



Borders and Marxist Politics in the Caribbean: An Interview with Earl Bousquet on the Workers Revolutionary Movement in St. Lucia

Earl Bousquet

Founding member:
Workers Revolutionary Movement

Interviewed by

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Abstract

In this interview, Earl Bousquet, a founding member of the Workers Revolutionary Movement (WRM) in St. Lucia, reflects on the period of progressive left activism and Marxist movement building during the 1970s and 1980s in the Caribbean. The interview focuses on his conceptualisation of socialism in the Caribbean, the history of radical politics in the 1970s and reflections on the Grenada Revolution (1979-1983). This historical interrogation was central to laying the foundation for discussing border imperialism in the region. Bousquet describes his first-hand experiences of applying Marxism-Leninism as a political model to the situation of St. Lucia and the wider English-speaking Caribbean and the pitfalls of orthodoxy in attempted carbon-copy application of scientific socialism. He emphasizes the need for Caribbean solidarity among progressives and the constant review of the effectiveness of “creative application” of social and political theory.

Keywords

Caribbean; Marxism; left activism; border imperialism

Introduction

St. Lucia is an Eastern Caribbean island with a majority Afro-Caribbean population. Agricultural production, especially banana production, tourism and small-scale manufacturing are the driving forces of the economy. The island declared independence in 1979 and adhere to a form of parliamentary democracy with Queen Elizabeth II as the head of state represented by a Governor General. Since independence, the two major political parties, the St. Lucia Labour Party (SLP) and the United Workers' Party (UWP), have dominated the political landscape. Earl Bousquet is a pan-Caribbean and socialist-oriented political activist in St. Lucia. He was one of the founding members of the Marxist Leninist-oriented organisation, the Workers Revolutionary Movement (WRM). Founded on August 17, 1976, the WRM brought together young Left, progressive and socialist-minded individuals in the mid-to-late 1970s and throughout most of the 1980s.

Bousquet and some of his WRM comrades also served in the Grenada Revolution during its short lifespan between 1979 and 1983. The Grenada Revolution represented the single revolutionary political process in the English-speaking Caribbean that combined the intellectual and political talents of Caribbean youth and academics on the Left and thus, represented the peak of black power, Marxist politics and Left activist struggles in the region at the time. At the national level in St. Lucia, the influence of the WRM expanded to the occupation of leadership in the island's major trade unions, the local and regional youth movements, the local Rastafari movement, community-based organizations and core sections of the opposition St. Lucia Labour Party (SLP) -- and eventually in successive SLP administrations' Cabinets of Ministers.

I sat with Earl Bousquet and discussed the history and potential for radical politics in a small island Caribbean state; the 'search for a model' of Caribbean governance, the challenge of applying external theorizing to the situation of the Caribbean and the implications of imperialism in and for the region. The dialogue provoked these questions:

- (i) How did Caribbean youth come to understand and experience Marxist politics and Left activism during the 1970s?
- (ii) What is the relationship between Marxist theory and activism in the context of the Caribbean's political culture?
- (iii) How can a new generation of Caribbean thinkers and activists break with the history of imperial violence as they seek to engage in their visions of development?

I situate this interview regionally for Caribbean youth and socialist actors across the globe. The Workers Revolutionary Movement of St. Lucia is an example of Marxist-inspired Left political activism that promotes regional integration while launching an attack on the oppressive political status quo.

Conceptualising Socialism in the Caribbean

AS: *In the English-speaking Caribbean, 'Democratic Socialism' in Jamaica led by Michael Manley's People's National Party (PNP), 'Cooperative Socialism' in Guyana by Forbes Burnham's People's National Congress (PNC) and the 'People's Revolution' led by Maurice Bishop in Grenada, are often referred to in Caribbean scholarship as 'Socialist Experiments'. The term 'experimentation' implicitly suggests that there is a (pure) model that exists. In the UWI Socialist Student Conference, we invest a lot of time searching for a method to understand Caribbean society more than for a model to govern a Caribbean nation, at this stage. Did you see your work in the WRM as a process of 'Socialist experimentation'?*

EB: You are right. We must first understand the society we want to govern or to be governed differently. And I think history has partly answered your question by showing that socialist change and development is not a question of 'either/or', but one of 'one after the other' – a process of generational and historical continuity. We need to understand the origins of and how early West Indian political leaders struggled to embrace socialism without being accused of being 'communist'. They were largely educated in England and influenced by the Fabian Socialist position of embracing socialism but rejecting the Soviet Union and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) that led it and where socialism's benefits were a daily reality.

In Saint Lucia, for example, democratic socialism was espoused as early as 1951, a quarter of a century before it was adopted as policy in Jamaica under Manley and the PNP in 1976. In its 1961 Manifesto, SLP Leader and the island's then Chief Minister, George F.L. Charles, declared:

'We pledge our support to the cause of Democratic Socialism in so far as it fits into our West Indian context and the Christian way of life. We believe in the Equality of all men in the sight of God and before the world. We are opposed to communism, fascism, colonialism and imperialism in any guise and to all forms of dictatorship.'

He continued:

"The above is a quotation from the final page of our 1957 Election Manifesto and we feel that we can do no better than to commence this Manifesto for the period 1961-66 with it. After all, this Manifesto is but a continuation of the 1957 one and the broad principles of the Labour Party have been the same from 1950 when the Labour Party was formed."

The experimentation with democratic socialism back then was within the context of our general Christian society and the portrayal of atheistic socialists or communists as "ungodly". The same conditions remained in the period of the late-1960s and the mid-1970s, when the new heirs and successors of the earlier socialists were looking at "experimentation" and searching for models, because that was a period of increased anti-colonial agitation and the process in the region had unfolded in such a way that independence, nationhood and sovereignty were on their way. "Something coming!" that we had to start preparing for our people and ourselves.

The movement began examining and explaining the differences between operating under colonialism and socialism. At the time, Marxism-Leninism and other such literature were banned in the British West Indies. The Internet was not yet invented, so here we were, listening to radio, reading the newspapers and watching black-and-white television in English and French, respectively, from Barbados and Martinique.

The international news reflected the risks and threats of the Cold War and as the contradictions within capitalism continued to explode after the Vietnam War, we were better able to see and explain the world as a theatre of war between capitalism and socialism. We discussed and highlighted those contradictions with the older Saint Lucians we encountered, who had lived through the roughest of times during and after World War II. They knew, for example, the role of the USSR during the war against fascism around the world, including the Caribbean.

