



REFLECTION

Reflections on a Revolution: In Conversation with Selwyn Strachan

In Conversation with Peter Clegg
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Reflections on a Revolution: In Conversation with Selwyn Strachan was organised by the University of the West of England's Social Science in the City strand, and took place in Bristol, UK on 22nd May 2014. What follows is an edited transcript of the conversation. The interview was conducted and edited by Dr Peter Clegg, Senior Lecturer of Politics at the University of the West of England.

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Just over 30 years ago, the only successful Revolution to have taken place in the Commonwealth Caribbean collapsed. Severe internal divisions and United States (US) intervention ended the People's Revolutionary Government's (PRG) time in office. Selwyn Strachan was a key member of the New Jewel Movement (NJM) and Minister of National Mobilisation and Labour. After the US invasion Strachan was imprisoned for almost 26 years for his alleged role in the death of Prime Minister and leader of the Revolution, Maurice Bishop.

Why did you become so actively involved in Grenadian politics during the 1970s? Describe the nature of Grenadian society in the 1970s under the premiership of Eric Gairy?

I was part of the rise of Black Power politics in the Caribbean and it was an exciting period. Maurice Bishop returned to the country after studying here in Britain; and he was also involved in political

movements in Britain, progressive movements and so as he came back to Grenada with a lot of ideas that were generated in British society and immediately embarked upon political organisations, political work to help lift the consciousness of Black people in our country. So I was bitten by all of that and at the same time the Government of the day, led by Sir Eric Gairy, was engaging in a number of human rights violations against the ordinary people in society. He was also not tackling the economic problems. In that context progressive revolutionary struggles emerged gradually. So we had a situation in 1973, Gairy waged a struggle of violence against the newly established NJM and its leading members, including myself. I, and some of my colleagues, were thrown into prison. This provoked mass democratic protests throughout the country. Further on in the middle of the 1970s Gairy passed a law to stifle our newspaper which in fact was having great impact among the people, raising their consciousness.

There were a number of killings of people who were known opponents of Gairy. One guy Harris Strawn a cousin of mine who met his death as a result of the 'Mongoose Gang' which Gairy had operate on his behalf. Another cousin of mine, Alistair Strawn, he was also killed by the Gairy forces simply because he came to attend a meeting in the market square. So all these different things really galvanised the people into action and more or less prepared the country for what eventually took place in 1979, which is now known as the Grenadian Revolution.

Please say a few words about the Revolution itself and the early days and weeks of the PRG? What were the immediate priorities and challenges?

The Revolution triumphed on March 13th 1979. It was not a case where we got up one morning and decided in fact to launch an assault on the army barracks which was in the south of the island and then announce that we were in power now. This was a gradual process because we in the NJM stated clearly in our manifesto that we would engage in all forms of struggle although we preferred the peaceful approach to power. But it had reached a stage where Gairy was becoming more and more repressive and it was not possible for the democratic process to be adhered to in all its facets and dimensions. So after the bloody assault on the NJM leadership in 1973 it was felt by the leadership that while we continued to engage in democratic forms of struggle we had to be prepared for

other forms of struggle. Therefore we created what we called the Military Wing of the NJM, similar to what was created by the African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa. We had to do that because of the direction the country was moving in. Not that we wanted to do that but we were forced into that situation.

By March 1979 the military wing of our party was more or less ready for the final assault. Gairy sensing something was afoot left Grenada on a State Visit leaving instructions to arrest and imprison the leadership of the NJM. March 13th was not set as a date for revolution; no specific date was set down, but because the way things were unfolding we had to bring the assault on the Gairy leadership earlier than anticipated.

Therefore early in the morning of March 13th the forces were gathered in the south of the island and given specific instructions and at 4.15 a.m. the military wing of the NJM launched its assault on the Gairy dictatorship. The True Blue Barracks, where the army was located, was attacked. The element of surprise was used and within minutes the entire army was scattered and we had our forces deployed throughout the country to seize the 36 police stations. At the same time there were prepared statements which called upon the people to come out in their numbers to support the revolutionary forces. The people were waiting for that. That's the important point about the Revolution. Thousands of people rallied to the call instantly without hesitation as though they were waiting for the call. From then on there was no turning back.

