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Jamaica: Struggle in the Periphery

By Michael Manley
Third World Media, in association with Writers and
Readers Publishing Cooperative Society, London,
259 pp.



34 Reviewed by Basil K. Bryan

Michael Manley spent eight years (1972-80) as the Prime Minister of Jamaica. During this period, Manley and his People's National Party attempted to establish a new Jamaica, based on a philosophy of Democratic Socialism and a moral imperative to conquer poverty and underdevelopment. They did not succeed. The account of what transpired in Jamaica during Manley's term of office provides lessons for a more profound understanding of the dilemma faced by Third World countries as they attempt to pursue transformation and development.

The portrait that emerges in this book is a personal account and a reflection of events that occurred during Manley's tenure as Prime Minister. Manley explains that this book is intended to be both "a comment upon and a mirror of a dialectical process," and notes that both "Latin America and the Caribbean today are in the grip of that process." What Manley demonstrates throughout this book is the reminder that escape from this grip is not easy, for while some forces are courageous enough to attempt change in the social and economic fabric, other opposing forces continue to defend the status quo.

Manley's reflections reveal the bitter but yet unending dilemma of an independent Jamaica struggling to remain afloat politically and economically in the face of persistent obstacles coming from the United States. These reflections tell of the struggle of a Third World country to overcome centuries of the impact of colonialism; to gain national dignity and respect; to protect sovereignty and acquire economic well-being and sufficiency, even while wrestling to end domination and exploitation by foreign forces.

As an important point of departure, this book takes the reader on a journey

through a political history. Manley argues that although World War II marked the beginning of the end of colonialism, and the emergence of political independence, a legacy of economic, cultural and psychological devastation was left behind, giving rise to a dependency syndrome. Many Third World leaders were soon to realize that the political freedom won was but one small step to total independence. "Each one," he writes, "was learning that its flag of freedom was only a symbol of new opportunities and not, by itself, evidence of real change."

By attempting to make "real change" in Jamaican society, Manley must have considered the difficulties ahead, especially in dealing with the United States, his country's most important trading partner. Manley is specific on this point: "Those who wished to work for change would have to contend with more than poverty and entrenched oligarchies . . . particularly if they were located in the Western Hemisphere." Meaning, they "would have to contend with American power and the reality of the most formidable hegemony in history."

The American plan, Manley notes, was first outlined by President James Monroe in the "Monroe Doctrine" of 1823—in effect, a "hands-off" warning to any European power entertaining the notion of intervening in the affairs of the nations of the Western Hemisphere. President Monroe made it clear that the U.S. would regard any interference as a threat to its own security and hegemony. Monroe's speech, according to Manley, though "largely unnoticed at the time, came to provide the excuse for the assertion of U.S. power in the Americas." It was used, he explains, to justify U.S. inter-

ference in "any and everything not to her liking in either the North or South of the continent."

Driven by what the author describes as a "trader" mentality in pursuit of its "commercial interests," investments by U.S. companies grew rapidly throughout Latin America after 1823. The same was happening elsewhere as "European imperialism was reaching new heights throughout Africa and Asia." The inevitable response, as Manley affirms in this book, was a "general awareness of exploitation of national economies" by Third World leaders:

"In all these countries the first energies were directed towards political independence. There was a general awareness of exploitation of national economies but the more urgent psychological impulse reflected the urge to freedom and the need to escape degradation. Every new independence experience was accompanied by excitement and hope. But the liberated spirit cannot exist on a diet of freedom alone. The great imperialisms had left behind societies where the majority lived in abysmal poverty with little education, inadequate health services and squalid housing. Independence had not been won for bread alone; but bread in the sense of the hope and reality of material betterment, was always the largest part of the equation. Independence had to be followed by material progress for that majority who had never known it, indeed could never know it, while part of the colonial experience."

Manley shows that up to 1972, when he assumed the leadership in Jamaica, U.S. interests owned almost all of the island's bauxite and alumina industry. He attempted to change this through negotiations. He explains that, subsequent to the imposition of the Bauxite Production Levy in changing this relationship, his government was subjected to a policy of destabilization, apparently orchestrated by the U.S. But Manley quickly points out that no "smoking gun" was left in support of this claim. Yet he provides the reader with examples of similar patterns emerging in countries attempting the nationalist route—Mexico, Colombia, Panama, Nicaragua, Haiti, Cuba, Iran under Mossadegh and Chile under Allende. Given Manley's attempt at creating an egalitarian society, bringing the "commanding heights" of the economy under greater public control and accountability,

and given the historical position of the United States on these matters, his assertion does not seem far-fetched.

In making the point concerning the destabilization of his government, Manley uses the example of Chile, where the attempt by President Allende to bring his nation's resources under local control was met by a similar policy. Manley writes: "By the time the CIA had finished with Chile, many citizens and particularly members of the middle class were hysterically convinced that Allende intended to destroy everything of value in Chile."