My father, Charles V.E. Bousquet, who was decorated four times for his role as a British seaman on four merchant navy ships during WWII, often reminded us that: “If it was not for the Russians, we would all be speaking German.” But essentially, his politics was as anti-communist as that of his two brothers Allan and J.M.D. Bousquet, who were ministers in the earlier Labour colonial administration and later in the United Workers’ Party governments.

International news back then also exposed us to the likes of Eldridge Cleaver and Bobby Seale in the Black Power Movement in the United States. We admired Muhammad Ali’s stance against the Vietnam War. We read and heard about the Black Panther Party and the Black Civil Rights Movement. We followed the growth of the Black Consciousness Movement in the USA and the Anti-Apartheid struggles in Southern Africa. We got literature from Europe about the likes of Aimé Césaire and Frantz Fanon, both from neighboring Martinique. We got socialist literature from more established Caribbean parties and movements in Jamaica and Guyana, as well as the communist and socialist parties in neighboring French-speaking Martinique and Guadeloupe, as well as the radical movements in French Guiana. Now, we look back at things more maturely and sometimes laugh. But seriously, those leaders of some of the more established communist parties across the region and their fellow puritan advocates of building socialist Caribbean societies based on Marxist-Leninist-based scientific socialism had it all wrong. We were all surely looking for a model, but the model was not just the Soviet Union. I remember such advocates of puritanism in Grenada saying during the Revolution to those of us preferring to look more closer at ‘the Cuban model’ that: “There is nothing like tropical socialism.” Party-building involved locked-in early-morning classes reading Marx, Engels and Lenin and sharing ‘creative applications’¹ to the Grenada reality. But there were varying degrees of understanding and ability to apply and slow learners did not feel encouraged to disagree or offer alternative views. It was hard for some at times. I went through it. By today’s measurement, it was Party Political Education 101!

The Workers Revolutionary Movement

AS: *The Caribbean is divided into multiple regions of geopolitical, cultural and cooperative groupings. Depending on where you are located, studies of the Caribbean engage in an exclusive history of the British West Indies or one particular linguistic zone – Hispanic, Francophone or Dutch Caribbean. Within the English-speaking Caribbean the “Big 4” (Barbados, Guyana, Jamaica and Trinidad & Tobago) dominate the narratives of the region. Smaller islands and territories are overlooked as a consequence. As a young man, you became one of the young socialist voices in the Eastern Caribbean. You were a founding member of the Workers Revolutionary Movement (WRM) in St. Lucia, a group with fraternal*

¹ The “creative application” of Marxism to the Caribbean context was a preoccupation of young socialists in the 1960s and 1970s. Ralph Gonsalves (2010, 47) observes:

“I was more impressed with Marx’s theoretical formulae than with his political programme as outlined in *The Communist Manifesto*. This mid-nineteenth century Manifesto, fashioned in European conditions, did not appear to me capable of replication in the Caribbean...I approached Marxism from a creative standpoint; it was not holy writ to be applied willy-nilly across different countries and centuries. My mind was, and is, too subtle, too enquiring, too questioning, to accept the dogmas of man.”

ties to the global Left and progressives then. What motivated you to establish this organization?

EB: It wasn't me alone. It grew out of a historical process that brought like-minded young radicals together, as is always the case in history when new movements are formed. We were from different communities on a small island, but we all knew each other and had the same background. We wanted to do more than just sit, drink, smoke and talk about "the Struggle". Like minds eventually converged and a new idea was born.

In my case, my own growth started while attending the Roman Catholic St. Mary's College – the island's top boys' secondary school – where we formed the Students Revolutionary Organisation (SRO) between 1967 and 1968. We secretly shared socialist literature among the more radical boys. The English editions of books from Cuba and other materials about the Cuban Revolution and Fidel Castro also informed us about Cuban students' achievements as a result of their part in creating the revolution.

We agitated early against religious discrimination – even though we didn't call it that back then – as friends of ours from other religious denominations could not attend the same school as us. In my case, there was also a particular religious family twist. My father was a Catholic, but my mother was a Methodist and she placed me in Methodist infant and primary schools. However, only Catholic students could enter the College, hence, I was removed from the Methodist school and transferred to the R.C. [Roman Catholic] Boys Primary School in Castries. Then, since my mother and father were not married and I was therefore legally considered an 'illegitimate child', my father had to pay a lawyer two-hundred dollars – a very hefty sum in those days -- to change my name from Earl Mondesir (my mother's surname) to Earl Bousquet. My dad had to legally affix his surname to my Christian name to 'legitimise' my civil status so that I could remain at the College.

The SRO also quietly agitated against the religious dominance of the Roman Catholic Church on St. Lucian social life. We called its discriminatory actions "unequal" and "unfair". We protested against the principal's insistence that we could not wear 'afro' hairstyles to school. Our parents were required to 'trim' our hair regularly. The school's rules – many in the official Rule Book – indicated how we had to conform to the social requirements of the upper class.

Ironically, the College principal, an Irish Presentation Brother named Donatus Brasil had straight hair that spiked out off his head and he combed it like an afro. One day, with summer vacation approaching, on the last day of school we protested against one of his many dictates by assaulting a plain white statue of the Virgin Mary located atop the step leading to the entrance of the school – splashing it with black paint. That did it. It would happen, that our entire Form 4B - considered by the Brothers and local teachers (Masters) as "the Black Power form" - was virtually expelled. We were not given expulsion forms (or maybe they were sent to our parents), but we were simply not back at school when the new academic year started after the holidays.

The SRO noted that there were forty-eight (48) boys affected. About half of us eventually became dreadlocked Rastafarians – the new cultural radicals in town at a time when Reggae Music, Bob Marley and marijuana were sweeping across the Caribbean – and the world. Those were the days when the 'Hippie' and 'Pace & Love' anti-war movement in North America and Europe had grown alongside the development of the 'Black Power' Movement. Those were also the days when the likes of Jomo Laurencin, a US-based Saint Lucian would get arrested every time he returned home and mounted a demonstration or protest in Castries to highlight Black Power and promote Black Consciousness.

