantle the old
state apparatus and army and replace it with a new government,
army, and militia have already been explained. What about other
political, social, and economic gains?

All of Gairy’s repressive legislation was wiped off the books.
New laws were adopted making it compulsory for employers to
recognize unions and ensuring the right to strike. As a result,
membership in the island’s trade unions rose from about 30 per-
cent of the labor force before the revolution to some 90 percent.
Other organizations won thousands of members, as well. These
included the National Women’s Organisation, the National Youth
Organisation, and the Productive Farmers’ Union.

Along with these organizations, other bodies were formed at
the initiative of the NJM leadership to begin the hard work of
increasing the democratic involvement of working people in de-
termining and administering the affairs of their country. Coun-
Councils were set up in workplaces, parishes, villages, and neighborhoods. These councils discussed and debated proposed government policies, including the nation’s 1982 and 1983 budget and plan. They had the power to summon government ministers and other officials to appear before them to be held accountable for their policies.

The New Jewel Movement leaders understood that these mass organizations and councils could not work miracles. Given the small size of Grenada’s working class and the poverty and lack of education bequeathed by centuries of colonial oppression, it would take hard work and consistent attention to achieve effective participation by working people in running the affairs of their society. It was not enough to set up councils, encourage people to attend, and then hope the rest would take care of itself.

In order to focus attention on this important challenge, the New Jewel Movement designated 1983 the Year of Academic and Political Education. In his January 1983 speech launching this, Prime Minister Bishop explained that “our people must develop in the new year a mental grasp on the true nature of the international capitalist crisis which is holding back the progress of our revolution and the development of all poor countries in the world. They must know the causes and origins of this crisis. They must see clearly the link between politics and economics, between imperialist exploitation and persistent poverty, between the mad buildup of arms by imperialism and the economic crisis.

“With their political consciousness raised and broadened,” Bishop explained, “our people will better understand the necessity to join and to strengthen those mass organizations and trade unions that already exist. Political education will help to identify from the ranks of our working people the future leaders of the revolution and it will help to prepare the working class to assume its historic role of transforming Grenada from backwardness and dependency to genuine economic independence.”

At his public meeting in New York City in June 1983, Bishop announced that preparation of a draft constitution had begun, laying the groundwork for future island-wide elections. These elections, he stressed, would not replace but instead “institutionalize
and entrench the systems of popular democracy” already established. The goal was the “involvement of our people in a participatory way from day to day and week to week,” not “just the right to put an ‘X’ next to Tweedledum or Tweedledee” every few years, as in elections in the United States, Canada, Britain, or many East Caribbean islands.

On the economic front, Grenada’s workers’ and farmers’ government had also registered impressive achievements. In 1982 its Gross National Product grew by 5.5 percent, for a total increase of nearly 14 percent since the 1979 revolution. This was at a time when the world capitalist system was suffering its worst downturn since the 1930s and the economies of most countries in the Western Hemisphere, including other Eastern Caribbean islands, were stagnating or declining.

Moreover, in line with the revolution’s socialist goals, the state sector was increasingly taking the lead in the island’s economic development. The single most ambitious government project was the new international airport to promote tourism and expedite export and import trade. Another priority was upgrading development of the island’s agriculture and related “agro-industries.” This involved both crop rehabilitation and the construction of factories to process, package, and market these products. Other major projects included new roads, including vital feeder roads to transport farm produce; several dozen buses for the island’s first public transportation system; upgrading water, telephone, and electrical services, now all state-owned; and hotel and tourism development.

Whereas Gairy had spent only EC$8 million on such development projects the year before the revolution, the PRG had laid out EC$237 million since March 1979, which is equivalent to almost U.S.$88 million. In 1982, the thirty-two new state-owned enterprises produced about one-quarter of all goods and services on the island.

As Bishop cautioned in the July 1980 interview with Intercontinental Press, however, the bottom line for the progress of a workers’ and farmers’ government has to be measured, “Not in terms of how many industries you have or how many hotels you have
when the profits are going to a very tiny elite, but in terms of what benefits are truly getting to the masses.” The government, he said, must meet “the basic needs of the population—jobs, health, housing, food, clothing.”

Here, too, the Grenada revolution had important accomplishments to its credit.

Real wages had risen by 10 percent over the 1981–82 period. Living standards actually improved more than suggested by this figure. For one thing, unemployment had fallen from about 50 percent to 12 percent during the first four years of the revolution, bringing higher family income. Most important, there had been a dramatic increase in the “social wage”—that is, the vital services and commodities available free or at low cost, as a right, to the population. In all, more than one-third of the country’s operating budget went to health and education.

A land reform law empowered the government to take out a compulsory ten-year lease on any land above 100 acres that was underutilized to put it into production on a cooperative or state-owned basis. The government had expanded the supply of low-interest loans to small farmers and farm cooperatives and also initiated programs to help guarantee markets for their produce. A state-run tractor pool of forty-five machines was established, and the government sought to advance modern farming by establishing four new agricultural training schools, as well. These measures had begun not only to raise the income of farmers and agricultural workers, but also to provide jobs for the unemployed.

Medical and dental care became free. Medicine was provided without charge for hospital patients and at low cost for others. Clinics were built throughout Grenada, the central hospital modernized, and the number of doctors and dentists more than doubled.

Secondary school became a right for all Grenadians; under Gairy, tuition was required, making education a privilege for the rich. Free books, school uniforms, and hot lunches were provided to elementary school children from low-income families. In addition, hundreds of students received scholarships for university or advanced technical education, never before available to any but the wealthiest Grenadians. An adult education program had al-
ready made strides toward combating illiteracy, with the aim of wiping it out by 1985.

Free milk was distributed to thousands of families. Price controls were imposed on basic imported items such as sugar and cooking oil.

Some 75 percent of families had received interest-free loans and low-cost materials to repair their homes. The newly opened Sandino Housing Plant had gone into production with a potential output of 500 prefabricated housing units each year.

Some 30 percent of workers were exempted from taxation altogether, while new taxes and fees were imposed on local companies, import-export merchants, and profits of foreign-owned firms not reinvested in Grenada.

A social insurance plan was set up, Grenada’s first on a national scale, covering workers employed in both private and public sectors. Benefits included retirement pensions, sickness and disability pay, maternity benefits, and payments to dependents of the deceased.

Special attention was placed on upgrading the rights and opportunities of Grenadian women. Legislation was adopted and implemented against sexual harassment of working women. Women workers were guaranteed equal pay for equal work. A maternity leave law compelled employers to give time off, most of it at full pay, to women both before and after childbirth.

Social programs such as these were a political choice that followed from the class interests the government defended. These programs were vital to the well-being of Grenadian workers and farmers. Since it is they who produce the island’s wealth, their improved health, education, and welfare was an investment in Grenada’s most important resource—its working people.

The costs and skills required for these social benefits and development projects would have put them out of reach for many years if Grenada had been limited to its own means. But it received substantial foreign aid. The most generous contributors were the government and people of Cuba. As Fidel Castro explained November 14, “Even though Cuba is a small underdeveloped country, it was able to help Grenada considerably, because our efforts—
which were modest in quantity though high in quality—meant a
lot for a country less than 400 square kilometers in size, with a
population of just over 100,000."