The Revolution immediately embarked upon a course of social reforms, economic reforms, bringing benefits to the people because we already had our manifesto and our programme organised and we were explaining to the people throughout the years before what we were going to be doing once there was a transfer of power in the country. So our priorities in the early days of the Revolution were in fact to create a number of social programmes to bring some immediate relief to the poor and working people of our country. We had a feeding programme, which was so important because poor people were suffering, we had a School Feeding Programme, we had free scholarships, including to study abroad, free education, schoolbooks, and uniforms. All these were initial social programmes we had to institute right away in order to consolidate the process, while we thought about the bigger economic programmes, as they required more planning.

Another important aspect was protecting the Revolution from external aggression. Within months of the Revolution taking place

we in fact said we have to diversify our external relations. And one of the countries we said we had to try to get closer to us was Cuba because of what Cuba has been doing for Third World countries historically. This of course angered the US instantly, so that the Ambassador to the region who was in the Caribbean at the time, paid us a visit in Grenada and held discussions with Maurice and essentially issued a threat to Grenada that the US will view with displeasure any cosyng up or close relations with Cuba, and basically our tourist industry will be put under serious threat as a result. And that was the first serious threat coming from the US against the Revolution and that threat continued in different forms right through until October 1983, because the US was determined the closer we got to Cuba the more determined it would become in terms of overthrowing the Revolution. This was an important aspect of the whole process that took place in the four and a half years of the Revolution, because it was felt that in order for us to continue to bring more and more benefits to the people we had to defend the Revolution and therefore had to deploy a lot of resources in that area, small as we were, limited in resources as we were, we had to be seen to be doing something to protect the Revolution and protect the gains of the Revolution because the people were in fact enjoying a period in their life that they never enjoyed before.

The PRG wanted to fundamentally restructure the nature of Grenadian society, and make a cleaner break with the British colonial period. Could you talk about the key economic and social reforms undertaken by the government?

We inherited a backward economy. Our economy was basically agricultural in nature and we were growing crops for export. Further, the business class was very small and their main thrust for many years was to in fact import wholesale and retail. The business sector never engaged in productive activity; they never engaged in the productive sector of the economy—such as taking a strong stake in agriculture. So we inherited that kind of situation. Our goal eventually was to build Socialism, but we knew that would take a very long time, this cannot be done overnight, but the basis can be created for that to happen 10, 15, 20 years down the line. But in fact in order to do that we had to embark upon a non-capitalist path of development or the path of Socialist orientation, and the mixed economy model was the best option to do that. In the mixed

economy we made it clear the State would play the dominant role in economic activity. The private sector would play its role and the co-operative sector would play its role. State-activism was crucial because as I mentioned earlier the private sector was small and afraid to get into the productive sector and take risks.

So we got engaged in agriculture. We established what we called the Grenada Farms Co-operative. Now understand in the Gairy days, Gairy seized a number of agricultural estates for political reasons and he started to cut up these estates to give to his supporters. But then after a while he stopped and these estates remained idle, nothing was happening. They were taken away from his opponents but nothing was being produced on them, so there was a basis there for us to put these estates under State control, so we could grow more food. At the same time we established agro-industries for the first time in Grenada to utilise the crops we were growing on the State farms and by private farmers. So very quickly during the Revolution we started to produce nectars, jams and jellies with several factories and we began to export some of these things. These were State enterprises. Also we established a presence in tourism. A number of Gairy-owned hotels were seized and placed under State control. Further, the State was involved in manufacturing (e.g. a fish processing plant to produce saltfish) and the extraction of gravel used for the construction industry. We were also involved in the financial sector, because we brought two or three banks under State control.

