

**NOTES ON COMRADE SELWYN STRACHAN'S ADDRESS TO  
CARIBBEAN LABOUR SOLIDARITY MEETING  
5 JUNE 2011**

Comrade Selwyn Strachan was a member of the Political Bureau and Central Committee of Grenada's New JEWEL Movement (NJM). He operated as Publication Secretary of the NJM, Editor of *The JEWEL*, the party's weekly newspaper, Chairman of the NJM Organising Committee and a Minister with multiple portfolios in Grenada's People's Revolutionary Government when the NJM came to power in March 1979.

He was one of the Grenada 17 incarcerated in Grenada for 26 years (including 8 on death row) after being falsely convicted for the murder of Maurice Bishop the Prime Minister of the People's Revolutionary Government (PRG). Even today many questions remain unanswered about the tragic circumstances surrounding the downfall of the PRG and the subsequent US invasion of Grenada in October 1983. Sello will help us to learn the lessons from the fall of what was the brightest revolutionary light in the Caribbean since the Cuban revolution.

Cde Sello was invited to speak about his visit to the UK and to give us the benefit of his thoughts on the question of the role that CLS can play in the Caribbean Region.

He extended greetings and thanks and deep appreciation for support from CLS and individuals. He said that the Cdes had been conscious of progressive people outside the prison making sacrifices on their behalf. They were deeply aggrieved by the events of 1983 (collapse of PRG in Grenada and US invasion). It had been very important for the 17 facing the might of US imperialism to know that CLS, especially stalwarts such as Dick Hart and Cleston Taylor, had taken a principled position. The US should not be allowed to finish off the Grenada Revo', get rid of the surviving leaders and its principles. There had been two elements to the campaign, first to save lives and then to gain ultimate freedom. On the 5 September 2009 the last batch of the 17 had been released from prison.

While in the UK Sello had visited Cde Dick, now nearly 94 years old, who had remembered him. It had been very emotional. The last time they had met had been in a remote rural part of Grenada. Dick had asked for guidance on how to get out and had followed Sello's car. That had been in mid 1983. Dick had come to Grenada to serve the Revo' as Attorney General and had been very close to the leadership who relied on his mature advice. He had been one of the Four H's expelled from the PNP in Jamaica. He deserved honour and respect. They had reflected on the time Dick had spent with them in Grenada. Dick had continued the struggle on his return to the UK. It had been a valuable and rare experience to meet with people who supported the 17.

The previous Friday (3 June) Sello had spoken at a meeting jointly held with CLS and PASCF as a dialogue between Sello and Gus John examining the causes and consequences of the implosion of the Grenada Revolution. He had needed talk at length to give clarification and background to these events. He had been patient and accommodating to allow people to ask all the questions they needed to ask. He had been unable to cover what had happened on Fort Rupert. It was important for the final aspect of events to be related to what happened before, not based on speculation, hearsay or gossip. It was necessary for analysis to be based on hard facts.

There has been one important question - **Where are the bodies?** People feel very passionate. It is a catastrophic chapter in our history and the area has to be exhausted in discussion. The bodies are under the control of the Americans. As the Government we were responsible for them from the 19 October to 25 October 1983. When they invaded the Americans exhumed the bodies and, we understand, took them as a first port of call to the US Medical School on Grenada. After that we do not know what happened to them. There is documentary evidence to show that the Americans carried out this exhumation. Earl Brown a Jamaican soldier, part of the Regional peace-keeping force after the invasion, went with the Americans and witnessed the exhumation. He gave evidence in court. There is a letter to this effect from Earl Brown a copy of which Sello has in his possession. Students from Presentation College had researched the issue of what had happened to the bodies and got Earl Brown to write his account.

It was his view that the world was still in crisis, greater even than in the 1930s. He wanted to see betterment for working people. The ones who were creating the wealth for the capitalists were bearing the brunt of the capitalist crisis. To save capitalism, working people suffered the worst. The World Federation of Trade Unions had met in Athens a few weeks previously, and there was a need to address the issues raised there. CLS can make a very important contribution for our people across the globe, particularly in the Caribbean. At the present, there seemed to be a concerted effort to chip away at the gains that had been made in earlier years. Across the region there were militant progressive trade unions as well as soft compliant ones.

The situation in Grenada now was a very dicey one because of the impact of the economic crisis. All post-revolution governments had been dismantling the revolutionary programmes and structures and putting matters in the private sector. This had created a gap between the gains achieved by the trade union movement and the current situation.

- There was now 30% unemployment in Grenada at least. Trade union rights won during the revo' were under attack.
- Ways were being sought through the courts to keep workers out of bargaining negotiations and not to recognise unions in some workplaces.

Government ministers and employers were being asked to say why they were not recognising unions.

- Companies were demanding to be able to sack people who they suspected were trading in or taking drugs.
- Maternity Leave law was under threat
- Women and youth were under the greatest pressure

**CLS could work to support moves to protect those Employment Rights still remaining.**

### Role that CLS could play in the Caribbean Region

- Find ways and means of developing links with the Trade Unions across the region. There are many able and experienced people with personal contact with trade unionists in the different countries.
- Organise seminars on an area by area basis to assist the labour movements there and raise consciousness as well as raising the profile of CLS. Devising the right strategy requires effort, consistency and discipline. We need to apply creative learning from experiences such as the Revo'.
- Highlight the struggles in the region through Cutlass. People in struggle like to see their causes recognised. It has a tremendous impact on morale and has a domino effect. The mainstream media in the countries will pick it up. This makes being active in organisations and trade unions more attractive.
- Devise a system whereby publications can be distributed in the region. There is no doubt that this will be effective and have an impact when consistently done. CLS could work with a few progressives in each country where we have contacts to distribute publications. Selwyn would be more than willing to play such a role in Grenada and use his political and organisational experience to carry that out.
- Target one country per year, as a strategy. The news would then be spread to labour movement organisations in other countries in the region who would then be more eager to work with CLS.
- Take a careful look at social legislation in each territory to suggest reforms and implementation and make proposals. Mount a lobby from time to time, delegations to High Commissions, etc. It is important to make suggestions humbly. In the context of gratitude for support and contribution to the development of CLS.
- Embark on the task and, as Lenin pointed out, through doing so CLS will draw in new forces, new blood.