

1983 Crisis

Joint Leadership: September 1983

15. On August 26th, 1983, the NJM CC analyzed and unanimously concluded that the party, the Grenada Revolution, and the country, Grenada, was facing a serious and growing crisis as a result of both internal problems and external pressures. At that meeting, Maurice Bishop himself described the situation as one where the governing party itself faced 'disintegration'.
16. There had been lengthy discussions at both CC level and in General Meetings of party members, over more than two years, to specifically review the growing challenges and problems being faced by the party and Revolution. Numerous organizational steps had been discussed and decided at CC meetings in the period 1981-83.

17. In September 1983 the NJM CC held an extraordinary meeting to discuss measures to meet the deteriorating situation in the party and Revolution. The meeting was held over 3 days. Towards the end of lengthy and detailed discussions, Maurice Bishop proposed a number of conclusions relating to the perceived crisis within the party and Revolution and a requirement for organizational measures to address the situation. Following on the conclusions a proposal to re-establish a Joint Leadership structure for the NJM was tabled.
18. After lengthy discussions the CC decided by a vote of nine (9) in favour, one (1) against and three (3) abstentions to return to the NJM's original leadership structure of 2 joint leaders of the party.
19. Ten years previously (1973), at the Founding Congress of the party, two joint leaders ("Coordinating Secretaries") had been elected: Maurice Bishop and Unison Whiteman.
20. Over time, Bishop emerged as sole leader. Now, the party executive was in effect voting to return to the original leadership structure, this time the "joint leaders" being Maurice Bishop and Bernard Coard. This the CC decided in an attempt to solve what they perceived as serious weaknesses in the party leader Maurice Bishop's leadership style and content.
21. It was the belief of a majority of NJM CC members that Bishop's considerable areas of strength – charisma, a special connection with the people, oratorical skills, extraordinary communication skills, and an ability to motivate the people to work and build the Revolution – were Coard's areas of weakness. Coard's areas of strengths – vision, organization, personal discipline and work ethic – however, were Bishop's areas of weaknesses. A majority of the CC believed that the marriage of the strengths of these two leaders was what was vitally needed, in the face of the crisis which all agreed was grave and growing.
22. Despite Bishop's full agreement with the analysis of the crisis at both the August and September CC meetings, and despite his acceptance of all the criticisms of his leadership at the meeting, he expressed serious reservations regarding the Joint Leadership proposal. He was worried, he said, that this proposal represented a vote of no confidence in him. Bishop therefore abstained in the voting. Unison Whiteman also abstained. He had put forward an alternative proposal, namely, that Bishop should remain sole leader and Coard

should be officially appointed Deputy Leader with special responsibilities. But this proposal did not enjoy support.

23. Hudson Austin was the third abstention. He had arrived for only the final hour of a three-day long meeting; having traveled all the way back from a visit to Korea and Vietnam. Having not heard the arguments of all sides, he felt it would be inappropriate for him to vote.
24. George Louison voted against the proposal, making it clear that he was vehemently opposed.
25. In light of Bishop's reservations, and due to the gravity of the issue, and despite a 9-1-3 vote, the CC decided to put the proposal of Joint Leadership to a general meeting of full members of the party. This meeting was set for September 25th (1983), and arrangements were made for every member of the party to be given a copy of the Minutes of the 14th-16th September CC meeting, so that they would have the detailed arguments of all members of the CC, and also the detailed breakdown of the respective areas of responsibility to be assigned, under the proposal, to each of the two leaders. It was clearly understood that the CC proposal was restricted exclusively to Joint Leadership of the party; that Bishop remained sole Prime Minister and leader of the PRG.
26. The general meeting of party members duly took place on September 25th, 1983. At the end of the general meeting, which lasted 15 hours, the vote was all but one member in favour of the proposal for Joint Leadership of the party by Bishop and Coard; the one being an abstention; with no votes against. At this party general meeting, both Bishop and Whiteman voted in favour of the motion. Bishop was reassured by the speeches of all party members, who expressed their love and admiration for him and for his contribution to the process, while expressing their belief that the Joint Leadership proposal was necessary for the reasons outlined by the CC. They told him in effect that this was not some smart move to eventually ease him out, as George Louison had declared at the CC meeting earlier in September.
27. Bishop left Grenada the day after the September 25th General Meeting of party members for pre-planned official visits to Hungary and Czechoslovakia. There, he met up with George

Louison, who had missed the party General Meeting because of having to leave a few days before as the head of the advance party for the visits.

Fateful Trip To Eastern Europe & Cuba: September 25th–October 8th 1983

28. Errol George, a member of Bishop's security detail on the trip to Eastern Europe, and himself a member of the NJM, testified at the Preliminary Inquiry into our matter that Louison spent a great part of that trip to Eastern Europe seeking to persuade Bishop to revoke his support for the decision of Joint Leadership of the party and instead to fight it. The Appellants had similar reports at the time from several party members who were on the trip to Eastern Europe and verily believe those reports to be true.
29. Bishop and his delegation, at the end of their Eastern European trip, paid an unscheduled visit to Cuba on their way back to Grenada.
30. While in Cuba, Cletus St. Paul, the head of Bishop's personal security unit, rang Lt. Ashley Folkes, the overall head of the personal security unit at home in Grenada, and, referring to the decision on Joint Leadership, he stated to Folkes in threatening language that blood would flow. Lt. Folkes was alarmed by this message from Cletus St. Paul and he immediately reported to his superiors, among them the Appellant, Liam James. The Appellants verily believe this report to be true because among other facts Lt. Folkes had no reason to lie on Cletus St. Paul.
31. The report from Lt. Folkes sent off alarm bells among the Appellants who were NJM CC members. It was already evident that something was wrong. Throughout the 2-week stay out of Grenada, Bishop did not contact Coard or Strachan, the other two top leaders, back home. This was unprecedented. Based on previous experience, whenever Bishop traveled out of Grenada, he would speak to Coard and/or Strachan at least once per day. The lack of contact on this occasion combined with the threatening message from the chief of Bishop's personal security unit were extremely disturbing.
32. Bishop, Whiteman, Louison, and the rest of the delegation returned to Grenada on October 8th. The Cuban ambassador, who was in Cuba on holidays, had his holidays cut short, and he returned to Grenada on the same flight.