Of course, the private sector still continued to operate in all those areas I am talking about, but we were in fact competing with the private sector and we made it clear that the State sector would be dominant in the process. We established other things like the Marketing and National Importing Board to purchase the agricultural produce from the farmers for resale abroad as well as locally and at the same time this agency was being used to import basic foodstuffs to be sold to the population at a reasonable price and compete with the private sector in terms of price. In a sense this helped to civilise and control the cost of living overall, because if the State was engaged in producing goods and services for the society at a reasonable price it made it very difficult for the private sector to increase the price of their goods at an astronomical pace, because they would lose more and more business.

By 1983 we had 44 State enterprises operating in different sectors of the economy. They were run under proper management structures—not by the central government—because we

recognised that whenever central government was involved in these kinds of activities these entities go bankrupt within a relatively short space of time. So it was clear to us if these were to produce profits for the country they had to be run properly. But the companies belonged to the State, they belonged to the people, and that was creating the basis eventually for the Socialist transformation of society. We began to see results almost instantaneously because it was very effective in the returns that were going into the Treasury and in turn we were able to utilise this to help build the country further, quite apart from the assistance we were getting from different parts of the world.

But a crucial aspect of our economic policy, key to many of the other things, was the building and construction of the international airport, which was first and foremost for the tourist industry, but also for all other areas of the economy, because as Maurice pointed out many times, the international airport was the gateway for our economic transformation. And that is why the US brought enormous pressure on the Revolution to stop the construction of that airport. The propaganda was massive. They engaged all the international institutions to deny us from getting aid to assist us with the project. Cuba was of course the main contributor not only in terms of material but manpower. Cuban workers were sent to Grenada to assist us in the building of that airport and Grenadian workers were put alongside Cuban workers to acquire their skills that could be used in other arenas in building society when the airport was completed. That was our plan and that airport (completed after the US invasion) was critical for the tourist industry and other sections of the economy, and it has been a saviour to the country since then.

For the first time in our country we were seeing a real National pride coming out. Real patriotism of the people. People were willing to come forward to participate in the building of their country. People's participation. People's democracy. The level of involvement has not been seen before or since. And that is why in fact today, 31 years after the Revolution imploded, people are still using what took place between '79 and '83 as a bench-mark for further economic development.

There have been criticisms of the authoritarian tendencies of the PRG (e.g. power and authority flowed clearly downwards from a very small group of officials within the NJM; 'heavy manners' against

opponents; closure of Torchlight and Grenadian Voice). How would you respond to such criticisms?

Well I would say straight away these criticisms are very valid because we in fact unfortunately found ourselves doing some of the same things for which we attacked Gairy. I think we were infected in the same way by the influence of British colonialism in terms of using violence to deal with political opposition. That was the soft under belly, the Achilles heel, of the Revolution in spite of the many great things that were done. Dissent was not tolerated. Those who had genuine views of a different kind were kept out, and that led to political detainees, arrests, and trials. We tried to explain that in a Revolutionary situation there will always be dislocation; that we were finding our feet in power; and we knew that the Americans were placing enormous pressure on us and were trying to use local elements to create subversion. None the less in hindsight the authoritarian streak was a mistake as it was not necessary and the criticism is valid to a great extent. We should have been more tolerant, and we have apologised to the Grenadian people who were victims of that kind of repression.

But let me point out that we were building Revolutionary Democracy in Grenada. In other words democracy not built along the Westminster model, because we were very strong on this thing, that the people should be involved in the building of the country on a day-to-day basis and we had bill boards throughout the country reflecting that. 'Not a day without a struggle.' 'Grow what we eat and eat what we grow.' That was part of the Revolution. There were bill boards throughout the country with these very catchy slogans, which the people were gravitating to and the Revolutionary Democracy took the form of the establishment of parish and zonal councils throughout the country where people were able to meet on a weekly, fortnightly and monthly basis in their different areas, whether it was in a school or a community centre to discuss what was happening in their area, as well as what was happening nationally and internationally, and able to make suggestions as to what the government should and should not do, including in relation to the national budget (the 'People's Budget').

You had a situation where technocrats and political leaders like myself would have to go before the people: full house, packed with people from a particular area who were able to raise issues, criticise certain programmes, ask questions of the technocrats and

so forth and get answers and get a report to them down the line as to what was happening. So this was real democracy.

