



Women

People who opposed Gairy always lived in fear. Our own home was searched by his Mongoose men on many occasions. People were always saying "who next" would be searched, and women were particularly afraid to speak in case their husbands or children were victimized.

Women usually had to sell their bodies to get work, either to Gairy himself or his Ministers. Other women who spoke out against the rising costs of sugar or other goods would find victimization for themselves and their families. Other women who spoke out, like nurses, would be transferred to Carriacou or far away from their homes.

We had NWO groups underground before the Revolution. Women in the different villages would organize, and we had six underground groups. We printed pamphlets, attacking the high cost of living, and calling for equal pay for equal work. We used to do house-to-house underground, and speak to the people who were against Gairy about why change was important and how women would benefit from it.¹

Gairy's regime was famous for "sexploitation": the widespread practice of demanding sexual favors from women in exchange for scholarships or employment. Private employers, too, responded to the same general climate, demanding sex from female employees and firing pregnant workers. Some 70% of women between the ages of 15 and 30 could not find jobs, and women routinely earned less than men for doing the same work.²

As the anti-Gairy movement grew, Grenadian women began to play an active, behind-the-scenes role. This activism cut across all divisions of age and class, involving uneducated rural women as well as professionals like teachers and nurses. Women sold the *New Jewel* paper on street corners, conveyed messages secretly, and offered their homes as meeting places and shelters for the NJM. On revolution day, women cooked for the soldiers of the People's Revolutionary Army, helped make arrests and occupied police stations until Gairy's forces surrendered.

In the months following the revolution, women made several major gains. The PRG put an immediate and complete stop to sexploitation by government officials, and passed a law prohibiting all forms of sexual discrimination. After extensive consultation with women's groups, unions, and employers' associations, the government passed a Maternity Leave Law giving female employees in all occupations the right to two months' paid leave for each childbirth.³ Both laws are enforced, although violations are usually corrected by a warning since employers know that women are now protected by law.⁴ The government also committed itself to a policy of "equal pay for equal work," and has equalized pay for male and female laborers on the road crews and state farms.⁵

The government established a Women's Desk in the Ministry of Education, Youth and Social Affairs to be the "state vehicle by which women can make their needs known."⁶ This office coordinates national programs for women and advises the PRG on matters which affect them. One of the projects of the Women's Desk is to review all the criminal and civil laws of Grenada for elements which discriminate against women.



Arthur Winner

pride of bearing

*The women walk
bodies balancing
each day's measure
of history's weight.*

*Belly's birth
toil's triumph—
the fruits of our labour
early and late.*

*On hips
in hands
on heads held high,
each one's load
determines her stride,
paces her future,
becomes her pride,
yesterday's pressure,
the new day's guide.*

Michelle Gibbs



The National Women's Organization

If it is true that the revolution has changed the status of women in Grenada, it is even more accurate to say that *through their involvement in the revolution, Grenadian women are changing themselves*. Advancement has come not so much through pressure for women's rights as an isolated issue (the model of the U.S. feminist movement) as through women's active participation and leadership in the revolution as a whole.

The National Women's Organization (NWO) is the structural expression of the women's movement in Grenada. It has two main functions:

- it is the catalyst for women's involvement in the programs of the revolution, recruiting women to volunteer as participants and leaders; and
- it is the main pressure group for women's rights, education and advancement in Grenada. The NWO's goal is to see Grenadian women achieve full equality as part of the overall development process taking place in Grenada.

The NWO is based on its 161 local groups, which women have formed in towns and villages all over the island. Each local group decides upon and carries out its own projects, with guidance from a Parish Coordinating Team.⁷ Groups often undertake projects such as painting a clinic or school, or sewing toys for a day-care center. Since 1980, the NWO has become increasingly involved in projects of a national scope in cooperation with the PRG. The NWO led the campaign to repair all the primary schools and pre-primary schools in the country. The creation of a string of day



Cuban and Trinidadian women attending a work-study camp at Pope Paul Ecumenical Center in Grenada.



