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GRENADA

7th November 1975

THE GRENADA NEWSLETTER
For Week Ending November 8th.

Vol 3 No 37

THE NUTMEG INQUIRY

The proceedings of the one-man Commission of Inquiry into the affairs of the Grenada Cooperative Nutmeg Association took a new turn on Friday of this week (7th) with the filing of a Writ in the High Court of Justice.

Events leading up to this began on Thursday when three Grenadian barristers-at-law, Messrs Kenrick Radix, Maurice Bishop and Lloyd Noel, appeared before the Commissioner, Mr Harold Dennison and advised him that they represented certain members of the elected Nutmeg Board which was dissolved by Government on July 4th.

These barristers made submissions to Mr Dennison on their clients behalf and stated that there were several rights which had been denied. Among these, they said, was the fact that their clients had not been notified of the intention to hold an inquiry. That they should have been given an opportunity to make representations on the choice and number of commissioners. And that, as of right, they should have been given access to all relevant books and documents.

The submissions of Messrs Radix, Bishop and Noel claimed that the Commissioner had a duty to give full and accurate disclosure of the evidence so far, they wished to have the right to recall witnesses, and they felt the Commissioner had not demonstrated a full, faithful and impartial investigation.

Overruled

When Mr Dennison resumed on Friday morning, he said that, with the exception of the right to recall witnesses and to lead their witnesses in examination, all the barristers' submissions were overruled. Mr Bishop then indicated that, in the light of this ruling, the barristers did not propose to proceed as they were unable to lead their witnesses. Shortly after, Messrs Radix, Bishop and Noel left the Inquiry and were followed by a large number of nutmeg producers who were in the gallery.

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As a sequel to this, a Writ was filed in the High Court on Friday afternoon by Mr F J Archibald, chairman of the dissolved Nutmeg Board. This Writ seeks, among other things, a declaration that the Commissioner has demonstrated "a real likelihood of bias by reason of his general conduct of the proceedings and his vehement expressions of prejudicial allegations". The Writ also seeks an injunction restraining Commissioner Dennison from proceeding or threatening to proceed with the inquiry. Sources close to Mr Archibald said that this suit is expected to be heard either on Monday or Tuesday.

Among persons who have given evidence to the Commissioner are Mr Robin Renwick, Manager of the Association. Questioned by Mr Desmond Christian, Grenada's Attorney General, Mr Renwick said that, in 1970, the sum of EC\$870,000.00 was transferred to Barbados and placed on fixed deposit with a bank there. Within a few months, this money was brought back.

Mr Renwick also gave evidence relative to the convening of and attendance at meetings of the Association. He said that Area Meetings were held to elect delegates to the General Meeting and that these delegates were elected on the basis of one delegate to every 25 members in the Area. There was no fixed policy relative to permitting members (other than delegates) to attend General Meetings as observers, but, at times, this had been done.

In connection with the Annual General Meeting of May 23rd, 28th and 31st 1974, the Manager said no delegates had been excluded, but other members of the Association had not been permitted to attend.

Resolution

Referring to the Public Relations Committee, Mr Renwick said this had been formed as a result of a Resolution passed at an Extraordinary General Meeting held on 4th February 1970. Mr Renwick said this meeting had been called to discuss a threat by Government to take over the Nutmeg Industry, and it was considered that the Resolution to establish the Public Relations Committee arose out of the subject of the meeting.

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In the course of his evidence, Mr Renwick revealed that a survey done in 1970 had disclosed that of 5,288 nutmeg producers in Grenada at that time, 2,595 or 49% were holders of property under one acre. Holders of property between 1 and five acres numbered 2,115, and this represented 40% of the producers. There were 132 producers with property between 10 and 20 acres - representing 2% of the producers - 67 (1%) with holdings between 20 and 50 acres, 32 (1%) having properties between 50 and 100 acres, and 38 (1%) with holdings of over 100 acres.

Another person questioned by the Attorney General about the transfer of money to Barbados in 1970 was Mr Irvine Bishop, a member of the Association. Mr Bishop said he was at the General Meeting at which it was decided to transfer the money, and he said delegates to that meeting were in a "great fright" that the funds of the Association would be seized by Government. The witness said he did not share that fright but he was in the minority.

During the course of Mr Bishop's evidence, Commissioner Dennison referred to the Grenada Cocoa Board, which cooperative has been taken over and is being run by Government. Mr Dennison asked Mr Bishop to remember that, before Government took over the Cocoa Board, people were dissatisfied, but that, now it is doing good work, people are satisfied. He pointed out that it was only a matter of two years since the take-over and time must be given to run the Board so that people will see and learn. "If England", he said, "with its 800 or 1000 years of experience, was to do something of that nature, they might, perhaps, keep it running for about 20 years before they start it back again."

