

ORTIZ/PASTOR CORRESPONDENCE ON GRENADA*

*EDITOR'S NOTE: In the Spring 1986 issue, the *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* published an article by Robert A. Pastor, Director of the Latin American and Caribbean Program of the Carter Center at Emory University and former Latin American Director of the National Security Council during the Carter Administration, which was entitled "Does the United States Push Revolutions to Cuba? The Case of Grenada." Since that time, the Honorable Frank V. Ortiz, former US Ambassador to Grenada, has written to clarify, and take issue with, some of the points raised in the Pastor article. Following is the letter from Ambassador Ortiz, together with Dr. Pastor's reply.

Dear Editor:

Historians and students of contemporary events are entitled to have confidence in the material they use when considering a subject as important as the United States and Third World revolutions. As US Ambassador to Grenada in 1979, I feel obligated to comment on Robert Pastor's article, "Does the US Push Revolutions to Cuba? The Case of Grenada," in your Spring edition just received here.

Pastor cites interviews with "key officials in the Grenadian and US governments." Note six tells us he interviewed Prime Minister Bishop and Bernard Coard for thirteen hours. Although his article establishes me as a "key official," at no time was I interviewed. I owe it to your readers to establish a few facts if Pastor's question is to receive a valid response; depending, of course on whether his formulation of the "predominant view," i.e., that, "the US pushes revolutionary governments to the left," is not more a *non sequitur* than a serious question.

To be specific on a general question. After more than 35 years Foreign Service experience, I say Maurice Bishop was wrong. The US, as a general rule, does accept "genuine national independence, non-alignment" and consistently uses its influence so that genuine self-determination can be assured through free elections. This is a US constant through all administrations. The problem in Grenada was that the New Jewel revolution met none of these criteria of genuineness. Perhaps a better formulation of a real problem might be, "What are the Best US Policies When a Trained and Determined Group of Marxist-Leninists Takes Power Through Force in Areas of Strategic Importance?" With that formulation Grenada is indeed a case history worth examining.

But to return to Pastor's formulation; had he followed a scholarly approach and interviewed me, I would have insisted on these, among other, revisions in his account. The result would have made his piece

less ambiguous and more accurate.

1. By early February 1979, US, British and Grenadian officials were aware of the clandestine arms shipments and that at least one of those arrested in the US had Communist Party connections. Nevertheless, it took about one month before State Department clearance was given for two Treasury agents to come to Grenada to determine *in situ* the destination of these arms. The agents arrived in Grenada at about seven o'clock, on the evening of March 13, accompanied by the Embassy's Political Officer. Prime Minister Gairy had left Grenada before their arrival. The *coup* took place just a few hours later. The agents had no authority to arrest anyone. I am sure they did not do so. On the outbreak of the *coup* all three US officials escaped Grenada aboard a Dutch vessel anchored in the harbor coincidentally with a Soviet cruise ship.

2. When all US files are declassified and published, it will be established that the US was aware of trips to East Germany (even while students in Great Britain) by Bishop and other leaders of the New Jewel Movement, their close and frequent contacts with Cuba, and the military training in Guyana, among other evidence of their ideological predisposition and intentions. They made little effort to conceal their orientation.

3. Since Pastor came to the White House bereft of diplomatic experience, it is important to correct his skewed version of the implementation of the formal instructions given me the first week of April 1979. First the *démarche* was not mine. It was a formal US government action I was ordered to take. I was instructed to make several points, one being to advise Bishop of US displeasure over any Grenadian tendency to develop closer ties with Cuba. When a professional diplomat receives formal instructions he always advises his interlocutor that he speaks not for himself but formally, and officially, for his government. He then carries out his instructions literally. On April 10, after advising Bishop, I acted on the orders of my government. I read to him *verbatim* the text of my instruction, then gave him a plain, unmarked copy of the precise text as a "non paper." This is done in important cases so no one can be in doubt as to what was said. It eliminated the necessity for Bishop or Noel to rely on potentially imprecise notes, assuming they were interested in precision.

4. Pastor says I "broadened" the Cuban point, but it is he who does revisionary broadening. According to Pastor, I was "delicately" (his word) to warn Bishop against "military" ties with Cuba. When

Pastor finally decides to check the text of the instruction sent me, he will find there was a literal carrying out of the *démarche* ordered, and perhaps instituted, by the White House. Standard diplomatic procedure was followed. The Embassy's reporting made all this clear at the time and it is now a matter of public record.