We also had mass organisations, such as the National Youth Organisation, the National Women's Organisation, the Farmers Organisation, the Pioneers, the Militia, and so forth. People in these groups were looking at the problems of women on a sectorial basis, looking at the problems of youth on a sectorial basis, farmers on a sectorial basis, and there could be some overlap with the zonal councils. With input from these groups we passed important social legislation, including in relation to women and labour.

It was a different thing we were building in Grenada and this eventually would have led to elections of a different kind because we had taken a decision, rightly or wrongly, in the very early days of the Revolution to have proper and real democratic elections five years after the Revolution triumphed, but we needed to establish these national democratic structures across the country in order to achieve that.

What were the main reasons for the serious internal dispute inside the leadership of the PRG/NJM during the summer and autumn of 1983?

Things were happening in the Revolution at a rapid pace, people were getting enormous benefits but by 1983 we had reached a stage where it can be said that the system was overloaded and this led to system breakdown. Because of the number of things we were doing party members were having so many things to do and very little time to recharge the batteries a lot of people were breaking down. Throughout the country it was happening – leaders as well as rank and file party members. The thing was getting so bad that a rebellion was kind of brewing, because the Revolution was clearly at risk. I don't think it was losing support, but there was certainly a falloff in activities precisely because of system overload and system breakdown.

Fundamentally the people remained with the Revolution. It was just that by 1982 the activities were not as vibrant as they were in the first three years. Even the masses, even the people themselves were having more and more to do. Imagine that. It was one thing for the vanguard party to be overworked and overloaded and breaking down, but the people that you were leading, lots of them were also getting tired because the Revolution was doing so many things. As well as this we continued to be faced with the external

pressures, and this added to the stresses and strains. However, it is important to mention here that there was no real ideological disunity within the party, including between Maurice and other members of the central committee such as myself. In my view the problems into 1983 were down primarily to system overload.

Recognising the gravity of the situation the party met in September/October 1983 in an attempt to correct the problems. First, the Central Committee met and it was here that a formal proposal for joint leadership of the party was put forward. It was felt by many that combining Maurice's strength with the masses and Bernard Coard's organisational skills would better help to address the problems facing the Revolution. But I want to stress the proposal was for joint leadership of the party, not the State, because the propagandists and those mischief makers around the world totally and deliberately distorted that entire position for years and tried to give the impression that it was something to share power at the level of the State, joint Prime Minister etc. The way we saw it was that we needed to share responsibility for the party work, to redevelop the party, and make it what it was for the previous three years and consolidate the gains that we had already achieved in the Revolution and to build on that. After we analysed the situation, everybody including Maurice, came to the conclusion that if we do not take the necessary steps now the Revolution would collapse in the near future. We also discussed increasing the membership of the party and rationalising and prioritising the work of every single existing member.

But everything was pushed aside and all the focus was on the joint leadership question. Initially, Maurice was not happy with the proposal, as was his right, and he expressed the view that this would be a vote of no confidence in his leadership. The Central Committee spent three days discussing and reassuring this was not the case. The leader of the Revolution was Maurice; the prime ministership was unquestionably his; the Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces was his. It was just an internal party reform, to try and get the party work back on stream and to bring back the vibrancy of the past. Then a vote was taken. Nine supported joint leadership and three abstained including Maurice, because he wanted to hear what Coard's position was, because the joint leadership was between Coard and himself. At the time Coard was not a member of the Central Committee as he had resigned one year before, simply because his view was that Maurice was not taking steps to deal with certain people (e.g. Vincent Noel, Unison

Whiteman and Kenneth Radix) who were not carrying their weight at the level of the leadership and they were not coming prepared to meetings and they were not contributing and were basically becoming dead wood and the work was being left to just a few of us and that was contributing to the system breakdown. Coard did however remain Deputy Prime Minister.