33. At the next scheduled meeting of the CC, namely, on 12th October, Bishop informed the CC that he had changed his position on Joint Leadership, and now opposed it.

The Rumour October 12th

34. During a break in the morning deliberations, CC members became aware of a rumour which they were told by national security officials was spreading like wild bush fire through the country. The rumour stated that Phyllis and Bernard Coard were plotting to kill Maurice Bishop.
35. Appellant Liam James later informed members of the CC that Errol George, the deputy head of Bishop's personal security unit, had reported being given the rumour to spread. Errol George stated that, together with Cletus St. Paul, he had been called in by Bishop and given the rumour to spread. He stated that Bishop had given them the names of fifteen (15) specific people (which they wrote down) to go and give the rumour, and to request them, in turn, to spread it. He said that Bishop stressed that the name of Phyllis Coard must be called first. Phyllis Coard was non-Grenadian, unlike her husband. He said that he was told that he had a rumour to spread; and that he had never heard of any such plan to kill Bishop prior to when he was given the rumour to spread.
36. On 13th October, in Bishop's presence, Errol George addressed a general meeting of all the members and applicants of NJM and repeated all he said in his report, including a detailed account of Bishop's role, and of St. Paul's and his roles in the spreading of the rumour.
37. Prior to George's address, Bishop had addressed the said meeting for over 30 minutes and denied knowledge of the rumour. George was not present at the time Bishop addressed the meeting. George was then brought to address the meeting and he did so in the terms outlined in paragraph 35 above. Bishop was then immediately provided with an opportunity to respond but he declined. Several persons present at then meeting spoke urging Bishop to give a response to George's address but Bishop declined to do so.
38. Errol George testified to all of the above events at the Preliminary Inquiry.

39. In the afternoon of October 12th Cletus St. Paul was questioned about the rumour. When confronted with the detailed report from George, St. Paul confessed to the rumour. St. Paul gave a written, witnessed confession, which was also taped. These confessions were handed over to Liam James in his official capacity as head of national security. St. Paul later wrote a letter to the NJM CC apologizing for his role in spreading the rumour, with all the damage it had caused in the country.

40. By the evening of October 12th, some 10 to 12 hours after the rumour had spread throughout Grenada, the Appellant Bernard Coard and his wife, Phyllis, were advised by national security officials that credible threats to their lives had been intercepted and that they would be moved from their home for that night.

Bishop's House Arrest: October 13th, 1983

41. On October 13th Bishop was placed under effective house arrest by the security forces with the full agreement of the majority of the NJMCC. Formally, Bishop was not arrested. He was requested to remain at home so as to avoid the possibility of unrest. But his telephone communication was removed.

42. The reason for the effective house arrest was twofold:

(a) His role in spreading the rumour. There was credible evidence that Bishop himself was the author of the rumour. Such evidence would have merited the immediate arrest and prosecution of any ordinary citizen for criminal libel and seditious libel. But this was the Prime Minister.

(b) Secondly, and more importantly, there was fear that Bishop would seek Cuban intervention, and in particular Cuban military intervention, to crush those who were perceived as challenging his position as sole leader of the ruling party.

(c) The fear with regard to Cuban military intervention arose from:

i. The fact that Cuba had a battalion of soldiers of over 700 men stationed at Point Salines. This was bigger than the permanent section of the Peoples' Revolutionary Army (PRA). The battalion comprised mainly of Cuban

construction workers (with previous military service) engaged in construction of the Point Salines airport. But they were led by 60 specialist military officers who had battle experience in Angola and Ethiopia. They were fully equipped with weapons.

ii. The standing arrangement between the PRG and the PRA on the one hand and the Cuban government on the other hand that the Cuban battalion stationed at Point Salines would only respond to a request for assistance from the Commander-in-Chief in Grenada (Bishop) to the Commander-in-Chief in Cuba, Fidel Castro. The Cuban side had imposed this arrangement on the PRG and PRA as a condition for providing any assistance in defending Grenada from external attack; its significance became clear in the circumstances of October 1983.

43. That this fear on the part of the CC majority was not fanciful was borne out by the fact that on October 19th, 1983 upon seizing army headquarters with the huge crowd, Bishop placed a call to the Cuban Ambassador, Julien Rizo, formally requesting that Fidel Castro and the Cuban Government militarily intervene to crush the ruling party, NJM, and the Grenadian army. This information comes from Fidel Castro in an interview with Jeffery M. Elliot and Mervyn Dymally (then chairman of US Congressional Black Caucus). The interview was published by Pathfinders, N.Y. and it is titled: **Nothing Can Stop The Course Of History**. We have read the interview and we verily believe that it represents a true record of the words of Fidel Castro.
44. The effective house arrest of Bishop did not represent an intention on the part of the Appellants to carry out or commence a coup against Bishop. It was not the belief, intention, or contemplation of the Appellants that, in the context of the revolutionary reality in Grenada, that their actions were illegal or constituted the commencement of a coup in Grenada.
45. The reality as well as the perception within the NJM was that Bishop was not in power in the Grenada Revolution; the NJM party was. In March 1979, it was not Bishop but NJM, led by Bishop and the rest of the leadership, who removed the Gairy regime from power.