

The ghost of Maurice Bishop

Grenadian leader haunts election process 20 years after his murder



This picture taken at the height of his popularity as Prime Minister in Grenada, shows the late **Maurice Bishop** in 1982 being affectionately greeted by an elderly woman. In the right of this photograph, the hands on the submachine gun belong to **Terrence Marryshow**, who was then part of the Prime Minister's personal security detail. He was later selected to be among the first batch of Grenadian students sent to study in Cuba under the revolution.

Posted October 2003 - Trinidad Express politics

This is the first in a new series of articles by senior CCN journalist ANDY JOHNSON who spent eight days in Grenada earlier this month, revisiting what he says has been the biggest story of his career—the collapse of the People's Revolutionary Government and the US invasion that followed. Johnson covered those events for the Express 20 years ago.

WHEN he addresses his party's national convention at the Queen's Park Stadium in St George's this afternoon, Prime Minister Keith Claudius Mitchell will announce the date on which Grenadians will go to the polls, the fifth election since the collapse of the socialist experiment in the Spice Island 20 years ago.

Today, October 19, marks the 20th anniversary of the murders of Maurice Bishop and Jacqueline Creft, the Prime Minister and Minister of Education (Creft was pregnant with a second child for Bishop at the time) and several of their supporters in the massacre at Fort Rupert, since returned to its original name Fort George. That spelled the end of four and a half years of socialist rule under the People's Revolutionary Government, the regime which was formed out of the New Jewel Movement after they overthrew the repressive rule of Eric Matthew Gairy on March 19, 1979, in what was called a bloodless coup, a peaceful revolution.

A fresh election had been in the air in Grenada for months and the anxiety was heightened when Mitchell announced a few weeks ago that he was holding his party convention on the anniversary date of the killings.

Seeking a third straight term in office, Mitchell has once again been propelled by circumstances to call the election inside of the five-year parliamentary term he is allowed under the constitution. Facing a collapse of his government which had a one-seat majority in the House of Representatives in 1999, he had no alternative but to seek a fresh mandate.

This time around, however, it is the apparent call of emotionalism arising out of this 20th anniversary of perhaps the darkest days in the modern history of the tri-island state of Grenada, Carriacou and Petit Martinique. It is almost universally acknowledged in many parts of the country that this year, somehow, the atmosphere is more highly charged with sentiments on all sides about what happened there two decades ago than anytime since 1984, when Herbert Blaize's Grenada National Party won the first election after the revolution's collapse from the centre and the US invasion which followed on October 25.

An interim administration, led by Nicholas Brathwaite, was put in charge in the intervening 14 months. Then, Brathwaite's National Democratic Congress won the election in 1990 to form the government after Blaize died in

office and Ben Jones succeeded him, serving out the rest of that term. It took a week to form the government after the election on March 13, 1990. Jones' The National Party won just two of 15 seats in Grenada's lower house. Brathwaite's NDC captured seven seats, but the Grenada United Labour Party won four seats and Mitchell's New National Party got the other two.

Francis Alexis, who was to eventually become Attorney General in the NDC government, almost blew it for his team in the first flush of the results on election night when he told reporters his party would not make deals with anyone who would wish to come over and help create the clear majority for it to form the government.

In an intriguing drama which had Grenadians biting their nails and immobilised by fresh anxieties for much of the rest of that week, Jones was offered the Prime Ministership, in a three-party coalition involving the two others. But in a move that caught almost everyone else off guard, around noon on Friday, March 17, then Governor General Sir Paul Scoon called Brathwaite and administered the oath of office for him to form the government. Big Ben Andrew, Jones's heavyweight political right-hand man, was left with his jaw swinging. He had only moments before been haranguing supporters to get the party headquarters ready to welcome his man back as PM. The deal, he thought, had been done.

Mitchell's New National Party came back in 1995 to take eight seats and form the government. And four years ago he did the double, taking all fifteen seats that time around. Between then and now, his MP for St Andrew's Southwest, Michael Baptiste, crossed the floor and formed the opposition. He is, however, now in court on fraud charges, accused of having converted government funds into his own. Baptiste is now the political leader of the GULP, Gairy's once formidable outfit, but much of whose support has shifted and split between the NNP and the NDC.

Alexis has been joined by Terrence Marryshow, the leader of the former Maurice Bishop Patriotic Movement and together they are called the People's Labour Movement. Marryshow said in an interview last week that after years of trying unsuccessfully to rally the country on the basis of a commitment to Bishop's ideals, he had to face political realities. He feels betrayed and abandoned by others whom he felt benefited from the revolution and should have wanted to show their gratitude.