Out of school, unemployed and still wanting to maintain our radicalism, we maintained contact in terms of sharing the latest issues of the English edition of *Granma*² or the latest hot books that arrived. We'd meet at some point to celebrate or observe the latest international anniversary or solidarity event. Newspapers were three times a week (Monday, Wednesday and Saturday), so we met often to discuss current local, regional and international events. This continued until my father, the senior harbor pilot, decided to get me a job on a ship and sent me sailing around the world. It was on the *Geest Port*, a 'banana boat', one of four that shipped bananas weekly to the port of Barry in Cardiff, Wales.

At sea at thirteen years old, I started writing and keeping diaries from 1969 to 1975. I travelled to scores of countries on all the seven seas and five continents. I followed and noted life, especially cultural differences in each port we called at. I found and read English language newspapers and quietly followed the politics the best I could when not studying navigation – my father's original call of lifelong duty for me.

My dad often reminded us that "I have never been to a university – not even to climb the step to deliver a message." His concept was: "The best education is knowing and seeing how the world turns." Thus, he placed each of his sons except the very last (he had no daughters) on a ship as their first job. I had no choice but to study navigation, but I also carried my radicalism with me across the seas and oceans. I was detained briefly by white police officers in Cape Town the very first time I landed in South Africa. Outside a bar seeking a taxi back to the ship at port, I touched a passing young white woman on the arm and asked her: "What's the time, please?" I had no idea what I did wrong and was explaining to the police that all I wanted was "the time". It was only after the ship's agent presented my Seaman's Passport at the station that the police freed me – and insisted that I and other fellow 'Black West Indian' sailors be warned that we are "not allowed to enter bars without carefully reading entry signs." That was my first direct introduction to Apartheid!

AS: *When did you begin the work of the Workers Revolutionary Movement and what were your objectives?*

EB: Like I said before, it was not I alone. I returned home to St. Lucia in late 1975-early 1976 from sailing the world and reconnected with former SRO members, fellow 'afro-heads' and 'Rastas'. From their readings up to those times, others at home had learned of existing groups of persons thinking like us in the Caribbean: the Afro-Caribbean Liberation Movement (ACLM) in Antigua with Tim Hector; the National Joint Action Committee (NJAC) in Trinidad and Tobago; the Peoples Progressive Party, Walter Rodney, ASCRIA and the Working People's Alliance (WPA) in Guyana; Trevor Munroe, Don Robotham and the Workers Liberation League (WLL) in Jamaica, etc.

The ACLM was a leading organization among the smaller Eastern Caribbean islands and they produced a newspaper called *The Outlet* that was often sued by government and ruling party politicians for exposing truths it could not prove in court. One such case was the then Vere Bird government's deal with the apartheid South African Defense Force (SADF) to allow importation into Antigua of 'Howitzer' missile-type weapons to be tested on Barbuda. "The Outlet" published the information revealing the weapons had arrived on a ship named *S.S. Tugelaland* – but couldn't lay its hands on supportive legal or official documentation to back its story – and was again heavily sued, to keep Hector and the ACLM silent.

On the 17th August 1976, in honour of the birth of Marcus Garvey³, the Workers Revolutionary Movement (WRM) of Saint Lucia was established. Thereafter, our list of

² The *Granma* is the official newspaper of the Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party.

³ While Garvey's economic message was not in line with socialist principles, the race consciousness and promotion of African liberation served as an inspiration for many Caribbean Left movements mid-20th century by a young generation.

members across-the-board (Members, Candidate Members and Applicants) would include members from across the society: youth, students and teachers, economists and doctors, women and cultural activists, workers and tradesmen, rural and urban poor, the unemployed, Rastafarians and Public Servants.

One of our early quiet achievements was to have sat with aging George Charles and painfully hand-recorded (by pen and paper) his account of 'The History of the Working Class of Saint Lucia', largely compiled and edited by the WRM's Chairman, Lawrence Poyotte. Only a few copies were printed – thanks to our Cuban comrades – but we were satisfied to have achieved that significant feat, which allowed us to share a first-hand account of an important part of Saint Lucia's ongoing working class struggle. Our weekly political analyses would also be published in our organ, 'Tambu'.

The WRM promoted pro-Cuban and anti-imperialism positions and helped people understand what socialism had to offer and the relevance of national liberation movements across the world. We played a lead role in developing an anti-apartheid consciousness and coordinated several solidarity events to highlight various peace and anti-imperialist struggles in Africa, Asia and Latin America. We identified with Caribbean struggles and began developing relationships with the likes of Guyana's Progressive Youth Organization (PYO), which put us on to the likes of Walter Rodney and Eusi Kwayana of the Working People's Alliance (WPA). What we were doing was also happening elsewhere across the Caribbean. Between 1976-1980 a number of organizations sprung up across the Caribbean: The Dominica Liberation Movement (DLM) grew in Dominica; the Youlou Liberation Movement (YULIMO) emerged in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, 'Youlou and the Begos' is the Carib name for the islands before the British re-christened it; the New Jewel Movement (NJM) had rooted itself in Grenada; the Workers Liberation League (WLL) was quite alive in Jamaica; the Movement for National Liberation (MONALI) quietly emerged in Barbados; the February 18 Movement, People Progressive Movement (PPM) and Committee for Labour Solidarity (CLS) sought to give a Marxist perspective to the struggles in Trinidad and Tobago; and the February 26 Movement emerged as the political arm of the Bouterse-led coup in Suriname. Our organisations also included returning students from the University of the West Indies (UWI) Campuses, especially radicalised ones from Mona, Jamaica, but also others from St. Augustine in Trinidad & Tobago. The influence and impact of the 'New World Group' and of academics such as Walter Rodney, Ralph Gonsalves and Neville Duncan on the campuses was a key factor.

AS: *Intra-Caribbean dialogue and mobility was extremely high with much less developed transport and communication technologies. The 11th World Festival of Youth and Students in Havana in 1978 was a high point for socialist youth in the Caribbean. I have heard stories of persons crying in Revolutionary Square, the building of lifelong relations with Latin American revolutionaries and English-speaking activists. You attended. What memories did you take away from the experience?*

EB: The 26th July 1978 in Revolutionary Square in Havana was the first time the five Saint Lucian delegates were seeing what a million people looked like. Virginia Alexander, Allan Amedee, Mario Michel, Lawrence Poyotte and I were just five Caribbean small-islanders in a sea of one million people.⁴

We were lodged at the Lenin School in Havana and I had a good Canon automatic self-loading camera. Some young guys from the Farabundo Mari Liberation Movement (FMLN)

Norman Girvan (2010,3) refers to "the ghost of Marcus Garvey" that helped shaped the political mood of context of the 1960s in the Caribbean.