Many women have joined the militia

care centers is a joint effort between the NWO and the Ministry of Education: the NWO local groups repair and furnish the buildings for the nurseries, while the government trains and pays the nurseries' staff. The NWO is also working with NACDA and the Women's Desk to start up cooperatives for women in the areas of baking and home canning; the first opened in December 1981.

As the NWO expands its membership and influence, it has become instrumental in carrying out the revolution's social programs. For example, the NWO is playing a key role in setting up the new national primary health care system which began in the fall of 1981. Such programs cannot be imposed from the top down; they depend on active participation by the people at the grassroots level. The NWO and the other mass organizations reach out to people and bring them into this process.

As the NWO has matured, it has come to focus on education, skills, and leadership training as the only long-term solutions to the problem of women's inequality. The NWO's national work plan for May to October 1981 reflected this concern by emphasizing education for its members. The Women's Desk offered a series of talks which local groups could request on topics such as nutrition, child care, family planning, Grenadian history, political issues, and the economy. The NWO also offered leadership training sessions for women in executive positions within the local groups and parish coordinating teams.⁸

Top women in the government

Dessima Williams, *Ambassador to the Organization of American States*

Government Ministers

Jacqueline Creft, *Minister of Education, Youth and Social Affairs*

Phyllis Coard, *Vice Minister for Women's Affairs and President, National Women's Organization*

Claudette Pitt, *Vice Minister for Community Development*

Permanent Secretaries (Senior executives responsible for running of ministries)

Marcella David, *Cabinet Secretary* (coordinates work of the PRG Cabinet)

Dorcas Braveboy, *Permanent Secretary in Ministry of Health*

Lew Bourne, *Permanent Secretary in Ministry of Housing*

Gloria Payne-Banfield, *Permanent Secretary in Ministry of Planning*

Faye Rapiet, *Permanent Secretary in Ministry of Legal Affairs*

Program Heads

Valerie Cornwall, *National Coordinator of Center for Popular Education*

Jane Belfon, *Director of Tourism*

Merle Hodge, *Coordinator of Curriculum Development Program*

Yvonne James, *Health Planner in Ministry of Health*
Candia Alleyne, *Coordinator of Food and Nutrition Council*

Joan Ross, *Program Director for Television Free Grenada*

Regina Taylor, *General Secretary of Agency for Rural Transformation*

Angela Cape, *Deputy Manager of National Marketing and Importing Board*

Bridget Horsford, *Manager of Agro-Industrial Plant*

Toward Equality

Grenadians see full equality for women as something which cannot be achieved overnight, but which will emerge out of the process of building the whole society in a revolutionary way. As a step toward erasing occupational stereotypes, the PRG awards scholarships to women for technical studies abroad, and encourages them to enroll in the vocational training schools in Grenada (such as the Mirabeau Agricultural School and the Fisheries School.) Women are slowly moving into non-traditional occupations such as carpentry, plumbing, fisheries, and agricultural cooperatives. They are steadily rising in the government hierarchy, with the appointment of a female Cabinet minister in July 1981.

Most importantly, women at the grassroots level are taking an active part in the building of participatory democracy in Grenada. They attend the parish and zonal council meetings in force: at some of these meetings well over half the attendance is female. There is a fundamental compatibility between the revolution's emphasis on community organization and voluntarism, and the interests of Grenadian women, who have traditionally based their identity on family and community ties. This does not mean that women have shied away from the more militant aspects of the revolution. Following the June 19 bombing, when three young girls were killed, slightly over 50% of the new militia volunteers were women.⁹ Although the revolution cannot transform the status of women instantaneously—and there is still much ground to cover—Grenadian women are conscious that their advancement and that of the revolution are inextricably linked.

Women is real, real out now, you know. Before, they had no kind of say, no privilege, no stand in Grenada. Women was the lowest. But now we pushing on, pushing on. We feeling more confident, we heart is open now.
72-year-old woman, Birchgrove¹⁰



Free West Indian