Others see him, however, as a loner who lacks charisma, an idealist with no star quality. Some of his detractors are, like him, among the first batch of Grenadians who went to Cuba to study during the "revo" as Grenadians call the period 1979 to 1983.

Good money is betting that this is going to be an election period of not more than four weeks, putting the election on or around November 17. For all intents and purposes it is a two-horse race between the governing NNP and the NDC. And it is between these two that the ghost of Bishop and the revo has taken on new mythic proportions and is calculated to ride herd over the political landscape during the campaign. Indeed, the stage has already been firmly set, with Grenadians saying more loudly than any time over the last two decades that it is time for healing, and for moving on.

Not yet, however. Jeanette du Bois, an educational development specialist, speaks for many when she says she has not sat down for any time over the last 20 years to work out her own feelings about what happened on October 19, 1983. She has not confronted herself. She has not come to terms with the what ifs, the might have beens. She has not put any of it into their proper perspective. And what's worse, she is still not prepared to do it. Forced to confront some of it in May this year at the sudden death of her cousin, George Louison, she has put them back in storage, and turned away again.

Louison was a leading member of the NJM/PRG. Cabinet minister, member of both the Central Committee and the Political Bureau, he was on Bishop's side when the division came in October 1983. He went and did law and was a practising attorney in Port of Spain when he collapsed and died of a heart attack while jogging near the Savannah one Monday morning in May. He was given a hero's farewell in his home village of Concord the following Monday.

His younger brother, Einstein, was first appointed Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces at the start of the revo. He was the only professionally trained soldier, at 21, in the outfit at the time. He had been trained in Cuba and in the Soviet Union. His name alone inspired fear and foreboding among Grenadians then.

Einstein Louison is currently a senator in the Mitchell government, the Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Agriculture, Lands, Forestry and Fisheries with responsibility for lands, a major platform speaker for the NNP and the one taking the fight to his former revolutionary colleagues now in the NDC. They are said to have participated in the decision to place Bishop under house arrest, putting in train the series of events which led to the massacres on Fort Rupert. Referred to as the hard-liners, the Coardites, they are said to have hijacked the NDC, installed a puppet

leader in Tillman Thomas and are seeking to take power using the democratic process, but with ulterior motives to take the country back to where a majority of the people fear to tread.

Among the core group are names such as Ruggles Ferguson, Feron Lowe, Peter David and George Prime. Ferguson is now the leader of the Grenada Bar Association. An economist during the revolution and working close to the central committee, Prime has since become a lawyer with his own practice, but is seen as part of what the observers in St George's refer to as the "Ciboney Chambers" clique. That is the name of Ferguson's law firm.

In an attack which took the issue to worrying new heights a couple weeks ago, Einstein Louison said he could give a minute-by-minute account of his whereabouts and his actions in the crucial days leading up to October 19, 1983, and has called on this group to do the same.

Clarice Modeste-Curwen is the MP for St Mark's and the Minister of Health and the Environment. A medical doctor, she is among the alumni from that first batch of Cuban-trained professionals under the revo. In a rousing address during an NNP rally in Gouyave last Sunday, she asked the question of the Ciboney clique's attempts to capitalise now on emotionalism around Bishop, "Whe de di dey (Where were they)", putting it in a hugely popular Grenadian vernacular.

Ferguson, Prime, David, Lowe, Thomas and company have announced that if they win the coming election, they would name the Point Saline International Airport after Bishop, in an attempt, observers say, to upstage the Prime Minister who is said to have had similar plans. But political insiders in the NNP said it was just one of Mitchell's clever ploys to leak this notion as a means of ensnaring his opponents.

It has touched off a maelstrom, however.

IN TOMORROW'S EXPRESS: Leslie Pierre, editor of the Grenadian Voice, says he wishes they never find Maurice Bishop's remains.

Also, be viewing the TV6 news tonight for more on this story.

'Commie scare tactics unfair'

Part Three in a series by senior CCN journalist Andy Johnson on developments in Grenada 20 years after the collapse of the PRG and its socialist revolution.

IT's an act of desperation on the part of the New National Party in Grenada for its members to be attempting to scare people about the presumed agenda of the "Ciboney clique", about their presumed plans to revert the country to the days of the revolution, and about their presumed intentions to free the 13 men now doing life for the murders of Maurice Bishop and the others on October 19, 1983.