Because Maurice expressed concern about the proposal it was decided the decision should be postponed until it was taken to the membership of the party. At that meeting member after member set out their position in support of the Central Committee proposal for joint leadership. At the same time they kept saying to the Comrade Leader 'we love you', this had nothing to do with you; this was for the Revolution and so on. And Maurice was visibly moved by that. You could have seen it, that every Party member expressed confidence in him. And at the end of the day another vote was taken by the entire membership. Every single member bar one, including critically on that occasion Maurice voted for joint leadership. The tension in the party evaporated at that time. And in fact there was great joy. The issue was settled. We can move forward.

The next day Maurice left on a long-planned visit to Eastern Europe. The feeling was the battle was settled and party members felt great, that is it. We are going forward. However, a big shock was coming. A number of people Maurice spent time with on his trip had been absent at the meetings and some were known mischief-makers. They got to work on Maurice and pushed all kinds of sinister thoughts in his head about the joint leadership and eventually succeeded in getting him to renege on the decision that was settled before he left.

On October 8th Maurice returned. Obviously you could see, once he arrived, there was that re-emergence of tension. I sensed it right away. I also learned subsequently that Maurice's security were issuing threats to certain people, including Coard. We sat in the back of the car, his Prime Ministerial car and we were chatting basically about the trip. Then we introduced the topic of joint leadership, and basically he had given the issue some more thought and he said he wanted the issue brought back to the party because he was not prepared to go forward with it. I listened to him carefully and I said, yes I hear what you say, and if that is your position I think you should be given a further chance. Maurice had to be comfortable with what was being planned.

A meeting of the Central Committee was organised for October 12th, and the first session was held without incident. But that is when the turning point in the whole process began. All of a sudden information reached us that there was a rumour flying all over the country that Phyllis and Bernard Coard were planning to kill Maurice. Everybody knows that Maurice was well loved and deeply respected by the people in our country and afar. So the moment a rumour of this sort hits the country the people will be immediately incensed and that is what happened. Everybody wanted to know what was going on. In other words, the party crisis which was going on for the past few weeks now became a national political crisis because it was taken outside in the form of a rumour, and then of course later on it was discovered the rumour had in fact been engineered by Maurice himself.

Unfortunately, I have to make that point, the evidence was unmistakable and everybody was dejected. Maurice denied anything about the rumour, but when the rumour hit the country the security forces were put in a quandary as to how to deal with the situation and they in fact decided, rightly or wrongly (in the end it turned out to be catastrophic), they suggested Maurice should stay at home – which meant house arrest. Coard was also advised to stay at home. The reasons for suggesting they both stay at home were different: for Maurice so not inflame the situation and for Coard to protect his life from angry supporters of Maurice. But in effect the person who was confined to his house was Maurice, no matter how it was worded; it was indeed house arrest. So that was the reaction to the rumour.

The rumour was the turning point in the entire crisis, and the house arrest was the point of no return. Nobody was thinking properly because there was action on reaction. And this thing went on for days, and demonstrations erupted spontaneously throughout the country when it was heard Maurice was under house arrest. People were being mobilised by the same mischief-makers who caused Maurice to change his mind – cashing in opportunistically on his popularity. On October 13th when Maurice's house arrest took effect, an emergency meeting of the general membership was called because party members across the country were wondering how we were going to handle the situation. Even though Maurice was under house arrest he was still asked to come to the emergency meeting. He came and spoke and we all were there, the place was filled with Party members. Maurice accepted responsibility for the state of things in the

country, but at the same time denied involvement in the rumour. But then his deputy security official was called to talk about his involvement in the rumour and in the presence of Maurice he gave a blow-by-blow account as to how the rumour was organised and what he was asked to do. The place was silent; everybody was stunned. After he finished Maurice was asked if he wanted to respond to what the security person had said, and he said no, he wouldn't respond, and you could see it in the party members, the tears were coming in the eyes. However, these were not the masses where Maurice had very strong support. So demonstrations just kept spontaneously coming up and we were trying to hold different meetings to see how we could resolve the crisis.