⁴ 18,500 persons was the estimated number of participants in the 11th World Festival of Youth and Students, 1978. A number of young Caribbean socialists and Left political activists participated in the festival. The masses of crowds were the largest ever seen by many young persons who originated from islands with small populations.

in El Salvador and others from Nicaragua's Frente Sandinista Liberation Nacional (FSLN) shared the room with us and my camera suddenly disappeared. I fumed mad and was looking for a fight when a Cuban friend told me, smiling: "They took it to use it to put it to work for their struggle". But as far as I was concerned, that was no joke.

Our first visit to Havana also exposed some interesting realities about the Cuban reality itself. There was no toilet paper of the type we were accustomed to, so we had to wipe with sheets of *Granma* newspaper – and throw the dirty paper in a basket, not into the toilet bowl. But I just could not do that, not with the highly revered *Granma*. Instead, I actually used some colored gift paper I picked up on someone's bed, which was just as bad for my rectum!

That first Cuba visit taught us a lot about the differences in seeking national liberation through armed struggle and going the peaceful electoral way. We saw the benefits from persistence and of having a strong party that is rooted in the masses. We saw that money is not all that's needed to improve life and make people happy. The Cubans had complaints, but they didn't blame Fidel or the communist party, instead they blamed 'Yankee Imperialism'. We saw socialism alive and kicking in Cuba. We saw young and old supporting the communists and praising the party, ready to fight and die for it and for their Revolution. We met Fidel and Raul Castro, PLO⁵ leader Yasser Arafat and FRELIMO⁶ leader Samora Machel. And we met all our friends and comrades from across the region that we only knew by name from correspondence.

That Havana Festival was like Muslims going to Mecca, like when Malcolm X took that holy ride to Saudi Arabia and learned that there can be good White Muslims too. In Cuba, we saw Blacks and Whites, Indians and Mulattos, young and old – and in between united behind one party. We returned home more certain than ever that we had made the right political choice, which was to embrace socialism and not capitalism. We didn't have a Fidel or a Revolution, but we were now sure that if it can happen in Cuba, it can happen anywhere else. We, from across the Caribbean, were inspired to each shape our own roads to our revolutions!

AS: *There is a wide political conjuncture that brought me to socialist movement building at the UWI and with youth in the Caribbean. With the death of my father Roderick Sanatan, I had a greater sense of the loss. I became more aware of the deficit in our culture, which does not seem to be replenished, of memories and contributions of a progressive Left generation of Caribbean youth in the 1970s – 1980s, But I am now witness to the rise of feminist and ecological mass movements embedded in the Latin American Left; and the European Left turn with the likes of Pablo Iglesias, Yanis Varoufakis, Benoit Hamon and their political movements. Rethinking socialism in the Global North and Global South harness the energy, intellectual arguments and political demands of the youth. I want a socialism that is culturally relevant and in touch with youth. How did your relationship with youth inform your thinking in the WRM?*

EB: It was difficult for us to sell scientific socialism and Marxism-Leninism. In as much as we held our own internal political education and ideological study classes, they were simply in-house discussions. But how do we explain that in our majority-spoken native Kwéyòl⁷ language? What is the creative application to young people? These questions guided our application of Marxist theorising in St. Lucia. We had to speak to farmers, unemployed people and workers regularly. We could not speak about Marx, Engels and Lenin to them.

⁵ Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO).

⁶ Mozambique Liberation Front (Frente de Libertação de Moçambique)

⁷ Kwéyòl is a syncretic nation language based on French and West African languages. The language is spoken prominently in Haiti, Dominica, Guadeloupe, Martinique, St. Lucia, Guiana, and in some communities in Trinidad and Grenada.

We discussed their problems and drew lessons from a Marxist perspective, but always making sure we can help their situation. We felt you cannot just give people literature to read, have them listen to you and not try to or help solve their problems when they come to you.

The centralised structure was very strong in the WRM decision-making process. Given everything about our ideological and political orientation and the fact that many of our members had prominent or public jobs (paid by government) we were a closed organisation with separate cells for Applicants, Candidate Members and Members, most of whom never knew each other as members. It would take sometimes three to four years to transition from an Applicant to a full Member, but looking back, the difficulty with that approach was that it locked out a wide range of persons. We experienced the shortcoming of this structure in the Grenada Revolution.

A woman who read an early article I wrote in the *Free West Indian*⁸ newspaper in 1980 contacted me. She said she was “a NJM member” and showed me her preciously preserved ‘Party Card’. She complained that “as a farmer, as president of the women farmers group in the area and as a party member”, she was not getting the attention she expected. After reading my story about the woman’s complaint, I was told by a leading member of the NJM political directorate that the party had transformed itself into “a vanguard party” and “a party of the new type”, which was now beyond the mass-based grouping the lady farmer had joined many years before. But this is exactly what happens when you are no longer a mass-based party, the Grenada transformation left behind a lot of people who had made the Revolution possible. That must not be allowed to happen. A party must never alienate itself from the people it serves. It has to be culturally relevant.

AS: I support the idea of mass democratic political organisations as the vehicle for popular participation. In my opinion, the ‘democratic’ feature is less emphasised in Caribbean politics, yet, I still believe that an explicitly authoritarian structure as a Communist Party-style group is less participatory. Drawing on your experiences, do you think the heavily centralised and scientific structure of Marxism-Leninism has the possibility of inviting popular participation?

EB: It always depends on national conditions. We had WRM cells around the island crossing in seventeen (17) constituencies. Applicants, Candidate Members and Full Members would be from the same community but not know each other, because their groups met separately. At our highest point we had over seventy-six (76) general members, which included eighteen (18) full members and six (6) in the Organizing Committee (OC). The OC comprised Chairman, a General Secretary, an Assistant General Secretary, an Organizing Secretary, a Recording Secretary and a Propaganda Secretary. Our official organ [newsletter] was ‘*Tambu*’ (The Drum) and our logo featured two cutlasses crossed, a book and the wheel of industry.