Responding to the attacks from the NNP platform, and indeed from the other parties in the race for the general election which has now been set for November 27, Prime said it was because his group is recognised as having the ability to get things done, to organise. For all the focus on the NDC evident in and around St George's earlier this month, this much seems apparent. The NNP is in power but for this election it is the NDC versus the rest.

The entire period since 1983 he said has amounted to nothing much. "We have come a long way admittedly," he said. "We have done some work, but in terms of making a difference to the way people think. I have not even gone unto the cultural imperialism the same Americans bring in their wake. CNN, BET, the entire minds of the people, 90 per cent of the tv programmes are American.

"What are you doing to your youths? We have no culture again. Everybody wants to wear them big caps, and fellas telling you if you ent have that no woman will like you. I mean, it's amazing. This 20 years we have gone backwards, in my view.

"And so, we say to the people we have a vision, we have a mission. This government has not done it, because we think they have blown their chances and a lot of us got back into the politics because we believe that politics is not for rogues, nor for crooks. If you have good people in politics good things are going to happen to the nation. That is my honest view and a number of us are committed to that, hence the reason some people see us as the vehicle that could bring about a change, and as to that vision now we sharing it with the people. Once they accept it and let others carry it, we are ready to go and that I think is what is happening. People have begun to accept the vision that we want to share with them.

"We believe that jobs must be an issue in any campaign that we run. We believe that the whole cost of living of our people now, poverty is too rampant. 31.7 per cent of the population now living under the poverty line. It means that \$271 a month is what people in that group get. That can't buy chicken feed ... that is a central issue for us. The whole question of management of the economy, taxation, that is a big issue."

Referring to the decision by the Mitchell government to abolish income tax, Prime said "them guys get up one morning in 1999, some of them never even manage a pig pen, pardon the example, but they never managed a pig pen and now find themselves managing a ministry, so you have \$19, \$20 million to manage your ministry."

"It is like me telling you let's go to Trinidad, I flying the plane and I never fly a plane in my life. What you think will happen?"

He says the NDC is not surprised that the entire economy is being mismanaged. He criticised the government's heavy borrowing programme as well, saying it is becoming like an albatross around the necks of the people. And, he said, the issue of the development of human and social capital is also the centrepiece of his party's policy for running the country if it gets into power.

These are the issues on which he and his colleagues have been campaigning, he said, and because of what the government and the other parties see as the responses they have been getting, there is the scare tactic about their communist tag, about where they were and what role they played in the events of October 19, 1983.

George Prime is articulate, can think quickly on his feet and appears to be a formidable debater who can speak with Grenadians comfortably on any level on a variety of subjects. He had just finished a first degree in economics and was working at the Grenada High Commission in London when Maurice Bishop led the armed takeover of the Gairy government in March 1979. He was asked to return home and help with the reconstruction of the country, the consolidation of the government which would use socialism as its route to development for the people. Like many thousands of others of his generation, he answered the call unhesitatingly. He referred to Bishop as "that bright spark", which was leading the country at the time.

In the 20 years between the collapse of the revolution and now he has become a lawyer, has his own practice and operates between St George's and Carriacou. He is now 49 years old and is a deputy political leader of the NDC, the party which was in power in Grenada between 1990 and 1995 and is now led by attorney Tillman Thomas, whom some of his opponents refer to as "Tillboy".

To the charge that Thomas, a former political detainee during the PRG rule, is a puppet leader, Prime said the man's record ought to speak for itself. Thomas, he said, single-handedly opposed a whole revolution, an entire regime and paid a high price for it. The fact that he has also agreed to work now with guys who put him in jail also is testimony to his intestinal fortitude. "He lives this spirit of inclusion," Prime said, when others only talk it.

On the issue of that political past, Prime said the government is using it as a smear campaign to bring fear into the minds of people "that somehow we are going to be seeking to form the government to let go Bernard Coard and others." One of those others, however, happens to be Cecil Prime, a younger brother of George. But, he said his party has no such agenda. Terrence Marrayshow, the former leader of the Maurice Bishop Patriotic Movement, insists, however that Prime and his colleagues are seeking legal, human rights and other avenues to do just that.

Prime, though, dismissed the calls from the Mitchell government for reconciliation over the events of 20 years ago, saying it is a gimmick. "It doesn't have depth, the chaps use the word when it is convenient so to do, but have not got the people into the mood for closure."

The government's inability to bring closure to what he called "that whole epoch" continues to linger on in people's mind almost like a canticle. And so until that is done, it is going to feature. But to say that it is an issue high up on the election agenda in people's mind, I don't get that feeling. And if it was, we would have known. Because part of our entire exercise, was to conduct all our meetings within an atmosphere of dialogue."