Castro reported that the total over four years amounted to some
$550 for every Grenadian. The biggest single Cuban contribution
came in the form of materials, equipment, designs, and skilled
volunteer construction workers for the Point Salines airport project.
But Cuba also provided doctors, teachers, and technicians; financed
and constructed the housing plant and other industrial projects;
helped establish a fisheries school and fishing fleet; and assisted in
training a professional army to safeguard the revolution’s gains.

Other assistance came from Libya, Syria, the Soviet Union,
several Eastern European workers’ states, and North Korea. The
U.S. government not only refused aid to Grenada, but also sought
to prevent other capitalist governments and international finan-
cial institutions from providing any. Despite such sabotage, Gre-
nada did get considerable help from the European Development
Bank and from the Canadian and other governments.

Early on in the revolution, a U.S. diplomat offered Grenada a
paltry $5,000—if the new government pledged not to develop eco-
nomic or diplomatic relations with Cuba. The Grenadian revolu-
tionists indignantly rejected this blackmail. Prime Minister Bishop
gave a speech to the island’s working people explaining that while
the new government wanted cordial relations with Washington,
“Grenada is no longer in anybody’s backyard!” Grenada was a
sovereign nation, he said, and would make up its own mind about
both its affairs at home and its friends abroad.

From the start, the revolutionary government pursued an in-
ternationalist course. It established the warmest fraternal bonds
with the government, leadership, and people of revolutionary Cuba
and Nicaragua. Despite its own pressing tasks and limited cadres,
the PRG sent young volunteer Grenadians to help with the lit-
eracy crusade on Nicaragua’s English-speaking Atlantic Coast. It
mobilized and educated Grenadians in solidarity with liberation
struggles in the Caribbean and Central America, South America,
Africa, Asia, the Mideast, and throughout the world. It joined the
Movement of Nonaligned Countries. It established diplomatic and
trade relations with Vietnam, the Soviet Union, the Eastern Euro-
pean workers’ states, and North Korea.

“Because our own struggle is internationalist,” Bishop said
during the July 1980 interview, “we have over the years been giv-
ing our fullest support to all international causes that demand
such support. We see that as our internationalist duty.”

Washington seeks ‘to wipe out all vestiges’

These accomplishments set an example for the entire Carib-
bean and Central America, for Blacks and other working people in
the United States, Britain, and Canada, and for the oppressed and
exploited everywhere. They vindicated Fidel Castro’s description
of Grenada as “a big revolution in a small country.” With each
passing year, not only did Grenada’s achievements grow, but also
their power of attraction beyond its shores. Despite capitalist me-
dia efforts to blockade the truth, more and more people were learn-
ing about and being inspired by the Grenada revolution. Prime
Minister Bishop’s visit to the United States in June 1983 had a
political impact on a small but important layer of U.S. working
people, and a vanguard section of the Black population.

In order to stop the spread of this example, Washington was
determined from day one to crush the Grenada revolution by
armed might. The military and political groundwork for such ag-
gression began to be laid by Carter’s Democratic Party adminis-
tration and continued under the Republican Reagan. U.S. military
forces staged a trial run on a tiny island off Puerto Rico in 1981.
This mock invasion was transparently named Operation Amber
and the Amberdines, to echo the actual island chain of Grenada
and the Grenadines. Even the pretexts for the practice invasion
were the same as Reagan’s phony justification in October 1983—
alleged danger to U.S. citizens, influence from a nearby “Country
Red” (clearly Cuba), and a government that had destroyed de-
mocracy on “Amber” Island and was exporting subversion
throughout the region.

Despite U.S. claims that it was “invited” into Grenada by the
Organization of East Caribbean States, Prime Minister Tom Adams
of Barbados admitted that the OECS governments were contacted
about the operation by U.S. officials at the time Bishop’s house arrest first became known. The invasion would have been carried out by the bipartisan cabal in Washington regardless of how many East Caribbean states agreed to “ask for it.”

Having now carried out this invasion that has been in the works for four years, U.S. imperialism is setting about to use whatever force is necessary to dismantle every trace of the political, social, and economic accomplishments of the workers’ and farmers’ government.

Several days following the invasion, Don Rojas, an NJM leader who was Bishop’s press secretary, told a British newspaper that Grenada would be “rapidly colonized” by the U.S. occupiers. “I think they will move very quickly to wipe out all vestiges of the revolution,” Rojas said. “The local councils and other democratic structures that we put in place will be dismantled and kept that way by military force.”

Washington intends to smash everything that remains from the revolution and to reimpose a puppet government directly subservient to U.S. imperialist interests. And that’s exactly what it has been doing.

The central targets have been the cadres of the New Jewel Movement and mass organizations, whose consciousness remains the most durable conquest of the revolution. The occupiers are carrying out a systematic effort to intimidate and break these cadres, who numbered in the tens of thousands, especially in the working class and among the youth.

Support for the 1979 revolution and its gains remains strong on the island, posing a big problem for the occupiers. Due to the widespread disorientation caused by the Coard group’s treachery and murderous violence against NJM leaders and the Grenadian people, many Grenadians mistakenly welcomed the U.S. troops as liberators. Even the big majority of these Grenadians, however, consider themselves supporters of Maurice Bishop and the People’s Revolutionary Government—a fact that has perplexed reporters for the capitalist press.

“Will there still be free education in the schools?” asked one young Grenadian woman quoted by a U.S. newspaper. “Will there
still be aid to buy [school] uniforms and books?”

“Some people here are beginning to ask themselves who is going to rescue us from our rescuers,” another Grenadian reported.

The process of repression and dismantling began with the October 25 invasion itself—so much so that the U.S. government slapped a ban on press coverage of these initial days of terror. That has been followed by the arrest, detention, and grilling of more than 2,000 Grenadians, who were held in small wooden crates that they had to crawl into on their knees. Those who were released were given cards warning them to “refrain from participating in any anti-government activities.” An unknown number have been jailed indefinitely.

Kenrick Radix, a leader of the New Jewel Movement who survived Coard’s murder machine, was picked up by U.S. authorities and held for twenty hours in one of these isolation boxes. The occupiers claimed that Radix had been acting as “an instigator in spreading bad will among the people in public places.” In other words, he had exercised his right to denounce the U.S. invasion and to call for immediate withdrawal of the occupiers in order to remove “the heavy boot of U.S. imperialism” from the neck of the Grenadian people.

A purge and blacklist of government employees has begun, based on CIA computer printouts. The U.S.-imposed puppet regime of British Commonwealth Governor-General Paul Scoon has curtailed political rights. The new government, allegedly needed to restore “democracy” to Grenada, quickly announced that even its trumpeted phony elections might not be held for several years.