Dangerous

Mr Dennison also referred to the Report of the Ward Commission of Inquiry which had investigated the affairs of the Nutmeg Association in 1971. In a reply to a question from the Commissioner, Mr Bishop said he had not seen "much of a change of heart in the Nutmeg Board" after the Ward Commission Report was submitted. The

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Commissioner then said, "From reading Mr Ward's Report, I have not seen any change of heart, and it is a dangerous thing even to attempt to put the business of thousands of people into the hands of people who would not show a change of heart."

Also appearing before the Commissioner was Mr Rupert Campbell, Accountant to the Association. Questioned on the accounts of the Public Relations Committee (PRC), Mr Campbell said a total of EC\$33,363.39 had been made available to the PRC. Of this sum, EC\$11,546.39 had been spent between 1970 and 1975, and , of this expenditure, EC\$1,996.06 had been for a public address system to be used principally at General Meetings. He revealed also that the books of account of the PRC were kept by Mr F J Archibald, and he expressed the opinion that the public address system was in Mr Archibald's possession.

Steps

Commissioner Dennison said he would give until Tuesday 11th to have the P A system and the books of account of the PRC produced to him, and, if they were not forthcoming, he would "take certain steps that people would not forget". If the articles were not produced, he said, "certain people will go to get them, and the getting will be rough."

Mr Dennison gave instructions that certain people whom he wanted to appear before him on Thursday (6th) should be notified over Radio Grenada and, in addition, the Police should inform them. "If they dont come", said the Commissioner, "we'll do the usual thing. We'll lock them up."

One of these persons is Mr F J Archibald, chairman of the dissolved Nutmeg Board. Up to Friday (7th) afternoon, however, it was understood that he had not yet been subpoena'd. The inquiry has been adjourned until Monday 10th, but in view of the Writ filed by Mr Archibald in the High Court, it is not known whether the hearings will continue at that time.

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CHAMBER CONCERNED OVER NUTMEG ASSOCIATION.

In a letter dated October 24th, the Grenada Chamber of Commerce expressed concern to Government over what it calls "the dissolution of the various agricultural cooperative institutions in the State, viz. the Grenada Cocoa Industries Board, the Grenada Banana Cooperative Society and the Grenada Cooperative Nutmeg Association."

Mr Lydon Ramdhanny, President of the Chamber, said today (8th) that his organisation was particularly concerned that the interim Boards which had been appointed to run these cooperative agricultural institutions had been given no fixed tenure of office. The President said his Chamber's letter had urged Government to arrange for election of Boards as was contemplated by the original legislation. Government has not yet replied to the Chamber's letter.

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CFBA ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING IN GRENADA.

The Annual General Meeting of the Caribbean Publishers and Broadcasters Association (CFBA) was held at the Grenada Holiday Inn over the period 6th and 7th November.

Deputising for Prime Minister Gairy, acting Minister of Finance, Mr Franklin Dolland, in opening the meeting, suggested that Westindian journalists should place more emphasis on what he called "positive reports" rather than on "negative ones".

Speaking at the opening function, Mr Ken Gordon, President of CFBA, challenged the concept that dissent militates against national development goals. He said the argument did not take into account morality, accountability and choice, vital human considerations which are critical for national development.

According to a press release issued after the meeting, the CFBA accepted a Report from its Freedom of the Press Committee which stressed "the continuing unhealthiness of the state of the press in a number of CARICOM countries." Particular attention was

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drawn to Westindian countries where the threat to freedom of the press continues, and special mention was made of Antigua, Trinidad & Tobago, Guyana, Dominica, Grenada and St. Kitts.

In connection with Antigua, Dominica, Grenada and St. Kitts, the Freedom of the Press Committee deplored the existence of laws which severely limit the functioning of a free press. The dismissal of five senior journalists from the Government-owned radio station in Trinidad & Tobago, in the Committee's opinion, constituted a threat to the security of working journalists, and as such, to the free press throughout the Caribbean.

According to the Committee, the situation in Guyana continues to be "undesirable", but Barbados and Jamaica were singled out as the countries where there are encouraging signs of continuing press freedom. The Committee said, however, that the current dispute in Jamaica over the suspension of the radio programme, "Public Eye" was to be regretted.

It has been agreed by CPBA that the Press Council should be established not later than June 1976. This Council will be headed by Mr Aubrey Fraser, Director of the Council of Legal Education of the University of the West Indies.

Mr Ken Gordon was unanimously reelected for a third term as President of CPBA. Messrs Mark Conyers and Nicholas Mellersh were unanimously elected respectively to the posts of Vice-President and Secretary/Treasurer. Other members elected to the Management Committee were Messrs J C Proute, D. Whyllie, N. Grosvenor, Gerhard Reiche and M Gordon.

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