

**THROUGH THEIR
INVOLVEMENT IN THE
REVOLUTION GRENADIAN
WOMEN
HAVE CHANGED
THEMSELVES.**



Many women have joined the militia.

**THIS IS WHAT THE
UNITED STATES
AIM TO DESTROY
AFTER FOUR AND A HALF
YEARS OF BUILDING A
REVOLUTION IN
GRENADA**

**INTERNATIONAL
WOMEN'S DAY
1984**

Grenada, a tiny island in the Caribbean Sea, with a population of 110,000 people, like other Caribbean islands, has a plantation history out of which evolved an extreme pattern of social stratification: master versus slave, rich versus poor, white versus black, manhood versus womanhood. During slavery days a black person was defined as a chattel and treated as a piece of conveyable property, without rights and without redress. The black woman bore the full brunt of this oppressive system. But even while living under those extremely oppressive laws, we reserved the right to flatter, humiliate, disobey, sabotage, or rebel. We still reserve that right today.

Traditionally, women in the Caribbean have played a prominent role in the struggle against oppression, although this does not become evident simply by looking at the leadership of the various political parties or governments. However, things have begun to change, and the women of Grenada were on their way to becoming a profound example of that change as the economic, social and political fabric of the society changed with the revolutionary process that started in 1979 after the overthrow of dictator Gairy.

The attention which the revolutionary government paid to the conditions of Grenadian Women as spearheaded by the Women's Caucus of the New Jewel Movement (the political party which ran Grenada for the four years prior to the American invasion). The Women's Caucus, formed in 1977, called for equal pay, reduced food prices and job creation for women. Before the revolution debates were raised within the party about the role of women in society, so by the time the revolution occurred there were clear outlines as to what must be done to bring about equality for women.

They were:

1. That the revolutionary state have a firm, official position advocating equality for women and that the state support that position with laws which ensured that no legal discrimination against women be committed;
2. that every woman have the opportunity to work and be economically independent;
3. that "social facilities be provided to allow women to work, such as day and night care centres", and
4. that "women receive educational opportunities towards consciousness and leadership".

Work started on the four decisions taken immediately after the revolution. The National Women's Organization was set up. It had a membership of about 6,000 women by 1983. A Ministry of Women's Affairs was established to carry out policy decisions by the NWO. The **Maternity Leave Law** was passed, and laws concerning birth legitimacy, child maintenance and family relations were being drawn up in 1983. The reproductive rights of women was an area totally neglected prior to the revolution. The National Women's Organization had membership on the boards of all statutory bodies and state enterprises, along with other mass organizations such as the National Youth Organization and the Farmers Union.

Prior to the revolution unemployment among women as some 60%. In the four years of the revolution unemployment dropped to 20%; still higher than among men and still 70% of the total unemployed, but a decrease in unemployment by 40%. The high unemployment rate among women was due to the lack of educational and skills upgrading facilities and entrenched sexism within the society. Women in the

Caribbean tend to have a lower educational level because very often parents allowed the boys to stay on at school while the girls left school at an early age and became homemakers. It was found that quite often, even when women have the technical abilities or leadership potential, a lack of consciousness and confidence about their ability gets in the way.

One of the major tasks undertaken by the revolutionary government, with the direction of the NWO, was the complete overhaul of the educational system. The new school curriculum materials which were being produced had a non-sexist orientation, with the objective being to have the young men understand this thing about equality between men and women at a very early age.



A successful CPE student waits for her certificate at an awards ceremony.

Gradual mobilization of women around the question of non-traditional work has had quite an impact. Women were being registered into the agricultural training schools in large numbers. They showed special interest in learning to operate heavy equipment, i.e.,

tractors, bulldozers, and placed special emphasis on auto mechanics. There were several co-operatives set up which were completely run by women. One such co-op was the woodworking co-operative on Grenville, close to the "controversial airport". Made up of six women, they build furniture for schools, daycare centres and other governmental institutions.

The situation in health care in Grenada before the revolution was "chaotic and without direction". There was a serious material shortage — the absence of essential drugs, bed linen, hospital equipment, and there was also a personnel shortage. Pre and post-natal care in hospitals for women was seriously inadequate. There were several health and dental clinics set up in rural areas, which were staffed by Cuban and Grenadian health workers. With the expulsion of Cuban medical personnel and the firing of many Grenadians from the health services after the American invasion the gains made in this area have been set back to pre-revolutionary state. The Nutrition Council that encouraged Grenadian mothers to practice breast feeding has been closed. U.S. forces are now distributing some products from Nestles.

The Centre for Popular Education (CPE) through which Adult Education classes in basic math, english, writing, history, etcetera, were being taught, and very vital to the upgrading of skills for women, was closed after the invasion. There has been the removal of price controls on staple products like sugar, flour and rice used with local staples like fish and ground provision. Agricultural and fishing co-operatives have been disbanded, agro-industrial plants have been closed. The Grenfruit Women's Co-op was shut down and the centre which housed the co-op charged with possessing seditious literature. Under pressure, they

have since been allowed to continue their work. For them, as for other co-ops, without the support of state policy or programming their future is doubtful.

The National Women's Organization has been banned, dissolved. The Ministry of Women's Affairs became incapacitated, given that it was staffed, run and given policy direction by the NWO. Many women who belonged to the New Jewel Movement (50%) were detained in the first weeks of the occupation by American forces. Others, socialist workers from other islands were expelled.

The defeat of the women's movement and the revolution in Grenada, brought about by the U.S. invasion and occupation, is not only a set back for the women of Grenada, but for the entire Caribbean and, indeed, the rest of the world.

IN SOLIDARITY WITH THE WOMEN OF GRENADA ON INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

**Support the MAURICE BISHOP and
other myrths of October 19th
Foundation.**

Send donation to:

**P.O. Box 315
Postal Station "O"
TORONTO, Ontario M4A 2N9
Phone: 469-1212**

**The foundation is set up to provide material assistance
to families of the victims of the October tragedy in Grenada.**