He said the part in its rebuilding exercise canvassed the entire country telling Grenadians what its vision was and asking for their views. "Nowhere in those meetings was this thing a feature," he said, except insofar as the other political parties keep trying to make it an issue.

But, he said, he and his colleagues have no case to answer because the government is not serious about reconciliation.

"I don't think you can say we have a duty to Keith, to explain where we were. We don't have no duty. If they were

serious about it they would have created an environment in which people would have come forward and openly washed their linen, and say, boy, this is what really happened. Yes, we are sorry for it. Governments have made mistakes, I don't know of any politician who has not made mistakes. And so we need to be coming clean and say this is what happened, and we are ready, but the truth is that I think the environment is lacking for that, even though the NNP got into office in 1999 on that entire aura that people ought properly now to forgive and forget, and let us move on, bury the past, but it has not happened."

Prime said of all the parties in Grenada, the NDC is the only one living the issue of reconciliation. It is something which requires a certain in-depth feeling, he said, not something that can just be spoken about ritualistically or superficially. "It must be a cleansing process, and who is a better person to champion that than the leader himself (Tillman Thomas). He is a man who was jailed by the PRG. He served his time in jail because he stood for certain principled position dealing with the freedom of the press."

Prime said he was not in Grenada during that period but from what he understood, Thomas stood for his convictions and still does. Before deciding to join the NDC, Prime said, he had been approached by the NNP. But because of how he regarded Thomas, he felt inspired by him. Thomas was willing and prepared to work with the likes of himself.

Under great pressure, Prime said, "because people were saying them guys is old communist why are you bringing them in the party? His position was that this is the time for inclusion. Nation-building has more to do with how people can make contributions, not with where you have been. These are the same guys who jailed me, and if I could be in the same party with them, what more evidence do you want for reconciliation than to be actually living it?"

"As it is said time and time again, you can tell the courage of the brave not by what they say, but by what they do and if you are doing the thing, that to me is the living testimony."

In tomorrow's Express: Jeffrey Thompson, captain of Grenadian industry, says he's bullish about his country once more.

We have come back to life

*Part Four in a series by senior CCN journalist **Andy Johnson** on developments in Grenada 20 years after the collapse of the PRG and its socialist revolution.*

ON the road from St George's to Gouyave there was just one patch of the nine-mile drive two weeks ago in which there were some road works underway that made the run slightly bump. In the village of Palmiste the work on the sea defence is being complete. For the rest of the way it is virtually smooth sailing. The sea defences almost all along the Grenada East coast has been rehabilitated and improved. Similar works are taking place in other parts of the island.

In the capital city there is a massive operation underway to complete a deep-water harbour, made necessary by the continuing expansion in the vital tourism sector. The job is more than six months ahead of schedule. Specky John, a Bajan small businessman who made his home in Grenada more than 40 years ago, looks out from the dredging and backfilling works from a bench in front of the cafeteria bearing his name, near the newly rebuilt meat market at the northern end of the esplanade.

"They did this work in less than three weeks, and they didn't work day and night you know," he said in an attempt to transmit amazement.

Such is the evidence of a kind of dynamism at large among Grenadians these days, a sense of purpose and a spirit of confidence, it is difficult to fathom the palpable sense of ambivalence about the government, the Prime Minister and the party in power. But a discussion on that is to come later in this series.

Renwick, Thompson and Company is among the leading enterprises in the Grenada private sector, with fingers all over the pie, in services, in trade, in agricultural supplies, in real estate development, to name some. Its managing director, Geoffrey Thompson, is as died in the mud capitalist as you could get anywhere in the Caribbean. He is a leading member of the Grenada Chamber of Commerce, has been one of its pillars for years.

With a delivery the vocal equivalent of honeyed gravel, he speaks with the authority of a four-star general.

These days, he says, he is bullish about his country again. It was not always that way. He was one of those who stayed through what he described as the dark, dreadful days of the revolution, hoping for a way out of it, deciding he was not going to be run out of his country, but not knowing how and when it would end. This is after he had personally given his support to Maurice Bishop and the New Jewel Movement in their attempts to unseat Gairy, by whatever means. The day after the takeover, on March 14, 1979, he says it became clear he and others like him had made a terrible mistake.

He offered this snap shot of what life had become in the Grenada of that four-and-a-half-year socialist excursion.

Customers were short on money, their buying power was diminished. The Animal Feeds part of his business was taken away.