I held several meetings. I took risks to go and talk to the people in the heart of the capital, in St George's, standing in the middle of the crowd. I could have been lynched, because here I was trying to explain to people, hostile to what is happening and wanted to get Coard. But after a while people got hostile and wanted to hear what Maurice had to say. I said yes that will happen but I must tell you what the reasons are for Maurice's house arrest. By the way Coard had to resign his position of Deputy Prime Minister after one of the meetings when one of the persons who was fanning the flames announced that I at a meeting said that he had been made Prime Minister, a total fabrication to fan the flames and this was sent out in the regions and so on, but it was all part of the whole thing.

But by the time October 18th came, seven Ministers of the PRG had resigned. In other words the government collapsed basically, seven out of 11 Cabinet Ministers resigned, the only persons that did not resign was myself, Maurice of course the Prime Minister who was still under house arrest, plus Hudson Austin and Chris De Riggs. Then we had to take a decision, difficult as it was for party members, because another emergency meeting had to be called on the 18th to say to the party members, now look, in order to save this Revolution we have to back down on this joint leadership thing and a delegation has been put together to go and see Maurice to put before him a compromise proposal.

Saving the Revolution was a key factor and I want to stress that point. And while of course party members expressed the view that, look Party principles should not be compromised and so on, they realised that a new course had to be taken. On the evening of October 18th a four man delegation – I wasn't in it – visited Maurice. He agreed that in return for the joint leadership proposal being withdrawn, he would make a statement that he had to take a lot of

responsibility for the state of things in the country. We were not even asking him to say that he spread the rumour. No. That would have been a waste of time. But at least this thing would save the Revolution. But Maurice asked if could speak with a few close confidants, people like George Louison – one of the chief mischief makers. This was agreed to. So the next morning Louison visited Maurice. He spent two hours there and by the time the meeting finished, a large crowd had gathered outside Mount Wheldale – Maurice's official residence. They were shouting and chanting for Maurice. The army unit that was there guarding the Prime Minister fired some shots in the air and the crowd backed off and when they realised all they were doing was firing shots in the air to keep them away, they decided to surge forwards and they burst through the gate, went into the yard, got Maurice and went with him.

On 19 October 1983 Maurice Bishop and seven others were killed by an army firing squad. Was there a direct order from the Central Committee to do this?

Well first of all, there was no order from the Central Committee, even though those who put us on trial put those words in one of the soldier's mouths. The soldier who led the firing squad at Fort Rupert said that there was an order from the Central Committee. The fact that this question is still being asked today shows that maybe that piece of evidence has not been accepted, and therefore the search for who actually gave the order is still on. But the Central Committee did not even meet on October 19th contrary to popular opinion. There were members of the Central Committee all over the place, including at Fort Frederick, not the place where Maurice was killed. Because after Maurice was released from house arrest, it was generally accepted and believed that he was heading back to the market square to address the people who were there waiting for him. When they reached a certain point just to go down the hill to go into the market square, a small section of that crowd decided in fact to guide him to the Army HQ. In other words I don't know whether that was pre-planned or not. They entered the fort, they disarmed the soldiers who were on guard, they took their weapons away from them, stripped them of their clothes, in fact one of the females were stripped down to her underwear by the angry crowd that went with Maurice. Maurice was not participating in that of course, and some actually left because they realised this

was a different situation altogether. So the entire thing changed from a political situation to a military one.

Some of the people armed themselves after accessing the armoury. Some were militia trained over the years of the Revolution. Two of the soldiers who had been detained escaped and went up to Fort Frederick and reported to a Lieutenant Colonel who was there, because after Maurice was released, some of us amongst the leadership were advised to go to Frederick for our own safety. So some of us were at the fort; incidentally the fort from which the army unit was sent to restore order. Later in the day, sometime after 1 p.m., three armoured personnel carriers were ordered to go to the Fort Rupert to restore order and chase the people off the fort because there was chaos there and there were plans afoot to arm people and move to other strategic points in the country. In other words it was clear that the country was heading for civil war based on reports of what was coming out. So that had to be nipped in the bud.

