

'GRENADA HE COME FROM'

by Paul Rose

IN a witty Caribbean calypso there are two lines that have now become rather poignant:

If you ask him why he happy so
Grenada he come from.

Grenadians, by repute, are a happy people on this tiny island, one of a string with populations the size of a single British constituency. The spectacle of the mighty United States invading Grenada is in one sense comical—like the British bobbies intervening to keep the peace in St. Kitts, Nevis and Anguilla or the scenario of the film *Passport to Pimlico*. The loss of life and the naked violation of sovereignty is tragic. The implications are much wider.

These implications for the Alliance and special relationship—the arousal of new fears for our fate as the carriers of Cruise and Pershing missiles after the US brush off: the revelation that we were paying a debt for the Falkland Islands: the destruction of moral credibility in condemning the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan: the suspicion that pre-election nerves following the horror of the Lebanon played a part: the doctrine that the US had the right to impose 'democracy' out of the barrel of a gun—all these and more contrast with attitudes to vicious and sadistic Latin American States with scant regard for human rights. Will Nicaragua be next? These thoughts come streaming into my consciousness.

I write from a very personal view as one who knows Mrs. Eugenia Charles and stayed at her hotel in Dominica when she was an able opposition politician. I remember standing on the quayside in St. Vincent watching the boat for Grenada depart and kicking myself for having flown from adjacent St. Lucia with only one spare set of underwear and my toothbrush, towel, soap, razor and snorkelling gear. The thought of the Grenadines, Mustique and Bequia remained a dream. If American boats to Grenada carried soldiers and weapons, mine would have carried nothing more than sheer delight at the beauty and compelling charm of the Caribbean.

To the outsider, the Caribbean sounds a uniform description. The reality is that each island has its own distinctive personality—from the US and British Virgin Islands with a Scandinavian character; the integral parts of France, Guadeloupe and Martinique, the very British Barbados or Antigua, the British but French patois-speaking islands of St. Lucia and Dominica, the curious Dutch/French split St. Martin or the 'Irish' Emerald Isle of Montserrat, the cosmopolitan Trinidad and Spanish speaking Dominican Republic, now tragically divided ideologically by their attitudes to the US action.

The Caribbean is now in the big wide world of superpowers' intrigue and strategy. Cuba woke up the world to its importance, not least in a missile crisis when many of us were prepared to have no more than a few hours left on this planet.

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During my last visit to the islands I could see a wind of change but the direction was not that which I had predicted. Winds leftward provoked winds rightward and vacuums are quickly filled by great powers. Perhaps the tragedy of these small islands is that federation failed. In the Haiti of Papadoc, Graham Greene's depiction of tyranny in *The Comedians* contrasted with the easy-going ways of my acquaintances in St. Lucia. These were in rival parties but close personal friends had been elected to three of the highest offices in the island. I flew out on impulse to stay with one of them.

Many young men and women from Caribbean educated in the UK returned, carrying doctrines opposed to the *laissez-faire* corruption of existing leaders or fired by a sense of black identity or Marxist ideas. Others merely replaced the attitudes of the former slave owners, inheriting their economic and political power. The patchwork is intricate and fascinating, but the contrast between oppositionist Michael Manley in Jamaica, Forbes Burnham in Guyana and the interventionists from Barbados has polarised their postures.

When Maurice Bishop's coup overthrew Sir Eric Gary's rather discredited regime and George Odium, late of Oxford, became Deputy Premier of St. Lucia with brother John as Home Secretary and close friend Peter José in charge of Agriculture, it seemed that the pattern of leftward change would sweep the next door under-developed island of St. Vincent where able graduates of British universities seemed posed to emulate their St. Lucian neighbours. Patrick John's pathetic regime in Dominica seemed likely to lose to the left in a country where 60% of youth were unemployed and the attempted framing of one of them on a murder charge was later exposed only after a death penalty reprieve. It didn't happen. The left faction in the St. Lucian Labour Party was impatient. I was privy to a meeting of two of the key figures when they decided not to give police protection to an opposition rally in favour of the defeated Government. The result was a riot—major in St. Lucian eyes—but minor in mine—which caused horror at the scale of damage in this paradise island. My lack of concern, having witnessed worse at football matches in North London, puts into perspective the peacefulness of islands not yet caught up in the world conflict a decade ago.

The impatient leftists destroyed their own power base and the old guard of the very competent Sir John Compton returned to power. This was no Cuba, but now violence is no stranger to the island. The radicals of St. Vincent failed hopelessly. Pro-US Mrs. Charles, not the left, replaced Patrick John. A determined woman, the most able politician in Dominica albeit of the right, inherited the stewardship of an island in which I well recall slipping my armed bodyguard to meet the leader of the dreadlocks who were made scapegoats for the failures of the previous regime. As in Barbados and Jamaica, the wind of change blew right not left.