Our members included labour leaders, members of the St. Lucia Labour Party, public servants, and middle class elements, as well from traditional bourgeois families. We also had members and sympathisers in the security services. I recall us being informed by a cell member that the police would do a ‘clean up’ of a group at the airport on their way to Libya. We warned the main organiser, but he did not communicate this information. As we speak today, some of those young men and women arrested back then [circa 1980] still do not have passports, some having had to change their names and those who were caught have permanent scarred memories.

⁸ The Free West Indian was the state-controlled newspaper of the People’s Revolutionary Government during the Grenada Revolution.

Many of our members worked in the public services and were in the middle class, which is why the group was a highly secretive organisation. We were also sending Saint Lucian students to Cuba on scholarships provided for the sons and daughters of the urban and rural poor who qualified, but whose parents could not afford. We wanted to protect them and their jobs after they returned home, so they were duly compartmentalised. We were building and operating as a movement with centralised leadership and not like the traditional political party. We opted to host public lectures and workshops, rather than public rallies with blasting loudspeakers that would draw too much attention from the authorities.

Our strategic intention was to provide a working class, progressive perspective and strategic leadership to various people's and mass organisations. These included the largest of the major trade unions at various levels: National Workers Union (NWU), Saint Lucia Teachers Union (SLTU) and the Saint Lucia Civil Service Association (CSA). In the end, we played a major role in the establishment of the Industrial Solidarity Pact (ISP), a trade union alliance that represented over 70% of the organised working class. Many of our members also belonged to the Folk Research Centre (FRC), which pioneered the movement to recognise, promote and teach Kweyol. We also promoted rural transformation. Our Chairman, Poyotte, worked with leather craftsmen to establish the Movement for Promotion of Leatherwork (MPL) that influenced the establishment of similar collectives in other islands.

The WRM also contributed immensely to the local and regional youth movements, including the establishment of the National Youth Council (NYC) and Caribbean Federation of Youth (CYF). Before all that, we worked with the likes of UK-trained Shakespearean-versed Oxford-read radical George Odlum, the young progressive teacher Kenny D. Anthony, the radical agriculturist Peter Rosie, progressive women's advocate Frances Michel, rural agitators Richard Edwin and Mc Millan Monrose, Robert Odlum (George's brother) and others, to revive the long-dormant Saint Lucia Farm and Farm Workers General Union (SLF&FWU).

This union was re-established to promote a national minimum wage for farmworkers. It so happened that Kenny Anthony's father owned several estates in the south of the island. It also happened that it was on his father's estates that our first mobilizations began – and with Kenny present. So, in effect, we were centralised by necessity on the basis of the organisational structure we built. But we would later find that such a structure, in the absence of political power or a mass base, had severe limits, even though we were able to effectively spread our wings and fly, largely unseen.

AS: *Socialist political parties and groups have historically engaged women in popular movements. However, the masculinist structure of the organizations often dealt with women on androcentric terms. How did the WRM confront issues of gender and women's liberation in your time?*

EB: Today is International Women's Day 2017. Exactly 42 years ago, 1975 marked a great year for women worldwide and a significant UN conference took place that put women's issues firmly on the international agenda but the gender issue and the struggle for women's equality was not yet nowhere near the top of the local or regional political agenda.

The first woman was elected to office here after Associated Statehood in 1967 was Mrs. Heraldine Rock, a Saint Lucian of Indian and peasant farming background, who in the 1974 election defeated the island's best-known well-read and intellectually founded politician, George Odlum, the acknowledged leader of the progressive movement.

Odlum cried foul and claimed electoral fraud, but he'd lost because he was not an organized campaigner. The former first Black president of Bristol University Students Union, who had returned home and was appointed Executive Secretary of the West Indies Associated States

(WISA), simply felt Saint Lucian voters should have voted for him because of who he was and what he wanted to do for them. But 'Ma Rock' was a house-to-house, door-to-door campaigner who daily walked the banana belt while Odlum supported other candidates in other constituencies.

There are facts and factors about women in politics here. First, women have always dominated in certain aspects of our politics. I don't know if it's a universal Caribbean thing, but from West Indian times it has always been the women who do the campaigning for the parties here, who knock the doors, who give and take insults, who pull the votes out for the men candidates. It has always been so here since Adult Suffrage was won in 1951. Second, the women have always dominated in the main areas of work – from carrying coals in their immaculate white dresses before and after World War II, to carrying sugar cane from field to factory, to carrying the bananas from field to truck and from wharf to the banana boats to be shipped to England. Women dominated and continue to dominate in the banks and stores, the food markets and the rum shops. Third, women have always turned out to political meetings just as men, in some cases even more than men.

Another fact is that women don't automatically nominate women as election candidates. There must be a reason and I think is more than just 'the masculinist nature of the parties'. Where women emerged or were proposed by men, they were supported by women, but were not always voted for by women just because they were women. Women here would attack women candidates as vehemently as men — and throw as much or even more dirt and mud. Women would also laugh louder at sexist 'jokes' thrown at opposing women by men candidates. This has nothing to do with gender and everything to do with the other woman being from 'the other side.'

In WRM's time, the gender struggle in Saint Lucia was not as defined, even though one of our members, Michaeline "Mickey" Crichlow, always found ways to introduce the topic and urge that what we now know as gender-sensitivity be among our considerations at a time when many hadn't even heard the phrase. The WRM also played a pioneer role in organizing related activities to commemorate International Women's Day (IWD) each year, also issuing our own statements. We had as many women as men in our ranks, but we never even classified or listed members by sex or gender. They were effective in winning young and older women to the local cause and to support the other causes we promoted and defended.

The women's movement here was taking shape around our time, with Mrs. Rock becoming the first Minister Responsible for Women's Affairs. Issues like 'Violence Against Women', 'Rape' and other forms of sexual assault, started to emerge in the press, but not on the political platforms. We started to see the likes of the 'Business and Professional Women's Club' emerging and calls for a 'Crisis Centre' started emerging as core issues for women. We saw more of that around International Women's Day and less attention paid to the issues by the political parties dominated by the men the women supported. Women's issues were more attended to at agitation levels and in spontaneous response to incidents, but it would take some time before the national women's movement started to emerge.