“The roads on which I had to distribute goods were going from bad to worse, which means that cost of distribution was going up at the same time that my yield from distribution was going down.

“In agriculture while there was a lot of rhetoric the reality is that the government said they would activate some of the estates that Gairy had acquired in his time. They did not do a good job of it. There was no real boost in production on the estates and in any case they didn't inputs from me because they taken that for their marketing board anyhow. Tourism in which we had a little foot, likewise had hit the bottom.

“Electricity was virtually everyday you could expected it to go and not just for five minutes, for half a day without notice, you didn't know when it would go; when it would come back. Your cash registers didn't work, your lights didn't work, your air-conditioning didn't work, your staff productivity dropped on account of all these things. Water was in a terrible state, supplies were again very erratic, the telephone system was difficult and they said they would replace that with an East German system that was really very old technology and there was not any confidence in the economy that we could see at any level of the private sector that we dealt with. From the smallest shop in the country to the biggest enterprise in the city, everybody was sort of marking time, holding on, hoping.

“You couldn't make a plan because you didn't know where the plans were going. You knew they were heading in a direction, but they were not forthright in setting out their end objective but at the same time you knew that their objective was not in concert with what we know as capitalism. We knew that they would be making changes left right and centre.

“It was difficult. It was a time frankly when you came to work in the morning not wanting to go to work you went home in the evening glad to get a chance to go and drink a little rum to drown your sorrows for the day that yielded no business and in our case in particular.

“At the time you had to be very careful how you spoke and what you said, and who heard you.” He made a sign, with the thumb over both lips and the rest of the hand coming down from the forehead at a right angle which was the way in which Grenadians talked with each other in those dreadful days. He described it as a time when secrecy was paramount, when people were locked up for speaking their minds and when there was almost no way of knowing who to trust, he said.

Giving credit to all the governments which have been in power during the last 20 years, Thompson said it is a totally different story, one which makes him want to sink his “grand national bourgeois” feet even deeper into the Grenadian soil.

With fresh elections having been called, the fifth since the collapse of the revolution in 1983, Thompson says unhesitatingly he will vote for Dr Keith Mitchell and the NNP again. “Warts and all, but they are the least warty of what we have in front of us,” he said.

“Because I can see on the ground tangible evidence of improvement in the condition of the country that cannot be taken away. I'm not talking about ephemeral improvements. Take it item by item. Grenada, he said, has the highest ratio of roads per square mile of island in the Caribbean, and their condition now is a success story in infrastructure development and maintenance well accepted.

“And they go not only on the main road but up into the mountains and into all the little feeder roads. If you have a time you could drive around and see for yourself,” he said.

The telephone system now in place he described as “world class”. The electricity system is vastly improved from

what it was up to 20 years ago. Disruptions in supply are the exception rather than the rule now.

“Water? Even though our housing stock has increased dramatically since the revolution even though the per capita consumption of water has gone up considerably, we only suffer deficits during the height of the dry season, those deficits not islandwide, but only in the highest usage areas and only because the system presently consists of independent reservoirs that are not inter-connected. But this is a project they working on right now.”

This he said has been a result of investment in the water infrastructure consistently, by successive governments in the last two decades. “The quality is perfect, the pressure, you couldn’t ask for more.”

Housing? “Take a drive around. There is a big concrete house coming up around every corner like mushrooms after rain, to me that is a sign of confidence. The rate of migration, which is voting with your feet, has slowed down.”

In discussions with his peers, he said there is tremendous confidence. “During the revolution nobody had any plan for investment, everybody was in a holding pattern. There was not any plan for expansion of business or new business ideas. You were there, just there.

“Today I don’t know of any of my peer group who has not made new investments or who don’t have plans in the making, at different levels, and all of them of a scale grander than what we used to do before the revolution.

Even among his staff, he said, people have returned to the typical Grenadian way of life, operating their own businesses on the side of their regular day jobs. In fact, he had made this point earlier in the discussion than late in the day of the revolution, Bernard Coard had lamented that this pervasive national petty bourgeois, peasant farming and property holding trait among Grenadians was a major enemy of the revolution.

“There is an enthusiasm, a confidences that there is opportunity,” Thompson said of the mood in his country now. “Things are expanding.”

In tomorrow’s Express: Drs Julie de Bois and Clarice Modeste-Curwen, two women of the revolution

A time for healing

Part VI in the series by senior CCN journalist Andy Johnson on developments in Grenada 20 years after the collapse of the PRG and its socialist revolution

A REPORT issued yesterday by Amnesty International from London calling for a judicial review of the procedures under which the trial of 17 persons connected with the deaths of Maurice Bishop and others in Grenada on October 19, 1983, touches at the heart of the calls in some quarters for reconciliation over these events.

