

In the meantime, partly owing to the incompetence, neglect and corruption of the incumbent regime, but also as a result of the 1973-4 oil crisis and subsequent global recession, the economy entered a period of extended stagnation and decline. Public utilities atrophied, infrastructure decayed, illiteracy and infant mortality rates rose and land seized from opponents of the regime stood idle. Unemployment by 1979 reached 49 per cent, with a rate of 80 per cent among persons under 23 years of age.⁷¹ Economic decay brought with it growing middle class as well as peasant and worker discontent.

Attempts to express dissatisfaction by constitutional means were met with increasingly severe repression. Anti-labour legislation was extended in 1977-8, including strike bans which covered a substantial portion of the work force. Although the People's Alliance Opposition made an impressive showing in the last election of the Gairy era, Parliament was in fact ignored by Gairy while opposition politicians were increasingly the target of assassination.

The principal political effect of these trends was that:

By early 1979, Gairy had united the bulk of the population against him, notwithstanding barriers of colour and class. Moreover, a radical alternative to electoral change grew increasingly acceptable to many. The inevitable end was in sight.⁷²

In tandem with this process of social, economic and political decay and the gradual discrediting of traditional political institutions and mainstream political forces in Grenada, there arose a dynamic radical force which provided an alternative to the status quo. This was the New Jewel Movement (NJM).

The institutional roots of the NJM lie in a regional gathering of socialist radicals on Rat Island, off St. Lucia, in 1970. Disillusioned to varying degrees with existing political and social arrangements in the area, and with Black Power as the major political and cultural critique of these arrangements in the late 1960s, those at the

⁷¹ T. Thorndike, *Grenada: Politics, Economics and Society* (London: Frances Pinter Publishers), 1985), p. 48. Thorndike provides in this work an illuminating, though somewhat "engagé", account of the political evolution of Grenada. For the leadup to the 1979 coup, see in particular Chapters 2, 3, and 4.

⁷² *ibid.*, p. 53