Reflections on the Grenada Revolution

AS: *George Lamming*⁹ once remarked, “Between 1979 and 1983, there was an extraordinary idealism and enthusiastic boldness of commitment right through the region. Those four years did something to ignite and activate people in all kinds of fields. But the tragedy [was] that [the Grenada] Revolution took such a fall, it traumatized the left – and we have not yet quite recovered the meaning of that event.” Since the revolution, many of the harsh lessons of history have been written about and debated in and out of the Caribbean. In 2013, Bruce Paddington produced the feature length documentary “Grenada – The Killing of a Revolution”. Left political activism in the region are not near the levels as they were in your time but among those in your generation, a sense of tragedy and loss is still felt about the Grenada Revolution. As a people, can we move past the idea that the Grenada Revolution as tragedy?

EB: I would describe the period of 1979-1983 as one when we came of age as parties, political institutions and groupings. We had moved beyond the ‘searching for’ to believing ‘We have found’. Grenada in 1979 said to us, or what we heard, was what we had left Cuba - less than a year earlier - very convinced was very possible, though not at all easy. Grenada, like Cuba, showed that while revolutions might not be their first choice, people would eventually support the process if convinced it is right. People supported the NJM because they knew what Gairy was doing. In St. Lucia, people were critical of Eugenia Charles because they knew what she did; and they opposed Bird because they understood the problems of his leadership. So, at the level of consciousness among the masses was closer to us than ever. It allowed us to emerge with the ULP winning the elections in St. Vincent, ACLM people entering the new party with Baldwin Spencer that ousted the Birds.

⁹ (George Lamming cited in Kamugisha and Trotz 2007, ii)

In Barbados, there was interesting aspect. Many still do not know that Owen Arthur was associated with Trevor Munroe and the WLL in Jamaica. Arthur went back to Barbados as a radical democratic socialist and he promoted a progressive platform in his party. We moved from the period of formation to the period of indirectly accessing political power through our members being strategically placed in the right place, at the right time. For example, with WRM's declared support, alongside all other progressive elements on the island, the St. Lucia Labour Party (SLP) won the general elections in 1979 and the young and progressive teacher and President of the St. Lucia Teachers Union (SLTU), Kenny D. Anthony, emerged as a member of the Cabinet in a very interesting way. At the time, he was too young to be appointed a senator, so the Constitution had to be amended to reduce the qualifying age to twenty-one (21) years old to facilitate his appointment. But the internal 'power struggle' resulted in the amendment never having been made in time and Anthony being appointed as 'Special Advisor on Education', the equivalent of Education Minister. Back then we also had other progressive allies within the Labour Party, in and out of office. It was not easy for WRM, as an entity, to float publicly. As a journalist and activist I was well known, but we couldn't have a declared 'WRM Headquarters' because we knew what we were up against.

Early on, for example, we rented an office on the middle floor of a private residence on Mary Ann Street in Castries, the home of the mother of Philip J. Pierre, a young UWI graduate and SLP Senator who was contesting against Romanus Lansiquot, a very loquacious UWP government minister, for the Castries East seat. As soon as our location became known – from my frequenting of the place - the electricity to the building was deliberately cut and the lone old lady was left in darkness for an entire holiday weekend. To avoid further punishment of Mrs. Pierre, we voluntarily vacated the premises. Between 1983 – when the UWP returned to office as a result of the power struggle within the ruling SLP – and 1996, our ranks started to decline as leading members pursued study or professional assignments and engagements abroad. Those who remained continued to pursue and promote the struggle through the many organisations we belonged to, but our public appearances and statements started to wane in favour of wider action with national outreach.

During that period I served as a long-standing Chairman of the Folk Research Centre (FRC), Editor of the *Crusader* and *Star* newspapers and a correspondent for several regional and international news agencies and progressive outlets, including *Prensa Latina* and *Granma* in Cuba and the Inter Press Service (IPS), as well as a BBC Caribbean and Radio Antilles, then owned by Germany's Deutsche Welle, correspondent in Saint Lucia covering the Caribbean.

In 1993, I eventually left Saint Lucia with my family for Guyana to take up a series of related appointments with the new PPP administration that emerged from the free 1992 presidential poll. President Cheddi Jagan had invited me to become Editor of the PPP's *Mirror* Newspaper, but I was also appointed Chairman of the state-owned Guyana Television Service (GTV) and a Director of the state-owned Guyana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC). As in Grenada, I entered the party structure and operated like a member, participating in all aspects of party life while helping construct a new society under socialist leadership.

In 1996, the SLP invited Dr. Kenny D. Anthony to leave his safe job as General Counsel, chief lawyer, at the CARICOM Secretariat to lead the party into the 1997 General Elections. Kenny, Lawrence Poyotte and I had a discussion in Guyana and I promised that if the SLP won, I too would return home to assist in the new government. Later, President Jagan died in 1996 and the troublesome process of succession - to his wife Janet and from her to the young Soviet-trained Bharrat Jagdeo – delayed my return home all the way to 1999. In 1997, however, the SLP won the general elections under Anthony's leadership with an unprecedented 16-1 margin – and a significant number of Cabinet members happened to be either former WRM members or personally positively impacted by the WRM in their early political formation - including the new Prime Minister.

By that time, the Grenada Revolution provided us all with a ready platform for organisations on the Left, because each organisation was invited and allowed to bring four (4) members to live and work in Grenada. I headed the newsroom at *Radio Free Grenada (RFG)* and the weekly *Free West Indian*. The aim of such attachments in Grenada by revolutionary comrades from across the Caribbean was to gain experience and return to your home country. In most of the cases, those who returned eventually entered public life, either as political candidates or in the public service. That was what I brought back to Saint Lucia and across to Guyana. The 1983-1997 period worried the West, especially Washington [D.C].

We could never be too rough on Bernard Coard and others, even though what happened in October 1983 was tantamount to revolutionary suicide. The US is up to now maintaining seized ownership of Maurice Bishop's body, which was taken to the US after the 'Kangaroo Trial' that followed the invasion. This was part and parcel of a deliberate strategy of not leaving a legacy for a shrine or a place of worship or a museum where people will go and pay reverence to Bishop and the revolution. The Grenada Revolution was a booming harvest, period of revolutionary blooming for the Caribbean. Much good happened and benefits were delivered directly and permanently - that history just cannot be erased.

