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Book Review: The Politics of Change: Jamaican Testament

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Books

The Politics of Change: A Jamaican Testament

By Michael Manley
Howard University Press
270 pp., $9.95

Reviewed by Arthur E. Burt

The written expressions of the Prime Minister of Jamaica deserve publication by a leading University Press. Sparsity of documentation and little evidence of systematic research might in fact allow for a closer acquaintance with the unadulterated views of the author.

After two decades in public life, Michael Manley clarifies in writing the effects of "this activist involvement upon the ideas and principles which I have brought to this enterprise." This may indeed be adequate as the documentation of experience. Manley's stated political objectives were to consider and to restate a philosophical road which Jamaica might explore, and to provide a point of departure for a discussion of Jamaica's future.

The achievement of these broad objectives, as the author affirms in the preface, were to be frustrated; that there would be no attempt to specify a plan of action nor to give a quantitative analysis of the problems. *Apropos*, he does not propose to articulate a new political philosophy. The contents of the book must, therefore, be analysed against this background of seeming contradictions.

The book is divided into two sections, each with a preface. The first section deals with "A Philosophy of Change;" the second with "The Strategy of Change." The illusive pursuit of *social justice* dominates the first section and seems to engulf itself in contradictions as the author examines the possibility of achieving the *just society*. He sees the equitable distribution of wealth as an essential ingredient of the *just society*, and since social stability always tends to be in conflict with individual liberty, considers the effective use of power as the catalyst of change.

To Manley, the concept of a just society is predicated on "a single touchstone of right and wrong," but he shows reluctance to elaborate on the determinants of these relative qualities. *Equality* is identified as another pillar of the *just society* but mere words, cliches, and sometimes truisms are devoted to what *equality* is not, rather than to a positive and unequivocal definition of the word. Equality, to the author, does not presuppose that everybody possesses equal talents, interests or capabilities; nor does it presuppose that everybody ought to receive the same rewards for functions performed. In several pages, Manley admits that society cannot function effectively without differentials in rewards, but resorts to a compromising yet restrictive definition of equality: Access to a home and a job, to educational processes, to remedy under the law, and to leisure.

Manley is somewhat more specific—even if at times contradictory—as he examines the "setting for change." Here his political philosophy surfaces with clarity. Graphically describing Jamaica's colonial past, he identifies two main aspects of colonialism having negative effects on the growth pattern of the society: an irrelevant system of education and reliance on paternal government. He proposes attitudinal and economic reconstruction as the only edifice of the just and self-reliant society. But forces of conservatism and activism struggle for expression under the author's pen as he seeks to repudiate radicalism as a vehicle of change.

Though expressing great admiration for the one-party state of Julius Nyerere in Tanzania, Manley clings tenaciously to the continuance, if not entrenchment, of the two-party system inherited from the country's British colonial past. "Arguments about one-party states as against multi-party states," he writes, "begin with the supreme disadvantage of irrelevance in the Jamaican situation, because the one-party state is unthinkable to the Jamaican." p. 25. Though referring in the preface to his "activist involvement," if not commitment, the author makes clear on page 26 that he would not engineer the demise of the "Westminster model" constitution *per se* but would seek to accommodate it to the "psychological needs" of the people. The concepts of democracy—not those of totalitarianism—are the vehicles selected by Manley to attain the *just society*.

On page 27, Manley portrays himself as a progressive conservative who believes in change without chaos. He cautions activists and radicals when he emphasises: "I repudiate the impatience for change with which we seek to undo and dismantle our present political strength and substitute for it some other system which would have to be artificially contrived to give effect to the purposes of impatience". Thus, Manley's activist involvement must be construed as a movement for change within the established system. This, therefore, is the politics of change or the Jamaican testament.

Acknowledging that discipline is essential to the attainment of social justice, the author again evaluates totalitarianism and democracy as to which could best foster national discipline, a concept imperatively essential to his thesis. But he laments that democracy could not be credited as a political method designed to enforce national discipline. Nevertheless, convinced that the goals of equality at the political level could best be realised through the democratic system, Manley argues that the challenge of the democratic method in a developing society is to see whether one can preserve the right to dissent, encourage the recognition of personal responsibility, and isolate the areas of collective action that demand national consensus. p. 28. This dichotomy of thought galvanizes his political and philosophical dilemma. Hamlet, would aptly ask: To be or not to be. . . .

Be that as it may, as Manley examines the constraints of *equality*, pragmatism nurtured by experience but shaken by philosophical conflict so evident in all his pages, induced a key question on page 35. "If all do not have equal talents nor make contributions of equal complexity how then can they be of equal value?" The answer given—equal educational opportunities to create social mobility and foster changes in class attitudes—is inadequate.

Although the author persistently sees *equality* as an objective to be realised, he admits that the constraints of economic reality and natural selection may determine how far each child can go; resources may not permit the provision of secondary education for every child; and even fewer may be able to aspire to university education. Here the author shies away from answering such a key question raised by himself—apparently ignoring the fact that an unequivocal and clear answer to this question above all other considerations would be the *raison d'etre* for the publication of his book.