The occupiers’ degrading treatment of Coard and Gen. Hudson Austin, who are understandably hated by the Grenadian people, is nonetheless also aimed at intimidating supporters of the revolution. Coard and Austin were paraded half naked, blindfolded, and manacled on the island. U.S. military propaganda teams plastered Grenada with posters, printed in the United States, showing Austin with just a towel around his waist; below it was an anti-communist message. Coard and Austin deserve to be brought to justice for their crimes, but by the working people of Grenada, not in a kangaroo court set up by a U.S.-imposed puppet regime.
Along with this repression, initial steps have already been taken to strip the Grenadian people of the social and economic gains of the revolution. Free and low-cost distribution of milk and other necessities has ended. Adult education centers are shut down. Schools and hospitals have been deprived of teachers and doctors by the expulsion of Cuban and other overseas staff people. Unemployment has already doubled. And any remnants of mass organizations and democratic workplace and community councils are being crushed.

This is what it takes to try to stamp out the vestiges of Grenada’s workers’ and farmers’ government and the popular revolution on which it stood.

Coard’s treachery and betrayal

As already explained, Washington was able to carry off this counterrevolutionary onslaught with such apparent ease because the Grenadian workers’ and farmers’ government had been betrayed and overthrown. As surviving NJM leader George Louison put it, “the revolution was destroyed from within.” Fidel Castro devoted a substantial portion of his November 14 speech to explaining the significance of this fact to the Cuban people and to revolutionists elsewhere in the Americas and throughout the world.

“Hyenas emerged from the revolutionary ranks,” said Castro, referring to Coard’s secret faction in the government, army, and New Jewel Movement.

“Were those who conspired against [Bishop] within the Grenadian party, army, and security forces by any chance a group of extremists drunk on political theory?” he asked. “Were they simply a group of ambitious, opportunistic individuals, or were they enemy agents who wanted to destroy the Grenadian revolution?

“History alone will have the last word,” Castro said, “but it would not be the first time that such things occurred in a revolutionary process.”

Castro is correct. Many details of the secret plotting and motivations of those involved may never be known. But Castro is also correct to explain that the most important facts and lessons are
already known, and do not depend on yet unanswered questions.

“The fact is that allegedly revolutionary arguments were used,” Castro said, “invoking the purest principles of Marxism-Leninism and charging Bishop with practicing a cult of personality and with drawing away from the Leninist norms and methods of leadership.”

Castro correctly condemned these charges as “absurd.” He explained how the capitalist press had made use of them to present the events in Grenada “as the coming to power of a group of hard-line communists, loyal allies of Cuba. Were they really communists?” Castro asked. “Were they really hard-liners? Could they really be loyal allies of Cuba? Or were they rather conscious or unconscious tools of Yankee imperialism?

“Look at the history of the revolutionary movement,” Castro said, “and you will find more than one connection between imperialism and those who take positions that appear to be on the extreme left. Aren’t Pol Pot and Ieng Sary—the ones responsible for the genocide in Kampuchea—the most loyal allies Yankee imperialism has in Southeast Asia at present?

“In Cuba, ever since the Grenadian crisis began,” he said, “we have called Coard’s group—to give it a name—the ‘Pol Pot group.’”

Much of what happened in Grenada has been clarified in press interviews with surviving NJM and PRG leaders such as Don Rojas, Kenrick Radix, and George Louison, who have also given assessments of these events.*

A semisecret factional grouping or clique around Bernard Coard had managed, especially since mid-1982, to strengthen its influence and control inside the government apparatus, the officer corps of the army, and in the New Jewel Movement. It functioned more and more as a party within the party.

This grouping thrived on seeking to pin the blame for the revolution’s very real difficulties on Bishop and other NJM leaders not in their faction, rather than trying to solve these problems and iron out differences in the course of loyal leadership collaboration and common practical work. Instead of functioning on the basis of political, objective, frank, honest, and selfless relations inside the leadership, the Coard group consolidated its position through favoritism, buddyism, privilege, and administrative control.

Coard’s ability to carry out his catastrophic bid for power, if only for a few weeks, was not a matter of Lucifer somehow running amok amid the heavenly host. A materialist explanation for what happened in Grenada cannot rise or fall simply on an assessment of the actions of a single individual—even an individual whose role was unquestionably decisive. These events reflected the social consequences of objective difficulties from imperialist pressure, poverty, and small size already described. Coard exploited these real difficulties to gain a hearing from layers of politically inexperienced cadres in the NJM for his explanation that “the problem is Maurice.”

In any revolution confronting such obstacles, the resulting pressures bear down with a different intensity and results on various social classes and layers within the working class itself. A small hotel owner is affected differently from a working person; a farmer differently from a wage worker; a highly paid worker differently from one who has more directly benefited from the revolution’s social achievements; and a person who has settled into a comfortable niche in the government apparatus differently from someone more closely attuned to the masses of the population. While there is no mechanical correlation between such underlying social differentiations and the lineup that developed inside the party, state apparatus, and army in Grenada, the strongest base of support for Bishop and the revolutionary government clearly came
from working people, especially among the youth. Coard and his followers had become divorced from the Grenadian people and reflected attitudes of bureaucratism, careerism, and individual ambition characteristic of the petty bourgeoisie, not the working class.

It is important to add that CIA agents were undoubtedly operating at every level of the Grenadian government, army, party, and mass organizations, as they always do in any revolution or revolutionary organization. Nonetheless, imperialism and its agents did not create the divisions inside the revolutionary leadership. Instead, they were able to take advantage of weaknesses already there to exacerbate tensions and turn divisions to their own advantage.

The petty-bourgeois and bureaucratic modes of functioning by the Coard faction in the government, army, and party—not any thought-out alternative political course for Grenada—were at the root of this group’s trajectory. Nonetheless, Fidel Castro chose his words well November 14 when he spoke of this outfit as the “Pol Pot group.”

The point is not to imply that Coard was hell-bent on a wholesale expropriation policy, let alone on the extraordinarily brutal anti-working-class, antipeasant, and antisocialist measures imposed by Pol Pot.

As Don Rojas explained, however, “Bernard and his people . . . said they were dissatisfied with the pace at which the process was evolving. . . . Somehow the notion that this process was not going fast enough entered into the ideological discussion in the party and led to a kind of cleavage. Some people said we needed to push it forward more rapidly. Others argued for a more rational, scientific, and less idealistic assessment of this question.”

Rojas said that this criticism had emerged rather suddenly, and that Coard himself had previously argued against such notions as the government’s chief economic planning official.

Rather than recognizing politically that objective material conditions and class relations were above all responsible for the problems confronting the revolution in Grenada, Coard’s followers acted as if it were somehow possible to leap over these factors in an administrative way.
The Coard and Pol Pot groups also shared, to however different an extent, a similar ultraleft, antidemocratic, and authoritarian brutality toward the workers and farmers. Unlike Bishop and other NJM leaders, Coard’s relations with the Grenadian workers and farmers were not based on promoting their organization, mobilization, and class consciousness, but on administrative dictates and persuasion of the gun.

To justify its maneuvers against Bishop, Whiteman, Radix, and other NJM leaders who did not share its penchant for dictates and commands, the Coard group began a campaign of gossip alleging that these individuals were “less Marxist” and “less proletarian.” Suddenly, Rojas said, “we hear Maurice Bishop accused of being petty bourgeois. We hear Unison Whiteman accused of being social democratic, of representing the right wing within the party. This was the first time we heard that there was a right wing within the party.”