With many of us still alive, the real true and full story of the Grenada Revolution will eventually emerge. Unfortunately, however, too many of the writings and films, like Bruce Paddington's¹⁰, that I have read and seen since its demise are from the perspective of "We were right" and "They were wrong." But in the context of collective responsibility, we were all wrong.

AS: *What do you mean by "we were all wrong"?*

EB: Read John 'Chalkie' Ventour. There were conflicts between Cubans, Grenada's military leaders, Bishop's followers and critics and the aims of the Revolution.

We had to do voluntary work, we were in the militia, we taught the people to read and write. We were well spread-out, but we had too many tentacles. It was as if your credentials went higher according to the level of your involvement in "revolutionary work". Some criticized persons for 'talking, talking and talking,' but we were also 'doing, doing, doing' and yet not connecting our work to our socialist ideas. We didn't seem to seek common ground. You were either 'a revolutionary' or a 'counter'¹¹. You were either 'scientific' or 'backward' – middle ground was regarded as a form of 'ideological frailty' or 'weakness'. That's what I mean. We were all committed, but at varying degrees and levels, without sufficient recognition that it is human for humans to have different levels of understanding and learning and act accordingly. In that sense, from the standpoint of collective responsibility, we were all wrong.

¹⁰ Documentary produced by Bruce Paddington titled, "Forward Ever: The Killing of a Revolution" (2013).

¹¹ 'Counter' was a pejorative term used to describe a counter-revolutionary.



Border Imperialism

AS: *The Caribbean as we know it is an imperialist imposition of artificial borders and boundaries. How have colonial borders prevented radical movement building and the integration movement?*

EB: Like everywhere else where artificial borders of sea and air separate neighbours and transportation requires passports and immigration regulations, movement between our Caribbean islands and territories was or is both limited and controlled over time. Historically, we hardly communicated between shores, only reading and hearing about each other through the traditional controlled media and letters or newspapers through post offices. Like the political parties, the radical movement was equally slow in growing a regional consciousness. But like the parties and governments, the progressive movement always also found ways to communicate, whether the socialists within the West Indies Labour Party leading to and after the West Indies Federation, or the Left and progressive movements that grew across the region in the 1970s and flowered after the Grenada Revolution through improved communication and more opportunities to commune like at party conferences and congresses.

So, yes we were limited and constrained by and within the imposed colonial borders over time, but as necessity breeds invention, we had to be creative to better connect. And that we did...

AS: *Then, how do we resist and overcome these divisions?*

EB: By continuing to be creative and innovative, while making use of the new methods that comes with time and change. Internet and IT have erased artificial borders but the imposed imaginary lines drawn in our sands and waters continue to divide Haiti and the Dominican Republic, the three Guianas and neighbouring South American states, just as they continue to

divide the islands naturally separated by the Caribbean Sea. We can and must use the new and evolving IT platforms and today's richly enhanced communications facilities at home and between border but that has and must be accompanied by the hard work of mobilisation and organisation on the ground. There's a dangerous tendency to over-depend or rely absolutely on the behemoth called Facebook for mobilisation, only to realize that in our societies, those most committed to the political process are still very much of the pre-Internet generation – and who do not all have e-mail addresses or Facebook and Twitter accounts. We must always look beyond the horizon and aim to drive beyond the boundary but there are always times when we have to creep and walk before we start to run. We cannot and must not run the struggle in a hurry.

AS: *There is a saying in St. Lucia that goes “We are seven times French and seven times British.” This refers to the fourteen (14) times the rule of the island changed between the French and British during European colonial expansion in the “New World.” In 1979, St. Lucia became an independent nation in the Commonwealth of countries. Like most of its Caribbean counterparts, there is still a dependent relationship on the Global North, especially the United States of America. What are the psychological complexities of persistently being in an uneven economically dependent relationship?*

EB: Being “Seven times British and seven times French” means we were, during that period, fourteen times not seen or treated as who we are; mainly sons and daughters, heirs and successors of slaves and indigenous people, with an identity of our own.

Throughout and in between each of those fourteen changes we had to speak the official language of whichever of the two colonial powers was in charge at the time. But that also allowed us to develop the indigenous multilingual creole language that Saint Lucia shares with millions in Dominica and Haiti, as well as with the remaining French colonies, officially called Overseas Departments in Paris, of Martinique, Guadeloupe and French Guiana, the so-called ‘French Antilles’.

The changing of colonial flags and languages fourteen times also had the negative effect of the indigenous language-speaking majority being locked out of the official system, business and courts, church and school being conducted in a language not theirs. Ultimately, the locked-out language only became stronger, as a good communication tool for local strugglers of the times, as the ruling classes never cared or got to understand what Englishman Henry H. Breen described in an early racist colonial account of Saint Lucia's history as a language of “toothless old women.”

Independence came in 1979 in a way in which it was negotiated by divided political teams. The petit-bourgeois, middle-class radicals in the SLP's leadership adopted an anti-Independence posture which was a departure from the party's core principles and philosophy. However, WRM remained resolute in its support for independence and said in a widely distributed public statement, “Independence is a necessary tool to further advance the struggle for national liberation.” We were expectedly hammered by the SLP leaders and even accused of ‘supporting the UWP’, but ours was a principled stance, that in a situation where other people shed blood for it, independence just could not be opposed.

We ended-up with an unwilling ‘Mother Country’ giving us a constitution that retained us within the realm of Her Majesty the Queen's royal kingdom, Saint Lucia's parliament still today paying allegiance to ‘The Queen’ the opening of each annual session, with Queen Elizabeth II's crowned head on all our money - paper or coin. US media penetration has turned our younger generations over time into markets of minds to be preyed upon from outside, while the economics of our time, over time, has removed the chains from our necks and legs and tied them to our pockets and stomachs. The psychological complexities are

many, as you see, which is why our politics has to always change with time. Our adversaries at home and abroad always promote and pursue regime change to suit their own designs. We must continue do the same for a different kind of change and also flex with time and change with change, as change remains the only permanent global constant.

