

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

The small Caribbean island of Grenada is also known as the Spice Island. In the past, the French and English fought for the island in equal measure. Today, others are fighting powers to gain more influence in Grenada and thus in the world. **Karin Wenger**

Spicy world politics on the Caribbean island of Grenada

Carib's Leap or Leapers Hill is the name of the cliff in the north of Grenada from which the Caribs, the last remaining indigenous people, threw themselves into the ocean in 1651. Where there used to be jungle and bush today there is a church and a memorial plaque. Cutty, a local tour guide, has led me here. Now he points to the raging sea far below us and says: "The Caribs escaped certain death before being captured and subjugated by the French colonial rulers."

Grenada. In the late 18th century

How the fatal jump came about is quickly explained:

While Christopher Columbus was still sailing past Grenada in 1498, the French recognized the island's treasures and wanted to they call their own. They bought land from the Caribs for a few knives, glass beads and schnapps. But the islanders regretted the deal shortly afterwards, attacked the French fort with bows and arrows and tried to drive the French off their island. The French, equipped with cannons and firepower, drove the Caribs back and pushed them to the north, to the edge of the cliff, to their deaths.

Colonial past

For many visitors today, the small Caribbean island of Grenada is nothing more than a day trip on a cruise - waterfalls are visited, nutmeg, vanilla, cinnamon and rum are bought and then it's off to the next sunny destination. The colonial past of Grenada and the other Caribbean islands is forgotten. Forgotten is the bloody legacy of the Europeans, who were still great powers at the time and divided up the world among themselves.

The French and British alternated in power on

hundred, the British brought a large number of slaves from Africa to Grenada and forced them to work on the sugar cane plantations. Today, over 80 percent of the population are direct descendants of these slaves. It was also British traders who brought nutmegs from Indonesia to Grenada in the middle of the 19th century and began to cultivate them here.

Chinese bribe money

Today, Grenada produces twenty percent of all nutmegs worldwide, making it the world's second most important nutmeg producer after Indonesia. "Europeans today come for our spices, our nutmegs. European colonial rule is long gone, today it's others who are fighting for us and trying to colonize us," says Cutty and shows to the cricket stadium, which we have now arrived at and which Chinese workers began building with Chinese money in 2005. "We call that Chinese bribe money. Projects financed by China so that we vote for China and against Taiwan at the United Nations."

Today, as yesterday and the day before yesterday, Grenada is at the center of geopolitical bickering and is being used as a pawn by the major powers. back and forth. It's no longer France and England who are in the frontrunner positions, but China and the USA. China dares to In this game, the US is increasingly moving into America's backyard, which includes several Caribbean states, including Grenada. Even today, two airplane wrecks on the old airport is a reminder of how important Grenada was to the USA during the Cold War. Back then, on October 25, 1983, one week after a

military coup on the island, Ronald Reagan sent 8000 American soldiers to Grenada. Officially, they were supposed to protect the American students at St. George's University, but even then it was actually about something else. It was the Cold War, Reagan feared that the putschists would side with Cuba, so the US soldiers deposed the putschists and a civilian, US-friendly government took over.

China is not sending soldiers, but money and workers and hidden diplomats. The cricket stadium was completed in 2007. The Chinese ambassador traveled to the inauguration, but instead of the Chinese national anthem, the Grenada police orchestra played the Taiwanese national anthem... - a mistake and political misstep that cost the head of the orchestra his job. Despite a brief political hiccup, the stadium construction was followed by other Chinese projects: Housing estates, agricultural aid and currently Grenada is expanding its new airport with a Chinese loan of more than 60 million US dollars. Tour guide Cutty is worried that China will simply seize the land or the airport if Grenada is unable to repay the loan - because the island nation is not rich.

Diplomat in foreign service

Is Grenada selling itself? At least that's how it looked until recently. Grenada is also selling citizenships. Through the "Grenada Citizenship by Investment" program, foreigners have been able to legally acquire citizenship for at least USD 150,000 since 2016.

can buy Grenadian citizenship and thus, for example, enter the Schengen area without a visa. Chinese national Yuchen (Justin) Sun has also become a Grenadian citizen - and more. The world-famous Chinese-born crypto and blockchain entrepreneur was appointed Grenada's Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the World Trade Organization (WTO) in Geneva last December.

The fact that it is never entirely clear which interests - his personal business interests, Chinese or Grenadian state interests - he is representing seemed to the Grenadian government to be a major problem.

not to be bothered. Nor does the fact that various lawsuits are pending against Sun in the USA, including for money laundering and breaches of stock exchange and tax authority regulations. Since his appointment as Grenada's representative at the WTO, Switzerland has refused to issue Sun with a legitimation card on the grounds that he is mixing private business with diplomacy. This invalidates his diplomatic immunity, his right of residence in Switzerland and his right to buy a house in Switzerland.

New government, new hope

Many in Grenada no longer seem to want their own government to sell off their small Caribbean state so that the major powers can play their geopolitical games with the island. This is probably one of the reasons why Prime Minister Keith Mitchell was voted out of office in the elections at the end of June 2022. The 75-year-old politician had sat at the levers of power for 23 years and had increasingly ruled Grenada like a family business. It seems to be a universal principle that whoever becomes long in power becomes greedy. The new Prime Minister, Dickon Mitchell, promised to fight corruption and announced, to stop the sale of diplomatic passports to foreigners. Tourist guide Cutty says: "Mitchell is our hope and the best advocate on the island." The 44-year-old now wants to stand up for the interests of his homeland and all its inhabitants. He has already announced that he will recall all ambassadors and set new political priorities. In his speech to the UN General Assembly in September, he focused for the first time on climate change. The Chinese diplomats who previously claimed to be in the service of Grenada will now have to look for a new role.



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