Rojas explained that the Organization of Revolutionary Education and Liberation, the name of the organization forming the core of Coard’s faction, went back to before the NJM was founded. In the early 1970s it had merged with Bishop’s MAP and White- man’s JEWEL to form the party, Rojas said, but “always maintained a kind of clique, an OREL clique, within the New Jewel Movement during the 1970s and even after the 1979 revolution.”

In any genuine fusion of political organizations, it quickly becomes irrelevant who among the leadership and cadres of the new organization had his or her origins in one group or another. No one makes political judgments or assignments on the basis of whether or not someone in the party used to be “one of our people.” While the MAP and JEWEL cadres had carried out such a successful fusion, it is now clear that Coard’s OREL grouping had never adopted this attitude toward the New Jewel Movement.

Coard’s campaign against Bishop and other NJM leaders took several concrete forms.

On one level, capable leaders of the revolution who were not Coard’s “kind of guy” were pushed out of the leadership. Kenrick Radix, for example, was removed from the Central Committee. At the same time, Coard gradually managed to get more and more
of his supporters onto the leadership bodies and into the apparatus of the party, the government, and the army. “He did this in a very systematic way,” Rojas said, “so that when he decided to make his move for leadership of the party, he had already consolidated quite a power base.”

In mid-1982, Coard and those around him began to complain about serious problems inside the party. In July 1982 Coard resigned from the Central Committee, attributing his decision to “slack and weak functioning” of the CC and the Political Bureau. He said that both leadership bodies were operating contrary to Marxist-Leninist principles of party building.

Charges began to be heard that Bishop’s alleged political shallowness, lack of Leninist organizational skills and discipline, and insufficient grasp of party-building strategy and tactics were to blame for the “crisis” in the NJM. Coard himself, having stepped aside, never explicitly mentioned Bishop, leaving that to his collaborators. As Radix put it, “What he did was to hide behind his wife [Phyllis, who remained a CC member] and some of the younger fellows to work his way. Coard used slander, rumor, and deceit to slander Maurice. The worst of Stalinist tactics.”

This campaign went on for more than a year. Then, in September 1983, an emergency meeting of the Central Committee was called together by Maj. Liam James, a follower of Coard in the army officer corps and a member of General Austin’s short-lived “Revolutionary Military Council.” Bernard Coard was not there, since he had resigned from the Central Committee.

Lt. Col. Ewart Layne, another Coard supporter in the army and later RMC member, opened the meeting. Layne explained that there was a big crisis in the country—lagging popular support, problems in the party, bad roads and electricity services, a deterioration of the revolution’s international prestige, and so on. Phyllis Coard and Minister of Mobilization Selwyn Strachan, who also emerged as a Coard supporter, again spoke of the weakness in the Marxist-Leninist ideological development of the Central Committee.

According to George Louison, the initial portion of the meeting did not involve direct criticisms of Bishop, but discussion later
shifted in that direction. James, Layne, and Maj. Leon Cornwall, also a Coard supporter and later RMC member, got the ball rolling. Phyllis Coard chimed in that many NJM members were scared to criticize Bishop, because he had been “hostile to criticism.”

According to Louison, however, it was not until the last day of the two-and-a-half day meeting that “out of the blue a proposal came out: The main problem within the Central Committee is Maurice’s weaknesses.” No alternative political policies were put forward by Coard’s supporters, Louison said.

Instead, Liam James placed a motion on the floor calling for Bishop to relinquish part of his leadership responsibilities to Coard. Bishop was to handle mass work and international relations; his strengths were allegedly limited to those arenas. Bernard Coard was to take over internal party work and overall strategy, since he was the “only” person who could “push the process forward.”

Whiteman and Louison argued that the Central Committee should take collective responsibility for the problems facing the revolution, not attempt to place the blame on Bishop or any other single comrade in the leadership. Along with Bishop, they pointed to the material conditions in Grenada as the source of many difficulties, and stressed the need for more systematic efforts to strengthen relations between the party, the government, and the workers and farmers in Grenada.

When Louison asked how such an important change would be explained to the Grenadian people and to fraternal political parties, Coard’s supporters answered that the decision would remain an internal secret of the NJM. Nothing would be said to the Grenadian people or other parties.

Of the thirteen members of the seventeen-person Central Committee in attendance, nine voted for this so-called joint leadership resolution; three abstained, including Bishop and Whiteman; and one—Louison—voted against.

Several more Central Committee meetings took place during the latter half of September; Coard began to attend. It was agreed that Bishop would take some time to consider the joint leadership proposal, and he did not attend most of these late September CC meetings. According to Louison, from that time on, Coard was
actually “calling the shots.” At a September 25 CC meeting, Bishop agreed to the joint leadership motion, “subject to clarification,” Louison said.

Rojas, who although not a Central Committee member nonetheless worked very closely with Bishop, expanded on Bishop’s attitude toward the CC proposal. “His position to the Central Committee,” Rojas said, “and to the party was that he did not have any problems with the proposal in principle—that if it was a majority decision of the party, he would abide by the principle of democratic centralism and majority vote on this issue.

“But he would have liked more discussion of the practical application of this joint leadership proposal. He had difficulty understanding exactly how it was going to work, as did many members of the party. . . . And he felt, quite frankly, that the way it had been proposed would have effectively removed him from influence in the top decision-making organs of the party.”

Bishop’s attitude to the Coard group’s talk about “more Leninist” functioning of the party was similar. “Maurice and the rest of the comrades had absolutely no difficulty in accepting the concept,” Rojas said, “if it meant a more disciplined and more organized approach to party work; to the norms of party life; to study; to the application of the fundamental principles on which the party was built; to an understanding of democratic centralism,” and so on.

“But I think Lenin was being used as a cover,” Rojas said. “It appears that the call for a more Leninist organization was misused to cover up what was in its essence a bid for power.”

At the end of September, Bishop, Whiteman, Louison, and Rojas left for Hungary and Czechoslovakia to try to obtain some additional electrical power generators for the island. It was then, Louison explained, that the Coard group took advantage of Bishop being out of the country to begin systematically disarming the militias. Coard and his followers knew what was coming, and they also knew that their base was in the army officer corps and a few trusted units, not in the armed workers and farmers of Grenada.

Bishop and the three other NJM leaders stopped in Cuba for a few days on their return trip from Eastern Europe. Castro ex-
plained in his November 14 speech that during this stopover, “In spite of his very close and affectionate links with our party’s leadership, Bishop never said anything about the internal dissensions that were developing. On the contrary, in his last conversation with us he was self-critical about his work regarding attention to the armed forces and the mass organizations. Nearly all of our party and state leaders spent many friendly, fraternal hours with him on the evening of October 7, before his return trip to Grenada.”

Contrary to all previous practice, only one other leader of the NJM and PRG was on hand at the airport to meet Bishop when he landed in Grenada October 8. For the next two days, Bernard Coard, who had served as acting prime minister during the trip, made no effort to contact Bishop about developments in the country during his absence.