In Jamaica, the wheels of destabilization, the book notes, were put in motion from the time (1974) Manley's administration took the decision to reaffirm its party's socialist commitment to the reorganization of the Jamaican society, with "the politics of participation" as the basis of a new order. Obviously, he must have realized that these "radical" alternatives were in direct juxtaposition to the usual unaccountability of the free enterprise system in Third World countries.

This leftward shift, not surprisingly, brought about economic reprisals by the U.S., which were manifested by pressures from, among other international sources, the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Foreign sources of capital literally dried up and destabilization created pressures and dislocations that were reflected in constantly rising prices, declining incomes, rising unemployment, growing violence and civil disorder. And the worsening of an already critical foreign exchange aggravated the situation.

The net effect, Manley writes: "By the end of 1975, Jamaica had become like a time bomb." Inflation was soaring; crime, violence and anti-government activities were taking their toll.

Manley suggests that his government's friendly relations towards Cuba and other socialist bloc countries served only to heighten suspicions of Jamaica turning into a communist nation. Disinformation, abetted by anti-communist propaganda, became a daily ritual. Many unfavorable articles appeared in the U.S. media, creating havoc with the island's tourist industry. Manley argues that even Jamaica's influential newspaper, the conservative *Daily Gleaner*, launched a full-fledged battle against his government. Throughout the country, on an almost daily basis, the seeds of doubt were scattered. Conditions deteriorated rapidly and destabiliza-

tion took its inevitable toll on national pride as hopelessness and despair overwhelmed the Jamaican people.

Throughout the period 1975-79, conditions in Jamaica continued to deteriorate, with each new day ushering in a weakened government. Appeals to the IMF for foreign exchange assistance became the logical consequence—a clear paradox for Manley's government to have sought help from this quarter while recognizing that "IMF agreements simply miss the point of the Third World dilemma" and therefore leave the population "subjected to severe pressure in pursuit of benefits that are unattainable."

After a "harrowing" experience with the IMF, Manley was finally driven to break with that institution and to pursue an alternative path of self-reliance.

In seeking a new mandate, Manley points out, his government called for new elections in 1980. He demonstrates at length that the campaign leading up to the elections was bloody and violent. More than 750 ordinary people (to whom Manley dedicates this book) were killed. Manley asserts that his electoral defeat to the conservative Jamaica Labour Party, headed by Edward Seaga, was the result of a combination of forces working in opposition, including "some of the most right-wing elements in the U.S. political system."

It is surprising, however, although so much activity was taking place, Manley is unable to present any hard evidence to support his allegations. It would seem strange that Manley's party, which won an overwhelming victory in 1976, could have lost so much public confidence by 1980. But again, the economic crisis resulting from his government's policies did reach intolerable proportions and did generate widespread disillusionment among the electorate. Given that Manley's far-reaching policies may have been valid from a nationalistic point of view, in the end, they contributed much to hamper Jamaica's economic growth.

Manley concludes his reflections by making some useful comments. Having dissected the events of the past, and recounted mistakes, he proposes some solutions for the future of the Third World. He suggests, for example, "the necessity for the Third World to evolve its own path to salvation." Also, that "... the antipodes of domination and liberation cannot coexist; that the 'pecuniary inter-

ests' of the Monroe Doctrine and Norman Manley's [his deceased father who had served as Chief Minister in an earlier period] charge of economic self-determination cannot live side by side." But apart from suggesting a non-aligned path as a general strategy, the reader is essentially left to wonder whether Manley is opting for disengagement or to remain a part of the periphery of the capitalist system.

United action and solidarity among Third World nations, Manley observes, is the only way by which these countries can hope to achieve economic viability and true independence. "Collective self-reliance among Third World countries must become more than a slogan," he argues.

Indeed, it is Manley's view that closer unity must become the *modus operandi* if Third World nations are to survive in a world dominated by a few rich countries. This is a noble plea! Yet the reality throughout the Third World does not give much comfort and this solidarity cannot be achieved by a magic wand. It is this seeming inability to act in unity that underlines Manley's importance to the Third World. For he quite correctly recognizes that the Third World dilemma requires "common cause in the struggle to create a new world economic order."

Though in the preface Michael Manley notes that this book is neither "history nor autobiography," what emerges is a mixture of both. In a broad sense, one cannot separate personal accounting from autobiography, and history certainly involves telling a story—which is what Manley does in this book.

Despite certain difficulties in the application of some of his ideas, Manley deserves credit for his work. After all, there is still a relative paucity of analyses of the problems and concerns of the Third World, as told by voices from the Third World. Indeed, Manley is an eloquent spokesman in this regard.

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