On arrival the first armoured car was ambushed, because they had weapons in them, AK47s and so on, and Maurice's supporters fired upon them. That of course was a surprise because the soldiers who went down to retake the fort never thought the people would respond in that way. They thought once they got there and Maurice's supporters saw the armoured cars they would be subjugated, they would surrender. But the opposite happened. Because based on what the Military Commanders told us subsequently, the soldiers were instructed that when they get there, if fired upon, because it was still a military situation, if fired upon you have a right to return fire. And that is what led to the shoot out. When the first armoured car was attacked, a warrant officer died instantly. The person who was leading the unit was shot and died at the hospital a few minutes later. All but one soldier on the first armoured car was shot. Two died and the rest were injured. The only person on the first armoured car who did not receive a bullet was the one who was buried inside the car because he was driving. It then meant that the other two armoured cars had to take over the situation. So people were picked up, in the shoot out of course, as we subsequently learned Maurice was not killed, neither were some of the Ministers and they in fact were arrested, they were picked up and brought onto another level of the Fort, and there was a lull in the whole process. By this time now soldiers were enraged because they had all watched and observed their fellow soldiers being killed before their eyes and they were making

sacrifices throughout the crisis, so that enraged them and something happened, something happened in that lull, and it was in that period of that enraged situation that those who were on the fort were executed as the term was being used, shot and killed, a disaster, a tragedy that took place.

We should have been able to resolve our problems in a different manner. The fact of the matter is the people who died were fine people, I mean we struggled together; we faced the repression of Gairy together. I mean Maurice Bishop and myself and his wife and so on bled together in a cell in 1973 before the Revolution, although all part of the build up, because of police brutality, violence inflicted on us, we were engaging in activities to bring the masses together. After we were beaten and so on we were thrown into a cell with other people packed up like sardines, spending the entire night bleeding to death and so on. When I think of all these things and know what happened subsequently it weighs a lot on my mind because I know what we went through. People are still surprised. They wonder what happened. How could this implosion have taken place? Just out of the blue.

Ultimately I believe some of Maurice's confidants who wanted to further their own place in the Revolution and knowing that Maurice had the support of the masses, encouraged and pushed him down the path that he followed – not thinking where this thing could lead. They are going to turn around and say that we are the ones who sacrificed the Revolution – those who supported joint leadership. But the fact of the matter is here is somebody (Strachan) who was extremely close to Maurice supporting a position that I felt would help him and the Revolution. I had no doubt in my mind at the time. But of course in hindsight we have to think differently because of the human reaction, the human factor and how people reacted to that decision. But I had no doubt in my mind at the time.

What are your concluding thoughts about the rise and fall of the revolution?

We should have cut down the pace by half and prevented October 19th 1983 than having this situation we have now. That is the stark truth. And that is why I mean I could easily say look I spent 26 years in prison. Forget me. I just try and keep myself quiet and try to live a nice life because I am old now and I struggled for my freedom in spite of the kangaroo trial that was given to us by the

invaders. But I owe it to my country to at least try to give a different perspective as to what happened. Difficult as it is, as it may be, for people to absorb it because it is not easy to hear a different angle of things based on what you have been hearing for the past 20 something years by the propaganda. It is not an easy thing but I still decide to go forward and engage people in dialogue and try and discuss the thing and see if we can get a better appreciation as to what really went on. As I said, the events which led to the execution of Prime Minister Maurice Bishop and others cannot be condoned. They cannot be justified. It should not have happened. That should not have happened, but for these nefarious activities of certain elements after Prime Minister Bishop in fact fully and completely supported the matter that was brought to the party. Should not have happened.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Selwyn "Sello" Strachan was born in 1947. He contested unsuccessfully Eric Gairy's seat in the 1972 General Election. Soon after he became one of the founding members of the NJM. A second unsuccessful run against Gairy came in 1976. In 1979, he edited the newspaper 'New Jewel', and in March became a key member of the PRG, He was captured by US forces on 29 October 1983, and in December 1986 he was convicted for his alleged role in the death of Maurice Bishop. He was initially sentenced to death, but this was later commuted. He was released from prison on 5 September 2009.

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