The report says there were gross irregularities with the trial and the appeal of those accused, and calls on Grenada Prime Minister Dr Keith Mitchell either to order a judicial review, or alternatively to free those still in prison for those crimes. (See Page 17)

Five years ago, in an attempt to test the waters on this issue, and clearly in response to the relentless pressures from many quarters internationally, Mitchell’s government offered a tentative step in this regard. Journalists from several Caribbean countries were invited to Grenada for meetings with the prisoners at the Richmond Hill prison, as part of that initiative.

But obviously recognising that there were still too many raw nerves among Grenadians over this matter among ordinary Grenadians, the government backed off.

In its report on the matter, however, Amnesty International said it believed it should not be a matter of public opinion that those convicted should be allowed to remain in prison on the grounds of a conviction that was obtained via a process that was in gross violation of international standards governing fair trials.

Release of the report is just one of the many developments taking place this year, marking the 20th anniversary of the events which led to the fall of the Grenada revolution and the US invasion which effectively turned it back. Its release was anticipated by sources who called us on Monday, with the publication in the Sunday Express (October

19) of the first article in this series. Amnesty set up an office in Grenada five years ago and, some observers say, it was for the express purpose of gathering information concerning the trial of the group they call the Grenada 17, and agitating for their release.

With this as with so many other matters related to those events, Grenadians remain sharply divided. The respected Grenadian newspaper editor and publisher Leslie Pierre is among those individuals who are divided in their own positions regarding the revolution on the one hand and the trials of those held responsible for its tragic ending on the other. Pierre was a detainee of the Bishop regime, held in prison for 27 months without charge or trial. He refers to Bishop as “a criminal dictator”. He says the revolution in Grenada was to be the first step of a plan to introduce communism across the other islands in the Eastern Caribbean.

But Pierre firmly believes that the trial of Bishop’s alleged killers was “a put up job” conducted at the behest of Washington, and that with any knowledge of how it was conducted, anyone concerned with upholding justice, human rights and the rule of law should see it that way.

The confluence of decisions taken by many in the country to mark the date this year, however, suggests there is indeed an appetite for bringing closure, and for moving the society onwards from here.

It all started, Einstein Louison said in an interview in St George’s on October 9, with the announcement by Prime Minister Mitchell that he the ruling New National Party would hold its annual convention on that day, and that the party would observe the exact time at which the massacre on Fort George took place, and at that time there would be solemn music played at the rally. First the party was attacked by others, for wanting to do that. Then several of them joined in, announcing their own plans to hold similar remembrances.

Even the NNP, of which he is now a member of the executive, and in whose government he serves as a senator and parliamentary secretary, Louison said, had not been observing this date in any significant way over the years up to this point.

He has described the developments all around the political spectrum as “a strange twist of time”. Louison has been fiercely attacking a group of his former revolutionary comrades who have re-organised and rejuvenated the National Democratic Congress who in their own attempt to capitalise on the significance of this 20th anniversary, have announced that should they win the election (now called for November 27) they would do two things. First they would name the Point Saline International Airport after Bishop and they would work for the discovery of his remains and those of the other people murdered with him on the fort.

Again, Louison said these former comrades had not been know to share any concern for those intentions until now. Rather he said, they were more interested in seeking “through legal and social” channels to win freedom for those who he and others unforgivingly refer to as Bishop’s killers. In fact, he said, those now in the NDC leadership “are still taking direction” from the prisoners on the Hill.

Not a few in Grenada have criticised Louison for his attacks, some saying he should bury the hatchet, if only on the ground that he was part of the process, and regardless of which side he ended up on in the end, they were all in it together.

Finding the remains of the Fort George “martyrs” is also one of the issues which the Grenadian society must settle if there is to be healing, a process which even the so-called “Coardites” now in the leadership of the NDC seem willing to embrace.

George Prime is one of them. A deputy political leader of the NDC, he points to the revitalisation of the NDC around such personalities as himself, Ruggles Ferguson, Feron Lowe and Peter David, as a sign of that intangible, elusive spirit of reconciliation and rededication. All of them are identified as being part of the hard-liners who tilted the PRG too much to the left and landed it in the headwind of self destruction and bloodshed in 1983. Tillman Thomas an attorney who was jailed by the revolution for his critical views of some of their actions at the time, is the leader of the NDC. He has agreed to work with them.