When Coard learned of the meetings in Cuba with Castro and other top CP leaders, however, he charged that Bishop, Louison, Whiteman, and Rojas had taken internal NJM affairs outside the party and had sought to obtain Cuban backing for their position. The four NJM leaders denied this charge.

Coard and his backers “went so far as to say Fidel had made himself a little god in Cuba,” Louison reported, implying that this was happening in Grenada as well. This marked the opening salvo of a new campaign against Bishop, this one centering on his alleged “one-manism” and the dangers of a personality cult.

“That was perhaps the weakest charge of all,” Rojas commented. “The people who knew Maurice Bishop knew him to be perhaps the most modest and least arrogant of all the top leaders of the party. He was the most accommodating and probably the number one adherent to the principle of collective leadership.”

As a result of these developments, according to Louison, Bishop informed other members of the Central Committee that he would like to schedule a review in the CC or the Political Bureau of the joint leadership proposal and its practical application and consequences.

Then, on October 12, a chain of events was set into motion that would result, before the day was out, in a de facto coup and the overthrow of Grenada’s workers’ and farmers’ government.
Those events began just after midnight, when Bishop’s security detail was awakened and brought together for a meeting while Bishop was sleeping. According to Louison, they were told that Bishop was “becoming a dictator” and that “their responsibility is to defend the working people and not to defend any leader.” This was the set-up for Bishop’s house arrest, which was to come later in the day.

At 7 a.m., the members of the New Jewel Movement in the army met and passed a resolution claiming that Bishop and Louison were trying to reverse the earlier Central Committee decision and demanding that these “opportunists” be expelled from the party.

At 9 a.m., the New Jewel Movement Political Bureau met. The two main points on its agenda were discussion of the armed forces resolution, and a motion to expel Louison from the Political Bureau and Central Committee for alleged violations of democratic centralism.

Later in the day, the Central Committee met. It expelled George Louison, and members leveled yet another charge against Bishop. They claimed that Bishop was spreading a rumor that Bernard and Phyllis Coard were plotting to kill him. Louison stated that this “was a complete lie . . . made up by Bernard in order to try to justify his position.” Rojas and Radix agree.

The Central Committee demanded that Bishop tape a radio statement that the alleged rumor was untrue, which Bishop did. At the end of the meeting, the CC voted to place Bishop under house arrest. His phones were cut off, and any security guards suspected of loyalty to him were disarmed and replaced. George Louison’s brother, Einstein Louison—who as the army chief of staff was the highest officer not lined up with Coard’s grouping—was also placed under house arrest.

As news of Bishop’s detention began to leak out to the workers and farmers of Grenada, the walls began to be covered with the slogan, “No Bishop, No Revo.” And that immediate and widespread sentiment among the masses reflected the reality. The workers’ and farmers’ government that they had established in March 1979 had been overthrown through a coup that day.

The next day, October 13, a meeting of 400 New Jewel Move-
ment cadres was held. Bishop was brought before it, confronted with the false charges, especially the alleged rumor, and told to comment on them. Bishop strongly denied having spread the rumor.

Coard, who attended the meeting, did not speak. Once again, he let his supporters do the dirty work. One after another, they took the floor to denounce Bishop. “They called him a dangerous individual,” Louison recalled. Rojas reported that proposals were made to expel Bishop from the party altogether, even to court-martial him.

“We all thought certainly the point of the meeting was to vote on the question and come up with some consensus within the party,” Rojas said, “some line of march to explain to the masses why Maurice Bishop was being placed under house arrest.”

But no vote was taken on the proposals. Coard’s group on the Central Committee explained that the purpose of the meeting was to inform the members of actions already taken by the CC so they could begin taking these decisions to the population the following day.

The atmosphere at the meeting was “intimidating, really intimidating,” Louison said. “Maurice’s head has already rolled and so has mine. These would be good deterrents to further offenses.”

Bishop was returned to house arrest following the meeting.

On the next day, October 14, Coard’s supporters began meeting with various groups from the mass organizations, workplaces, and other sectors to justify their actions. Selwyn Strachan, for example, tried to hold a public meeting in downtown St. George’s to announce that Bishop had been replaced as prime minister by Coard. A crowd gathered and chased Strachan off the street. A little later that day, Radio Free Grenada announced that Coard had resigned as deputy prime minister and finance minister in order to “clear the air” of the rumor that he was plotting to assassinate Bishop.

These events on October 14 were the first to be reported in the international press. From then on, Bernard and Phyllis Coard and Strachan evidently decided to lay low for a while, hoping to weather the storm of popular opposition—the depth of which they had misjudged—before making further public appearances. They were
not heard about publicly again until the U.S. invasion and their subsequent arrest.

The following day, October 15, Kenrick Radix, together with union leader Fitzroy Bain, led the first street demonstration demanding the release of Bishop and his reinstatement as prime minister. And George Louison began a series of private meetings with Coard, hoping to find some way to resolve the worsening situation.

According to the Cuban government, Fidel Castro sent a message to the NJM Central Committee that day, as well. It was delivered directly to Coard. While Cuba had no intention of interfering in Grenada’s internal affairs, the message said, Castro expressed his “deep concern that the division that had arisen could do considerable damage to the image of the revolutionary process in Grenada, both inside the country and abroad,” including in Cuba. But Coard took no heed of the Cubans’ concerns.

“This group of Coard’s that seized power in Grenada expressed serious reservations toward Cuba from the very beginning,” Castro explained in the November 14 speech, “because of our well-known and unquestionable friendship with Bishop.”

On October 16, Gen. Hudson Austin gave a speech over Radio Free Grenada, attempting to diffuse and demobilize the mounting protest evidenced by the reaction to Strachan and the street demonstration. He now sought to reassure Grenadians that Bishop was not being challenged as prime minister, and that Bishop was just “at home and quite safe.”

Then Austin got down to the actual point of the radio address—to present the slanders against Bishop for the first time publicly. The NJM, Austin said, had voted to expel Bishop from the party in order “to stop the steady growth of one-man rule in our party and country.” The lie about the rumor and the other false charges were also repeated. Bishop had “disgraced” Grenada by these actions, Austin said, and had been expelled from the New Jewel Movement. At the same time, Austin stressed that “there has been no dispute” over the “political and economic policies of the party.”

On October 18, Radix led a second street protest, following which he was picked up and jailed by Coard’s backers. Unison
Whiteman, who was foreign minister, returned to Grenada from the United States, where he had spoken before the United Nations General Assembly the previous week; he immediately began working with Louison, still in hopes of reaching a settlement with Coard. But the uncontrolled as well as controlled forces set in motion October 12 had already shattered that possibility.

Coard and his group “were completely contemptuous of the Grenadian people,” Louison later said. “They believed that no matter what action they took, they could eventually explain it away.” The Grenadian people “are bound to get tired and hungry,” Coard told Louison, and then they would stop marching and go back to work. Things would return to normal. Gairy had let people demonstrate every day for almost two months straight in 1973–74, Coard reminded him.

Up until that point, Louison said, “I still believed a peaceful solution was possible.” On October 18, however, he became convinced that the opposite was the case. “There was a distinct wing of the Central Committee that wanted a military solution,” Louison explained. “That I’m clear of because I discussed it with them.”