5. Passing over Pastor's motives for revising seven-year-old instructions, I shall repeat my judgment that Bishop's reaction to a formally expressed US position, and to my personally expressed point-blank question as to whether Cuba was offering arms, was understandable. Bishop knew, on April 10th, that Cuban arms had already arrived the day before aboard the Guyanese vessel *Jaimito*, concealed in a cargo of rice, and that a Cuban ship, the *Matanzas*, had left Cuba April 6th with more arms. Bishop probably believed we knew this — I only suspected it — and expected Grenada's democratic neighbors, supported by the US, to react. This is why he stirred up the great invasion scare, the "CIA plots," the "threats" of the US ambassador, moved against the press and other turgid political theatrics to justify what was organized long before. Pastor knows that, despite Bishop's wild reactions, one of my last acts on leaving my post was to recommend we not confront Bishop and not answer his calculated misrepresentations so that the new ambassador would have a chance to start the bilateral relationships looking towards the future, not the past. I believe that cable, too, is declassified and available. (See Rossin, Lawrence, "US-Grenada Relations since the 1979 Coup," Department of State Documents).

6. It's good Pastor emphasizes the New Jewel's origins in the Black Power movement, a racist organization if ever there was one, given to blaming all and any problems on whites. To have Bishop, and especially Coard, call me an "arrogant racist" is ironic. To say I "barged into" Coard's office without knocking is ludicrous — I was led in by one of his many attendants, otherwise I would have been lost. Anyone knowing me has no trouble determining the validity of these below-the-belt quotations Pastor chose to use. (The fact that he did so may explain why he dared not review his piece with me.) In point of fact, the atmosphere of the April 10 meeting with Bishop was pleasant despite his utter exhaustion and the topics raised. At the conclusion, Bishop, who had a personal warmth about him, even left his office to accompany us out of the building to find a taxi and wished me luck on my new assignment. The meeting with Coard, like all my meetings with him, was edgy but polite.

It is the Grenadian people themselves who can contribute most to our understanding of events there and their relationship to larger questions. However, the declassification, and availability for study and analysis, of significant US documents, including the instruction discussed above, and most of the Grenadian documents, will provide answers that merit attention.

I can't help hoping a Memorandum of Telephone Conversation I wrote on March 17, 1979, will also be published. Therein I recorded a telephone call from Ashley Hewitt, the Caribbean Country Director. He asked the Embassy (to) cease referring to the New Jewel as being Marxist because this was, "causing problems for some in the White House" who wanted us to stop. He hinted Pastor was the originator of that instruction. I replied that caused me problems since we were using what the New Jewel called themselves, (when not using the term Leninist vanguard). I requested written instructions since I would not act on oral instructions alone. Needless to say, those instructions never came. It is encouraging, however, that, seven years later, Pastor's perceptions, especially when faced with facts, seem to have progressed to the point where he concedes the New Jewel was irretrievably "unfriendly and undemocratic" and "sympathetic to the Soviet bloc."

I recommend to your readers a book Pastor overlooked, Gregory Sandford's *The New Jewel Movement-Grenada's Revolution 1979-1983* (published in 1985 by the Center for Foreign Studies, US Government Printing Office), which gives a good overall understanding. The book also correctly cites the April 10 instruction which Mr. Sandford obviously took the time to read.

Very truly yours,

Frank V. Ortiz (1 January, 1987)

P.S. In 1902, Lenin, in his book entitled WHAT IS TO BE DONE?, seems to have foreseen with some accuracy what took place in Grenada three-quarters of a century later when he wrote that an organization of revolutionaries must contain primarily and chiefly people whose occupation is revolutionary activity. . . This organization must necessarily be not very broad and as secret as possible!

He termed this revolutionary elite "Vanguard Fighters" and said:

The one serious organizational principle . . . must be strictest secrecy, restricted choice of members, and training of professional revolutionaries. Once these qualities are present, something more than democracy is guaranteed: complete comradesly confidence among revolutionaries.

In the same passage, however, Lenin cold-bloodedly states that “in order to rid itself of an unworthy member, an organization of genuine revolutionaries recoils from nothing.” This, of course, is undoubtedly the concept Bernard Coard had in mind as he had Maurice Bishop murdered (Lenin’s *Collected Works*, IV, 447, 466-9).

DR. PASTOR’S REPLY

Dear Editor:

If one read the letter by Frank Ortiz, but had not read my article, one might conclude, first, that the purpose of the article was to embarrass Mr. Ortiz; and second, that his answer to the central question of the article — “Does the US Push Revolutions to Cuba?” — differed sharply from those of the article. Neither conclusion is correct.

His letter may leave the impression that, in the course of my research for the article, I was trying to avoid him, or that I interviewed only Bishop and Coard. In fact, I interviewed more than 20 officials in the US government and other Caribbean governments. I felt less of a need to interview Mr. Ortiz — who anyway was in Argentina when I was writing the article — because his views had been presented in some detail in a letter to the *Atlantic* magazine, which I cite quite frequently in my article.