Ferguson is the current president of the Grenada Bar Association, a position which suggests he has the respect and admiration of colleagues in his profession and is not someone still being despised and scorned for past actions or affiliations.

The NDC is getting crowds at its meetings and rallies. And, George Prime says, “the people are accepting the

message we are presenting". It is indeed an acceptance of this reality that is causing severe nervousness among the NNP, with Louison and other frontline speakers warning Grenadians not to be fooled by wolves in sheep's clothing.

Such "scare tactics", Prime says, are a result of the fact that the Mitchell government has not been and is not serious about its calls for reconciliation. "The chaps use the terms when it is convenient so to do," he said. Saying that reconciliation is a process that must come from "deep within" and cannot be wished into being on the basis of mere sloganeering, Prime seems to favour a formulation on the order of South Africa's truth commission, in the immediate post-apartheid era.

If such an environment is created, he feels there would be many who would jump at the chance to come "and wash their linen in public", to explain where they stood and what they did in the days leading up to October 19, 1983.

Taken together then, all these strands of evidence make for a conclusion that the people of Grenada, 20 years later, are searching now for a way to move forward, wanting to find a way to put that past behind them. Whichever party wins the November 27 general election, it seems clear this will be a major item in the order of priority.

In the Sunday Express: Like Patrick Manning's PNM in 1995, Keith Mitchell's NNP in 2003 is doing well. But, it seems, not good enough.

Keith Mitchell's mixed messages



Prime Minister of Grenada Dr Keith Mitchell and Minister Elvin Nimrod enjoy a moment at the New National Party's rally two weeks ago.

The final installment in the series by senior CCN journalist Andy Johnson on Grenada today, 20 years after the collapse of the People's Revolutionary Government and its socialist experiment.

WITH 14 of the 15 seats in Grenada's House of Representatives now in his party's control, Prime Minister Dr Keith Mitchell expects to win the general election he has set for November 27. Not many Grenadians expect that his New National Party (NNP) will do a repeat of the results of four years ago when it effected a complete sweep of the polls. The MP for St Andrew's Northwest, Michael Baptiste, left the ruling party in mid-term after the 1999 general election and formed the opposition in Parliament. He then joined the once mighty Grenada United Labour Party and became its political leader. But the GULP is not given much of a chance in the coming election, neither is the People's Labour Movement, led by a former Attorney General, Dr Francis Alexis and including Dr Terrence Marryshow, who was the founding leader of the Maurice Bishop Patriotic Movement.

After facing defeat after defeat at the polls in Grenada elections over the last 20 years, Dr Marryshow said his movement had to face the political realities and seek an amalgamation and accommodation with others.

The real challenge appears to be coming from the National Democratic Congress (NDC), the party which was the government in Grenada between 1990 and 1994, led then by Nicholas Brathwaite. He was the man who headed the interim administration which was installed after the bloody collapse of the People's Revolutionary Government and the US invasion which followed in October 1983.

When the NDC lost the government to Mitchell's NNP in 1995 the party came close to going under altogether, but it has been revived and rejuvenated over the last four years by a group of young professionals, many of them having close ties to the PRG and the Revolutionary Military Council, the outfit which declared itself in charge of Grenada the night of October 19, 1983. This was the day on which the massacres of Maurice Bishop and others took place on what was then Fort Rupert, in the capital city. The RMC was routed six days later on October 25 by the US invasion, however, and 17 of its leading personalities, including one woman, were tried and found guilty of those murders. The lone female member, Phyllis Coard, wife of PRG deputy leader Bernard Coard, was released on medical and humanitarian grounds in March 2000 for an initial six-month period, ostensibly to seek treatment for cancer and a so-called depressive disorder. She remains at large, with a new one-year extension of her "leave" having been granted by the governor general in June this year.

A fresh report released last Thursday by Amnesty International (AI) calling for either a review of the trial of those referred to as the Grenada 17, or alternatively their release from prison has raised new fears among some people in Grenada as to what would be the Government's intentions. Indeed, Dr Mitchell has made at least two attempts to test public sentiments among his people on this issue, under pressure from AI and other local and international human rights groups and individuals. He has not had the courage to go the distance. The clemency towards Phyllis Coard is a minor concession in that direction.

Sensing that the NDC can be a formidable opponent in the coming election, Dr Mitchell's NNP has gone on the offensive against those whom it has identified as sympathisers and collaborators with the leaders of the "17," and this is emerging as a major issue in the election campaign.

This is just one of the intangibles which appear to be causing some tremendous concern for the NNP and its supporters, even in the face of the considerable evidence on the ground that the party and the government have performed creditably.