Whiteman called a Caribbean press agency later that day and announced that he, Louison, housing minister Norris Bain, and education minister Jacqueline Creft had all resigned from the government. Shortly afterwards, George Louison was jailed.

Then came October 19—Coard’s Bloody Wednesday. Unison Whiteman and Fitzroy Bain led another demonstration, this one of 5,000, while another 25,000–30,000 waited in the market place for Bishop to speak. That amounted to some 25–30 percent of Grenada’s entire population, comparable to 60–75 million in the United States. The demonstrators went to Bishop’s residence and managed to free him. Rojas spoke with Bishop, the last living NJM leader to have done so. He reports that Bishop told him that “those criminals up on the hill” were going to turn their guns on the people and that the people “must disarm them” first.

Bishop asked Rojas to lead a contingent to the central telephone exchange and to communicate several messages to the world. He asked Rojas to call on Grenadians overseas and on trade unions and progressive forces in the region to make known their support
for the people’s mass outpouring that day.

Rojas said that Bishop was concerned about efforts by a small handful of right-wingers in Grenada to use the protests against his house arrest as an opportunity to spread anti-Cuban and anti-communist propaganda. According to Rojas, Bishop “wanted the point made very clearly that President Fidel Castro and the Cuban people had absolutely no involvement in this crisis,” and that nothing that might happen in Grenada should serve as a justification for U.S. intervention.

The mass demonstration marched to Fort Rupert, the army headquarters. Most of the soldiers in the garrison joined in the protest, turning over their weapons to members of the militia in the crowd. The plan was to arrange some kind of telephone hookup from inside the fort by which Bishop could address the Grenadian people over a public address system.

This was the last effort by Bishop, Whiteman, and other central New Jewel Movement leaders to salvage the revolution and restore a workers’ and farmers’ government to power. They sought to appeal to the army to refuse orders and, together with the people, to rise up and overthrow the illegitimate Coard regime that had strangled the revolutionary government. The response of the soldiers at Fort Rupert showed that this might well have happened if there had been sufficient time to get out Bishop’s call for resistance and begin organizing on that basis. This attempt by Bishop was the only possible revolutionary course under the circumstances.

Shortly after the crowd arrived at Fort Rupert, however, Coard ordered three armored personnel carriers to the garrison. They fired automatic weapons into the crowd, killing an unknown number of participants and wounding many others. Bishop, Whiteman, Fitzroy Bain, Norris Bain, Jacqueline Creft, and union leader Vincent Noel surrendered themselves peacefully, in order to avoid a wholesale massacre. They were separated from the rest of the crowd and summarily murdered inside the fort.

“I am 100 percent sure [that Coard] ordered the killings,” Louison later said. Radix agreed. Despite the fact that Coard dropped from public view hoping to deflect the Grenadian people’s
wrath, Radix said, “I want to make clear that the RMC [the Revolutionary Military Council officially headed by General Austin] was an extension of Bernard Coard. . . . He devised the thing.”

These are the events, to the extent they are known at this time, that surrounded the overthrow of the workers’ and farmers’ government in Grenada. Coard’s secret faction had moved from ambition and cliquism, to open treachery and betrayal of the revolution, and then to the murder of the revolutionary people and their leadership.

In the process, as Rojas put it, Coard handed Grenada “on a platter to the U.S. with all the trimmings.” That is why the resistance by Grenadians to the U.S. invasion was limited—although, as Castro explained November 14, “despite these adverse circumstances, a number of Grenadian soldiers died in heroic combat against the invaders.” Coard’s actions are responsible for the confusion among many Grenadians about the counterrevolutionary goals of the U.S. intervention, as well for the fact that some Grenadians who had supported the revolution have now fallen for the lie, peddled both by Coard and the imperialists, that the betrayers were the “real Marxists.”

With the arrest of Bishop, the U.S. rulers immediately recognized that this was the opening they had been waiting for, the chance to crush everything that was left of the revolution and the mass organizations. They had to move quickly to prevent a civil war from developing and the emergence of a new leadership of the New Jewel Movement that could topple the Coard regime and reestablish a revolutionary government. Radix, Louison, and Rojas are all convinced that the revolutionary majority in Grenada had at least a fighting chance of doing just that had Washington not invaded.

Of course, the United States government could have moved to crush the revolution militarily even if these events had not occurred. Perhaps it even could have succeeded, although that was far from certain. But the strength of the revolution had stayed Washington’s hands for more than four years, and an invasion was not inevitable in the foreseeable future. Moreover, the political and military price that U.S. imperialism would have paid for
such an assault would have been very high. As anyone who had visited Grenada and witnessed the popular commitment to that revolution can testify, the workers and farmers would have put up a mighty battle to defend their government.

But that government had been overthrown, and the people disarmed and demobilized. Coard’s factionalism and splitting operation threw a decisive and fatal weight into the balance, tipping it toward Washington.

**Cuba’s internationalist leadership and role**

There is another important factor that would have weighed in favor of the Grenada revolution had not Coard toppled the revolutionary government. That is the help that Cuba could have rendered in the event of a U.S. invasion. The Cubans had long made clear their commitment to do whatever was necessary and possible to defend Grenada. Bishop told the May Day 1980 rally in Havana that, “Certainly we in Grenada will never forget that it was the military assistance of Cuba in the first weeks of the revolution that provided us with the basis to defend our own revolution.”

At a press conference in Havana late at night October 25–26, just after the U.S. invasion, and again more briefly in his November 14 speech, Fidel Castro explained how the Cuban government had conducted itself in the days leading up to the aggression. Earlier, on October 20, the day after the murder of Bishop, the Cuban government had issued a public condemnation of the criminal actions by the so-called Revolutionary Military Council.

The Cuban revolutionists released these public statements not only to make clear their own position, but also because they recognized their responsibility to lead the working class and oppressed on a world scale, explaining these treacherous actions and laying out a perspective for supporters of the Grenada revolution.

While explaining that Coard’s actions had made a U.S. invasion virtually inevitable, the Cubans conducted themselves in such a way as to make the U.S. imperialists pay the biggest possible price for such aggression. They sought to place the workers and farmers of Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Cuba in the best situation to defend their revolutions in the face of this escalation of
U.S. military intervention in the region.

Despite the avalanche of bourgeois press smears throughout the Grenada events, the Cuban government and its leaders won international respect and recognition for their exemplary conduct. Many people today understand more clearly than before the revolutionary character and importance of the Cuban leadership in world politics. This has increased the authority of the Cuban revolution in sectors of the Black movement in the United States, for example.

Because of the significance of these October 20, October 25, and November 14 Cuban documents, all three have been reproduced here as appendices to this collection, *Maurice Bishop Speaks*. In these statements, the Cubans explained several fundamental principles of their proletarian internationalist approach to world politics.

First, the Cubans stressed that their international policy is based on the principle of noninterference in the internal affairs of other parties, governments, and countries. Whatever relations or agreements they enter into are only at the request of those parties and governments—with no political strings attached. The Cubans do not try to pick and choose among leaders, to pit them against each other, or to impose policies. They give advice with generosity, but only when it is asked for, and only as advice, never dictates.