One of the principal conclusions in my article was that the US did not push the Grenadian revolution to Cuba or to the Left. I gather that Ortiz does not disagree with that. I also try to explain that, while I believe the relationship between the Grenadian revolutionary government and the US was likely to be cool and distant at best, regardless of the policy adopted by the US, a collision was not inevitable. Perceptions on both sides led each to interpret the other’s behavior in the worst possible light, increasing the likelihood of confrontation.

I genuinely regret Mr. Ortiz’s unfortunate personal comments. One would have expected a more diplomatic letter from someone with so many years experience in the Foreign Service.

As regards Mr. Ortiz’s substantive points, let me comment on several of them. First, my article states clearly that the *démarche* he made on April 10 was due to “instructions” that were sent to him. I do not have access to those instructions, which I have been led to believe are still classified, but three days after Bishop publicized Ortiz’s *démarche* in his speech, the US State Department publicly corrected one of Ortiz’s points. Specifically, State announced that Grenadian relations with Cuba were not the principal issue from the US

perspective: "We would be concerned (however) about the development of close military and security ties." This was a highly unusual and implicit reprimand of the Ambassador by the Department, and it led me to conclude that he might have expanded this particular point on his own. (Reported by H. Trewhitt, "U.S. Cautions Grenada on Cuban Military Ties," *Baltimore Sun* (1979) April 17: A-4).

Secondly, Ortiz implies that he had instructions to leave a non-paper with Bishop, and that only someone without diplomatic experience would fail to recognize that was standard practice. That was not my recollection, but I asked Ambassador Viron Vaky, who was Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs at the time and, thus, Ortiz's immediate superior. Vaky said: "Ortiz did *not* have instructions to give the non-paper, and I was surprised he gave it. I would not have done it."

But, in my article, I also make clear that whatever was said or done in Ortiz's meeting with Bishop, on April 10, 1979, was not really of that much importance in the context of the evolution of the overall relationship between the US and Grenada.

The classified memorandum that Ortiz wrote to himself, on March 17, 1979, and which he cites in his letter, is a bit bizarre. He suggests that I might have been the source of some invisible pressure to force him to stop calling the New Jewel Movement "Marxist." Ortiz writes of his "problems [with that] since we were using what the New Jewel called themselves." This is strange since the NJM was not only trying to *conceal* its Marxism, but was trying to assure everyone of its democratic intentions at that time. Indeed, I recall him calling them Marxist then. The book by Gregory Sandford, which Ortiz recommends, confirms this point, citing his description of the NJM's "radical," not Marxist, ideology. Ortiz today might want to dissociate himself from such moderate recommendations, but Sandford writes that Ortiz:

"believed that the responsibilities of power and a growing acquaintanceship with the US might moderate both their ideas and their anti-Americanism. He [Ortiz] advocated that the US accept Bishop's expressed desire for a peaceful relationship. He particularly warned against the US allowing itself to be pressured by other regional governments into any precipitate actions against the PRG" (p. 51).

One conclusion of my article was that the best way to prevent violent revolutions in the Caribbean Basin is to assure that the democratic process works and that Marxist coups are prevented. This

is a central US interest. The new information that Ambassador Ortiz offers about the visit by low-level Treasury Department officials to Grenada, in March 1979, is intriguing because it suggests that parts of the US government may have been working at cross-purposes to that interest.

I was unaware of the trip, and Ambassador Vaky does not recall it either. Ortiz confirms that it took one month to obtain clearance for the visit, and one presumes that during that time US officials conveyed some of the information on the arms smuggling to the Grenadian police. On the day of the arrival of the Treasury agents and Embassy official, Grenadian police arrested one member of the NJM and interrogated others. Bishop, Coard, and other NJM leaders later said that this arrest and the interrogations provoked them to launch the *coup*. In other words, the visit by the US officials might have *unwittingly* precipitated the *coup* that brought the New Jewel Movement to power. That is absolutely astonishing, if true.

The only person who could have judged the sensitivity and implications of the Treasury Department's investigation and have known all the pieces of the puzzle – the arms smuggling, the NJM's ties with the Communists and East Germans, the visit by the Treasury officials, the departure of Gairy – was the US Ambassador. If the Ambassador knew one month in advance, as he writes in his letter, then why weren't precautions taken to ensure the investigation would lead to the arrest of the perpetrators rather than to the overthrow of the government? Why weren't higher level officials in Washington informed and warned? These may be the most interesting questions that emerge from Ambassador Ortiz's letter.

Sincerely,
Robert Pastor
Professor

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