In infrastructure development, in the improvement of health services and the utilities, there are indications everywhere that the country is and has been on the move. In grand soca concert style two Fridays ago in St George's, Digicel launched a service which will provide competition for Cable and Wireless, to give Grenadians more choice and greater integration into the modern IT networks, a further improvement and expansion of an information and communication system that one leading businessman has described as "world class" even without the introduction of Digicel.

Residential and commercial building construction, renovation and improvement are going on apace, the result of a buoyant economy aided by the abolition of income tax in 1999 and an aggressive development borrowing programme being pursued by the government. A significant portion of that borrowing programme, incidentally, is being fuelled from the Trinidad and Tobago banking sector. It is estimated that there are only 262 persons in Grenada subject to income tax, those being persons earning upwards of EC\$60,000 a year.

Just as with Patrick Manning's PNM in Trinidad and Tobago in 1995, Mitchell's NNP in Grenada in 2003 is doing well. But, it seems, not good enough, given the grumblings among sections of the population.

Up to six months before he lost the government, if not the election in 1995, Manning had been on all but a political roll. His government had floated the dollar, a move which was quickly to be established as a wise, stabilising one. It had put a premium on managing the foreign debt and reducing the burdens of debt servicing. His minister of works had succeeded where others had tried and failed for years, to move the Drag Brothers from the centre of Independence Square in Port of Spain. Then the construction of the Brian Lara Promenade was commenced. They built City Gate and transformed the mass transit system into and out of Port of Spain.

Then came the Hong Kong misadventure, followed by colossal blunders in the parliament, with the mishandling of the Foreign Minister and his sister, the then Speaker of the House of Representatives and the deck of cards began to crumble. Loud noises began coming from among the PNM faithful flock about a lack of opportunities, particularly at the lowest levels. A statement the Prime Minister made early in that tenure about "no jobs for the boys" came back to haunt him. It is believed that supporters stayed away from the polls in critical areas because they did not get campaign jerseys.

In Grenada today influential commentators and observers are saying the Prime Minister has become an alien to his roots. "He is living the way he always wanted to, since he was a school boy," one commentator said. This is a reference to an observation that Dr Mitchell is allegedly fraternising too heavily with the "L'anse Aux Epines crowd," that segment of the Grenadian upper class, identified by the geography of where they live. L'anse Aux Epines is Grenada's answer to Westmoorings and Goodword Park.

But whereas the image of those neighbourhoods here still conjure up whiteness, in Grenada it is unmistakably brown or light red. Mitchell is from the Grand Roy district, a poor and working class village along the east coast road between St George's and the town of Gouyave.

There is this tale of a dialogue one day recently in St George's, between a major businessman and a group of under-employed youths queueing up to have a word with the Prime Minister. The businessman comes up and goes ahead of the youths in the line. He is told he should wait his turn. He offers a rebuke, including the weight of his financial contributions to the ruling party.

"But your vote is the same one as ours, and we are more than you," he is told.

"Every square inch of my community is paved," he said. "Is that the case where you live?"

Perhaps because of the alliances he has made with the Grenada private sector and its movers and shakers, Mitchell felt assured enough to re-establish his country's links with Cuba, a move which won him huge points with that segment of the society wanting to find ways of advancing the goals of the Bishop-led socialist experiment. The NNP in government has resumed the arrangements for sending Grenadians to study in Cuba on scholarships, as well as for bringing in Cuban professionals to work in Grenada.

Mitchell has in his Cabinet, in the senate and in the wider government apparatus, persons who see the period of the "revolution"— 1979 to 1983—as perhaps the greatest period in their country's modern history and who credit him with seeking to advance some of the goals of that period. This is generally regarded as more of a plus than a minus.

But high unemployment is said to be a critical issue, among young people and women. George Prime, a deputy political leader in the NDC and one of those associated with the rejuvenation of the party, puts it at 21 per cent. He says this means that those people must make it on EC\$271 a month. He says Grenadians are losing their culture to those inculcated by American cable TV. And he criticises what he has identified as a searing lack of management skills in the Cabinet and in the government.

On top of that, public opinion in St George's is ripe with discussion about the Prime Minister's lack of tolerance for critical opinion and for thought he regards as too independent of his own or his party line. He is said to have alienated such critical professional blocks as the lawyers, the doctors and teachers.

These are identified as some of the hurdles which he must scale if even he wins the election on November 27 but wants to govern in an atmosphere of collaboration, coalition and consensus.