“It is to our revolution’s credit,” Castro explained November 14, “that, in spite of our profound indignation over Bishop’s removal from office and arrest, we fully refrained from interfering in Grenada’s internal affairs. We refrained even though our construction workers and all our other cooperation personnel in Grenada—who did not hesitate to confront the Yankee soldiers with the weapons Bishop himself had given them for their defense in case of an attack from abroad—could have been a decisive factor in those internal events.

“Those weapons,” Castro explained, “were never meant to be used in an internal conflict in Grenada and we would never have allowed them to be so used. We would never have been willing to use them to shed a single drop of Grenadian blood.”

Second, the Cubans explained that despite their own limited
resources, they do whatever they can to aid peoples throughout the world who are oppressed by imperialism or engaged in struggle against it. In his speech November 14, Fidel Castro stressed that despite Cuba’s attitude toward Coard’s government in Grenada, “We could not accept the idea of leaving the Grenadians without doctors or leaving the airport, which was vital to the nation’s economy, unfinished.”

Especially after Washington’s dispatch of its naval armada to the seas off Grenada, Castro said, the Cubans “couldn’t possibly leave the country. If the imperialists really intended to attack Grenada, it was our duty to stay there. To withdraw at that time would have been dishonorable and could have even triggered aggression in that country then and in Cuba later on.”

Under the impossible circumstances created by Coard’s group, however, the Cuban government made the correct and necessary decision that Cuban personnel would fight only if attacked by U.S. invading forces. On October 22, the Cuban government sent a message with these instructions to its mission in Grenada, to be communicated to the Cuban construction workers and other personnel on the island. “We would thus be defending ourselves,” that message said, “not the [new Grenadian] government and its deeds.”

That same day Cuba sent a message to the Revolutionary Military Council, rejecting an appeal by General Austin for additional military aid. In a message to its embassy in Grenada the following day, the Cuban government explained its decision to reject this request. It pointed out that the members of the Revolutionary Military Council “themselves are the only ones responsible for the creation of this disadvantageous and difficult situation for the revolutionary process politically and militarily.” (Coard’s group was spreading the slanderous charge that blame for the impending U.S. aggression lay with Cuba because of its October 20 statement condemning the murder of Bishop.)

In its reply to the RMC leaders themselves, the Cuban government stressed that while rejecting the military request, Cuba would conduct a vigorous international political campaign to counter the U.S. threats. If the invasion nonetheless took place, the Cubans
said, it would be the duty of the RMC officials “to die fighting, no matter how difficult and disadvantageous the circumstances may be”—a duty they showed no inclination to carry out. “It is noteworthy,” Don Rojas explained, “that the fifteen members of the RMC and Coard, Strachan, and Austin all either surrendered to the Yankee invaders or were captured without resistance. This was the same group who . . . called on the Grenadian people to fight ‘to the last man, woman, and child.’”

When the U.S. attack began, Cuban relations with the Coard-Austin government were so strained that there was no coordination between the Grenadian army and the Cuban construction workers. The Cuban volunteers, as instructed, began fighting only when attacked by the U.S. forces, and then they fought heroically and well. They gave their lives to provide Washington a small example of what would happen if U.S. forces invade El Salvador, Nicaragua, or Cuba.

‘Not the first time’

As Fidel Castro explained in Havana November 14, what took place in Grenada at Coard’s hands was not “the first time that such things occurred in a revolutionary process.”

Cuban Marxists have had their own direct experience, in 1962 and again in 1966–68, with the types of methods employed by Coard, and the dangers posed by them.

At the end of 1961, the July 26 Movement—which had led the workers and peasants to victory and to the consolidation of the first workers’ state in the Americas—fused with the Popular Socialist Party (PSP), the traditional prerevolution Communist Party in Cuba, and with a third organization called the Revolutionary Directorate. The fused party took the name Integrated Revolutionary Organizations (ORI).

Aníbal Escalante, a longtime PSP leader, became organizational secretary of this new party. He abused his position by replacing cadres in the party and state apparatus almost exclusively with former associates from the PSP. Escalante then winked at the bureaucratic practices and the privileges and even corruption of these appointees.
Escalante also started a rumor-mill belittling the July 26 cadres and leaders. Fidel Castro, for example, was accused of not functioning as part of a collective leadership and of not being sufficiently Marxist. The popular support for Castro and other July 26 leaders was dismissed as signs of a developing personality cult. The PSP cadres, it was alleged, were the “real” party builders and Marxists.

To put a halt to these abuses, the ORI National Directorate held a series of discussions, removed Escalante from his positions, and instituted a number of other organizational changes. In March 1962, Castro presented a televised speech on behalf of the ORI leadership to explain to the people of the world what had happened, what had been done to correct it, and the lessons that could be learned from this experience. The speech became known in Cuba and around the world by the title, “Against Bureaucracy and Sectarianism.”

Castro pointed out that under Escalante, the party was being converted from what it should be, “an apparatus of the workers’ vanguard,” into a “nest of privilege,” “favoritism,” “immunities,” and “favors.” The workers and party cadres, Castro said, were beginning to ask: “Was [the ORI] a nucleus of revolutionists?” Or was it a “mere shell of revolutionists, well versed in dispensing favors”?

If the party did not reverse this process, Castro said, it would no longer “enjoy the prestige which a revolutionary nucleus should enjoy, a prestige born solely from the authority which it has in the eyes of the masses, an authority imparted to it by the example which its members set as workers, as model revolutionists.”

In light of the bourgeois propaganda campaign around Grenada, it is interesting to note Castro’s reference in the 1962 speech to similar disinformation efforts at that time. “It is logical to expect that the enemy will take advantage of these errors [by the Escalante grouping] to sow confusion, to go about saying that the Communists have taken over in Cuba; that Fidel has been replaced by Blas [Roca, another PSP leader] or Aníbal, or someone else, and Raúl [Castro] by another.”

Concerning the charge of a developing cult of personality, Castro
had this to say: “Those evils have not been a threat in our country. The only danger there was was the one that we did not see. How blind we were! What a difference between theory and practice! What a good lesson!”

“If we have one leader, two, ten with prestige, we should have more leaders with prestige,” Castro said. “We should not destroy those leaders who have prestige,” which has been gained because of what they have done for the revolution. That only ends up destroying the prestige of the revolution itself, Castro said. The task should be to develop more leaders known for their selfless activity and hard work.

Escalante’s campaign of rumor had taken a toll on the revolution, Castro said. “Clearly this discouraged the masses,” he explained. “No, the masses did not turn against the revolution,” he said, “they’re always with the revolution. . . . But this cooled the enthusiasm of the masses; this cooled the fervor of the masses.”

What’s more, Castro said, Escalante’s factional activity fueled anticommunism, which still had a foothold in Cuba in those early years of the revolution. The leaders of the revolution had worked hard to combat anticommunism through patient education and experience, Castro said. But, confronted with the bureaucratic practices of the Escalante grouping, “many people will ask: ‘Is this communism? Is this socialism? This arbitrariness, this abuse, this privilege, all this, is this communism?’”