A state of emergency prevailed—dreadlocks in someone's house could be shot on sight. Six expatriates or tourists had been murdered. The island's economy, the home of Rose's Lime Juice, depended so much on

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whims of the Geest banana boats. Clearly the shift from incompetence to a formidable pro-capitalist regime concerned at internal subversion gave the US a natural ally in Mrs. Charles. As Cuban workers cleared an airstrip for Bishop's Marxist regime with its curious 'New Jewel' title, it was clear that so tiny an island was an obvious and easy target for the CIA. That the regime did not fall demonstrated that it must have had substantial internal support. The bloody coup by the left, mirroring the frequent occurrences on the right in Latin America, shocked people in hitherto peaceful 'paradise' islands, however inefficient or corrupt. Cold blooded political murder in the Commonwealth Caribbean was not an accepted tradition; yet, however repulsive, it could not be seen as a danger to the lives of US subjects. In any event, the plan to invade predated the coup by weeks and was a convenient pretext. The lunatic left all too frequently gives the right its opportunity to pounce.

That the US could not destabilise tiny Grenada off its southern pier may in part be due to Cuban power. It shows a singular lack of subtlety and effectiveness of the CIA and US policy. The resort to open brute force shows a lack of sensitivity to the outside world and the views of a major ally of whose Commonwealth Grenada is a member, and whose Head of State is the Queen. It shows President Reagan and his advisers to be living in a closed, fantasy world of goodies and baddies.

The image of a Soviet Government immune to the real world's revulsion of Afghanistan mirrored by a similar contempt for outside opinion by the USA has frightening implications for small nations and their sovereignty. How can one trust the US finger on the Cruise trigger? How can one rule out the cynical use of Europe as a nuclear battleground by the superpowers who refuse to listen to allies and friends and, in the case of the Soviet Union, have sent in their troops to crush the Hungarian uprising and the Prague Spring? Would not those of us who are *not* unilateralists be right to insist only upon an independent deterrent capable of inflicting enough unacceptable damage to prevent Soviet initiatives, but refusing to be an undefendable target for US missiles controlled by paranoid strangers to the world outside? That is the first question I ask after my indignation at the US incursion into one of those Caribbean islands for which I have a very special feeling.

I could turn a blind eye at the obvious corruption of government departments in Antigua by sleazy US businessmen. I could accept the aggressive capitalism of Dominica after years of indolence under so-called Labour administrations, or the return to the status quo in St. Lucia. I could never accept their faults as a pretext for armed intervention, even by a detachment of the Household Cavalry; but the fact is—and many of us have known it since 1956—that to the two superpowers any regime opposed to them and vulnerable is fair game and war by proxy has turned the world into a large chess-board in which bishops are pawns and knights or queens moved at will. Castles like Cuba sometimes have to be tolerated even if they do threaten the king—or should I say president?—and solidarity of pawns can sometimes survive by threatening to over-

turn the whole chess-board. But, by and large, morality has no place in the game.

Meanwhile, back in the Caribbean as I write, the US is mopping up and its own Congress is demanding its withdrawal. Democracy is not something you can force upon people. It grows organically. However, you can give it a chance and the US will rescue a little of their lost credibility if all groups are permitted to take part in genuine free elections in the wake of their attack.

For small islands in the Caribbean, whether belonging to CARICOM or not, there must be the most terrible split in attitudes. However, in the long term it must become apparent that the experiment of federation needs to be tried again, with Jamaica, Guyana and Trinidad being enlightened enough to give some weighting of influence to the tiny States of St. Kitts or Antigua, Barbados or St. Vincent. A joint Caribbean peacekeeping force might extinguish forest fires on odd islands in the event of an armed coup without resort to superpower intervention.

The spectacle of the mighty USA sending in the Marines and the five Caribbean States merely following in their wake must be rejected on principle. Indeed, the Security Council has done so and even Sir Geoffrey Howe was forced off the fence after his initially lamentable performance in the House of Commons. One might ask ironically whether we should send a task force to remove the invaders *à la* Falklands. In this case, the invaders are our allies. They have also demonstrated, as at Suez, that Britain is a minor power. The result may be a closing of ranks in Europe as a counterweight to US strength to render the Atlantic Alliance more an alliance of equals than of small individual powers sitting under a US umbrella.

It is comforting at least to know that Mrs. Thatcher was prepared to defy the wishes of Ronald Reagan. If her Government has been slipping on banana skins recently, Grenada's banana crop may yet turn out to be the major contributor to a demand for a dual key on missiles and a more European-conscious Britain. Personally, it seems to me that the Governor-General has been seen as no more than a pawn moved around the board by the USA and certainly without authority to call in the Marines. The lunatic left have been revealed as a mirror image of the military dictatorships so well-known to the southern hemisphere of the Americans. Those concerned with human rights may ask why the US did not intervene to prevent the excesses of Papa Doc and his Ton Ton Macoute in Haiti? Why do they give backing to a regime which permits the murder squads of El Salvador? Why, indeed, are they currently massing their might around Nicaragua and helping the murderous 'contras' in Honduras? Alas, my peaceful vision of the Caribbean paradise has disappeared.

I prefer to remember another couplet from the calypso and forget the realities of power politics on the beaches edged by palm trees, the green mountains and blue seas of my favourite Caribbean island, ravaged by a hurricane two years ago but at least uninvaded and relatively free:

If you ask her why she pretty so
St. Lucia she come from.