AS: *Harsha Walia, an activist and author, has begun to look at “border imperialism” extensively and how it is a technology of violence that polices black/brown and indigenous communities. She offers an interesting analysis of internal policing of borders within nation states. In the Caribbean, socialist regimes experienced the most brutal form of enforced border imperialism – invasions. How have invasions divided and denied the dignity of Caribbean people historically?*

EB: Technologies of violence have prevailed over time, changing and adapting along with the rise in resistance. Slaves were whipped; rebels were ‘lynched’; Garveyites were pursued; Rastafarians were arrested, shot, jailed or killed; communists and socialists were branded; and new laws were always introduced to enforce introduction and maintenance of technologies of violence.

US and British-made weapons transformed Caribbean police forces into little camouflaged armies, just as weapons of war from Iraq and Afghanistan later transformed US police forces into the lethal armies that execute with the violent technological tools that gave life to the Black Lives Matter movement. Policing of borders within states targets communities of colour in the USA, France and Britain, but it also affects targeted Caribbean communities for reasons other than race. Gang wars and gang-related violence is on the upswing across the Caribbean as a result of drugs being paid for now, more with guns than cash.

Internal border policing is also changing in the Caribbean, with the UK, USA and France playing increasingly active combined roles in policing the waters in the name of fighting drugs but since the Grenada Invasion, the US and the Eastern Caribbean island governments have also been jointly facilitating annual naval and land-based military manoeuvres. Invasions have been few in the English-speaking Caribbean Community (CARICOM). The first in recent memory was five decades ago in Anguilla in 1967, when the British flew the Special Air Services (SAS) down to the tiny Caribbean islet to put down the ‘People’s Revolution’ led by Ronald Webster, seeking secession from mainland Saint Kitts. The most remembered external invasion in the English-speaking Caribbean was the so-called ‘US-led Rescue Mission’ of October 25, 1983 that was nothing but an imperialist invasion to bury the Grenada Revolution after its suicidal death. Grenada came just twelve years after Anguilla and lasted only four-and-a-half years, but in both cases they left rich lessons to be learned about the eagerness and willingness of imperial powers to move against colonial or independent islands or states, regardless of sovereignty or rights, once they consider their interests are threatened.

AS: *What must the Caribbean progressive Left and socialist movements do to defy the history of our region being a playground for imperialist powers?*

EB: If we could stop invasions by declaring them illegal, the world would long have been a better place. Similarly, if CARICOM governments could have convinced European powers that benefitted from slavery to apologise and atone today, there would have been no need for building a regional movement for reparations from the UK and other culprit members the European Union (EU) for slavery and native Genocide. However, the reality is that we have to know that invasions are always real possibilities and the EU states that were built off slavery are not about to voluntarily apologize or atone for commission of the greatest crime against humanity known to humankind.

Caribbean socialist, Left and progressive parties and movements cannot wish invasions away, but we can certainly do more to let our people know that invasions today come not only by forces of arms by sea and air, but also through technology and economics, culture and education.

We continue to be shaped into the images and likenesses of our oppressors, we embrace other cultures without question, we watch while history is falling off our school curriculum and we refuse to adjust to the changed and changing times with the speed required to keep up. We must pay more attention to inter-generational partnerships. There must be more meaningful engagement, communication and coexistence among and between the experienced and battle-scarred, with better hook-ups to the new and emerging cadre of progressive thinkers. The elders and sages must be willing to talk less and listen more, when and where it matters. Instead of shutting down new ideas, we need to be more accommodating of the innovative ideas, approaches and experimentation of the emerging Caribbean young political, cultural and social activists, who have the world at their fingertips today.

AS: *Where do we go from here?*

EB: In these new times in our small and large Caribbean states, we all have to manage our space and the transition, from our time to your time. In our time, we set the pace in the small islands now called the OECS¹². Dr Ralph Gonsalves of St. Vincent and the Grenadines was among those ‘kicking-up dust’ at and from UWI Cave Hill Campus in Barbados, which significantly contributed to progress in political education in Barbados itself; Pierre Charles, Rosie Douglas, Bill Riviere, Gregory Rabess and others were holding the fort in Dominica; Renwick Rose, Oscar Allen, Casper Brown, Adrian Saunders, Colin Williams and others held sway in St. Vincent and the Grenadines; Maurice Bishop, Bernard Coard and Unison Whiteman led the process with others in Grenada; Tim Hector, Harold Lovell, Dobrene O’Marde and others battled and survived to fan the flames in Antigua; Kenny Anthony, Lawrence Poyotte, George Goddard, Carl Pilgrim, David Demacque and others did our bit in Saint Lucia.

The movements in the small islands also maintained links with our fraternal parties and movements in Barbados, Guyana, Jamaica and Trinidad & Tobago, as well as the progressive governments in Cuba and Nicaragua, the national liberation movements in Central and South America and the communist and progressive movements in the French Antilles - French Guiana, Guadeloupe and Martinique.

We left our fingerprints across the region long after our parties and movements either died or morphed into bigger and better things. Kenny Anthony and Mario Michel, Pierre Charles and Rosie Douglas, Maurice Bishop and Bernard Coard, Ralph Gonsalves, Harold Lovell – all became Prime Ministers or Deputy Prime Ministers in their respective countries, leading regimes implementing progressive change according to their respective national limits. Like our forebears, we fought in the trenches and laid the larger stones to cross the rivers. We built paths and bridges. We planted ideas that took root, grew and spread.

We continued the work started by our forebears and took it through our time. Now we have to work together with today’s generation and share our experiences, tell our stories and both plant them into oral history and upload them into the new e-cloud libraries for immediate and future downloading and sharing. Our leaders at all levels in the movements for struggle today must wake up and smell the new coffee.

¹² Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS).

Conclusion

It is one thing to read about Marxist theory and the history of socialism in the Caribbean, it is entirely another to interview someone who put radical politics into effect. The experiences and feelings of Caribbean people need to be considered in our analyses, even challenged such as beliefs about gender and leadership. Earl Bousquet's reflections on his time in the Caribbean Left of the 1970s, the Grenada revolution and media work for progressive governments alongside his interest in making a new generation of Caribbean youth achieve further progress are hopeful signs. Bousquet's political activism in St. Lucia challenged the idea that "there is no tropical socialism." Pursuing the classic goals of socialism with a process relevant to the Caribbean cultural context remains central to movement building in the region. The history of the Workers Revolutionary Movement is an essential resource to Caribbean people who seek to challenge the limitations of the geographic size of our small nations and our ability to impact global affairs. Border imperialism's most treacherous invasion is the invasion of our minds and self-confidence.

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