Castro also took up the charge that some ORI leaders were less “Marxist” than others because of their political origins. “The revolution is irrevocably defined as Marxist-Leninist,” he said. “Let no one suffer from any fantasies or engage in any illusions on this score. Do not imagine that we are going to take a single step backwards. No, on the contrary, we are going to move forward!”

From “this moment on, comrades,” Castro said, “all differences between the old and the new, between those who fought in the Sierra and those who were down in the lowlands, between those who took up arms and those who did not, between those who studied Marxism and those who did not study Marxism before, we feel that all these differences between them should cease. That from this moment on, we have to be one thing alone.” That is,
every party cadre was part of a common organization seeking to advance the revolution based on studying and applying the Marxist program and strategy in light of the living class struggle in Cuba and worldwide.

Following Castro’s speech, Escalante was sent abroad to serve as a minor diplomatic official. Over the next few years, imperialist economic and military pressures against Cuba intensified, exacerbating shortages and other difficulties on the island. Attempts to extend the revolution in Latin America through support to several guerrilla war efforts failed, capped by the defeat of Che Guevara’s forces in Bolivia, and some domestic measures aimed at accelerating economic development proved to be overambitious and ill-suited to the country’s actual situation.

In 1964 Escalante returned to the island to be with an ailing relative. Later in the decade, amid the heightened social tensions, he began to carry out renewed secret factional activity, using the same methods of innuendo and slander.

Again reminiscent of Coard’s charges against Maurice Bishop, the Escalante supporters began “passing themselves off as heroes of a battle against petty-bourgeois leadership,” as Cuban leader Carlos Rafael Rodríguez explained at a 1968 meeting of the party’s Central Committee called to discuss the matter. One of Escalante’s people complained to several lower-level Soviet officials in Cuba that, “Fidel wants Cuba to be the hub of the whole world . . . so that he can achieve a stature greater than that of Marx, Engels, and Lenin,” and that in Cuba “policy is made by no one but Fidel Castro.”

At the 1968 Central Committee meeting, Rodríguez—himself a former central leader of the PSP—explained what was at stake in combating Escalante’s methods. The harm done by Escalante, Rodríguez said, “lies in the fact that he frustrated a process of unity that began by being, and could have been, a joyous, fraternal process in which comrades from various organizations, who had worked jointly or separately toward the same objective, were beginning to unite. He turned that into a bitter process, one that has since been painful.”

The number of people involved in the second Escalante affair
was small, but in one respect their activities were even more serious than in 1962. Escalante and his supporters tried to capitalize on strained relations that had developed between Cuba and the governments of the Soviet Union and several Eastern European countries over differences concerning aid to Vietnam and other international issues. The Escalante grouping urged personnel in the Soviet and Czech embassies to get their governments to bring pressure on the Cuban leadership to change its policies. They even went so far as to propose the withholding of economic aid and military aid from Cuba as a factional club against the revolution’s leadership. Some officials from these two countries—who were later ordered to leave Cuba—cooperated with Escalante’s maneuvers.

In 1968 Escalante and the core of his grouping were tried for violations of Cuban law committed in the course of their factional activity; they were convicted and sent to prison.

From both these rounds of the battle against the Escalante grouping, the Cuban leaders drew important lessons about leadership methods, bureaucracy, and the relationship between the party, the state apparatus, the army, the mass organizations, and the workers and farmers.

During his March 1962 speech, Castro proposed a new procedure for becoming a party member. From that time on, the majority of nominees were accepted into party membership only after having been elected a model worker by an assembly of their coworkers. This included all the workers in a given workplace—party members and non-party members alike—who knew the individual, and knew whether or not he or she was actually playing a leadership role as part of the communist vanguard of the Cuban working class. At the party’s 1980 congress, Castro reported that the number of workers in the party had tripled since 1975, and that the party and its leadership bodies also had more women, more veterans of internationalist missions, and more peasants and agricultural workers. As a result, Castro said, the party had become “more Marxist-Leninist and more revolutionary,” as well.

The 1968 events, in particular, drove home once more the principle that the Cubans have enunciated time and again in all their
statements on Grenada—no interference in the internal affairs of other governments and other parties.

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Combined with difficult objective circumstances, factional and administrative leadership methods such as those of the Coard grouping can split the vanguard party of the working class, separate it from the masses of working people, and lead to destruction of the revolution. In the process, the workers and farmers can be left wide open to direct imperialist intervention and repression.

As the example of Cuba proves, however, such a development is far from inevitable.

In his speech in Havana November 14, Fidel Castro warned the U.S. imperialists not to let their “victory in Grenada and their air of triumph . . . go to their heads, leading them to commit serious, irreversible errors. They will not find in El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Cuba the particular circumstances of revolutionaries divided among themselves and divorced from the people that they found in Grenada.”

Pointing to the determined resistance by Cuban construction workers at Point Salines, Castro asked the crowd of more than one million workers and farmers: “If in Grenada, the imperialists had to bring in an elite division to fight against a handful of isolated men struggling in a small stronghold, lacking fortifications, a thousand miles from their homeland, how many divisions would they need against millions of combatants fighting on their own [Cuban] soil alongside their own people?”

Nicaraguan leader Humberto Ortega told a gathering of Sandinista Youth in Managua, “The Yankees won’t find us with our arms locked in storerooms. We have already distributed weapons and millions of bullets throughout the country.”

And Vietnamese President Truong Chinh, after condemning the U.S. invasion of Grenada, warned that if Washington “were reckless enough to invade Cuba and Nicaragua, then many other Vietnams would emerge in Central America and Latin America.”

Washington will certainly not find the job easy when it sends
its troops and planes against the revolutionary peoples of Nicaragua and El Salvador, as it is right now preparing to do. As casualties mount and reverses accumulate, the U.S. capitalists will quickly find themselves fighting a second front at home, as well. U.S. workers don’t want another Vietnam-style war. And they are growing increasingly angry over government and big-business attacks on their jobs, on their living and working conditions, on the rights of Blacks, Latinos, and women, and on democratic rights in general.

What’s more, U.S. troops and firepower cannot erase the example and rich lessons of the Grenada revolution. Along with revolutionary Cuba and Nicaragua, the workers’ and farmers’ government brought to power in 1979 by the Grenadian people remains, as Fidel Castro once put it, one of the three giants of the Caribbean. Nor can the imperialists sweep away the contribution made by Maurice Bishop and the New Jewel Movement to the process of constructing a new revolutionary leadership of the working class and its allies in the Americas and internationally.

“Imperialism is bent on destroying symbols,” Castro explained November 14, “because it knows the value of symbols, of examples, and of ideas. It wanted to destroy them in Grenada, and it wants to destroy them in El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Cuba.

“But symbols, examples, and ideas,” he said, “cannot be destroyed. When their enemies think they have destroyed them, what they have done is made them multiply. . . . Grenada has already multiplied the patriotic conviction and fighting spirit of the Salvadoran, Nicaraguan, and Cuban revolutionaries.”

Our aim in making available these speeches and interviews of Maurice Bishop is to help multiply the example and the lessons of the Grenada revolution as widely as possible among workers and the oppressed throughout the English-speaking world.

DECEMBER 1983