Be that as it may, Manley emphasises the importance of the mixing of *all* children at the primary school level as essential to the

evolution of an egalitarian society. In the world of reality, experience has shown that such things as a single educational system—and working together within a service organization such as the Army, the National Youth Service or the Peace Corps—do not in themselves foster egalitarianism nor lead to the demise of social stratification. These are legacies of a reactionary capitalist system and will only disappear with the system itself.

In a similar vein, the author reaffirms in the second part of the book that although his purpose was consideration of strategies aimed at accomplishing changes necessary for the transformation of the society, he is not prepared to attempt a quantitative analysis of what is required; neither would he deal with growth rates nor gross national production. Be that as it may, *quantification* which the author sees as the business of the technician, and *quality of life* as the business of the philosopher, are indeed not mutually exclusive. The arguments and postulates of the philosopher should be predicated on an understanding and appreciation of relevant facts, knowledge, and information.

Though an analysis of the economic problem would have been a plus for the book, the author carefully avoids such an exercise. Instead, he selects to identify what he considers as major problems. Among what he considers the eight basic problems existing since 1945, Manley identifies the export-import orientation of the economy and trader mentality derived from capitalist and colonial orientation as the two main economic problems to be solved. But he offers no practical solutions. While he contends that an irrelevant educational system was responsible for the nation's lack of basic skills to effect necessary transformation of the economy, he does not say what steps should be taken to make the system relevant.

Proposals advanced by the author for the economic transformation to create the just society are indeed novel and seek little support from established principles of economics. The *act* of public ownership of natural resources—particularly land, beaches, utilities such as the banking system, and the bauxite and the sugar industries—do stimulate feelings of nationalism but not economic development. *En passant*, it should be noted that the section on foreign policy, seen by the author as an integral part of economic development strategy, is of significance since it is a statement of the policy a Prime Minister intends to pursue. Nevertheless, only time will fairly evaluate a foreign policy committed to: positive commitment to Caribbean economic regionalism, search for common Third World economic strategy, support for the United Nations, and answering commitment to the right of self-determination for small countries, the summary of which is an open foreign policy.

The main points of weakness in Manley's book are excessive repetition and inconsistency of philosophical thought. However, it must be acknowledged that the book is written in language that is elegant and deserves a place in the libraries as the outward expressions of the inward hunger of a Prime Minister.

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Black Manhood: The Building Of Civilization By the Black Man Of the Nile

By Phaon Goldman
Tarharka Publishing Company, Annapolis, Md.
242 pp. $14.95

Reviewed by John E. Fleming

The author of *Black Manhood* carefully documents Black Africa's role in the growth and development of civilization, by emphasizing those indices of African geneology and influence. He begins with pre-dynastic Egypt and takes his narrative through the 25th Dynasty by examining the influence and dominance of Black people's culture along the Nile, from Uganda to the Mediterranean.

Since Western civilization has its origins in ancient Egypt, Western scholars, unable to escape their own cultural and racial bias, have found it necessary to dissolve Egypt's traditional and natural relationship with Black Africa. *Black Manhood* is thus a vital and significant contribution to anthropology and history. The author concludes: "Racial Chauvinism and cultural innuendoes of a derogatory nature almost invariably accompany the attempts of one race of people to write the history of another." He points out why it was necessary for the Western world to "disprove" that Africans were significant, if not crucial factors, in the development of Egyptian civilization.

By using the works of renowned anthropologists and Egyptologists, the author traces the development of Egyptian civilization and points out the role played by Blacks. He effectively challenges the assertions that Blacks played no role in Egyptian history outside that of slaves, captives and other persons of low caste status. He discusses the absurdity of how early Western scholars called Egyptians white when it was clear that these Black and brown men had the physiognomy of Black people. Even an Italian scholar, Giuseppi Sergi, was forced to ask the question, "But if they are Black, how can they be white?"

The pointedness of such questions not withstanding, Goldman documents how Egyptologists dismissed obvious Negroid features as "deformities and abnormalities." The absurdity of such glaring distortions is illustrated in the irrationality of a German scholar, Heinrich Brugsch-Bay, who suggested that the Black Queen, Nefertari, ancestress of the great 18th Dynasty, was portrayed as Black in an art form because the work was done after her death and the color black represented the darkness of the grave.

Because of prejudice and ethnocentricism, Western scholars refused to acknowledge that Western culture, to a large degree, originated in Africa. Further, prejudicial attitudes against darker races prevented Westerners from acknowledging the contributions Africans made to medicine, religion, astronomy, literature, agriculture, architecture and engineering.

The author's discussion of Egyptian religion, especially the growth of monotheism during the 18th Dynasty, places in bold relief, the extent to which Judeo-Christian beliefs are grounded in Egyptian religion, whose origin Egyptians themselves traced to the South. But such revelations and acknowledgments would have made it more difficult to distort Black history and subsequently portray Black people as less than human in order to deny them human rights.

After reading *Black Manhood*, one would be hard pressed to ignore the substantial contribution of Blacks to world civilization.

Black Manhood is well worth reading for any student of Afro-American and African history.

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