



# Jamaica in Turmoil

## Interview with Trevor Munro

The interview was conducted by Ken Fuller

*Ken Fuller writes:* Situated 90 miles south-east of Cuba, Jamaica has a population of 2.2 million. While capitalism is more developed there than in most other Caribbean (especially English-speaking) islands, the working class constitutes less than a half, and its industrial core only a fifth, of the total employed population. The domestic private sector is dominated by 21 families. In 1970, the undistributed corporate profit and depreciation allowances of 41 firms (out of a total of 11,435) accounted for 70% of gross domestic savings. In the countryside, a number of landbarons, constituting 1% of all landowners, hold over 40% of the best land. Local branches of major North American corporations, notably in the bauxite-alumina industry, whilst employing less than 1% of the labour force, contributed about 10% to the Gross Domestic Product, 20% of government revenue and over 40% of foreign-exchange earnings between 1970 and 1976.

For the ten years following independence from Britain in 1962, Jamaica was governed by the Jamaica Labour Party. This has always been a conservative party, loyal to both local and foreign capital, deriving its name from the fact that its mass base is in the Bustamante Industrial Trade Union, itself totally lacking in democratic structures. The JLP followed the 'Puerto Rican model' of economic growth, relying on foreign, chiefly US, capital to provide jobs and lead the development process. As a result, Jamaica soon found that it had what one economist has termed 'growth without development'.

Rather than an integrated economy, Jamaica had a collection of local branches of US corporations which bore little relation either to each other or to the needs of the Jamaican people.

By the late 1960s, the boom in hotel-building and the expansion of the bauxite industry (Jamaica had become the world's leading producer of bauxite) came to an end. As a result, and due to profits remitted to the USA and to the fact that the tourist industry, in particular, had a high import-content, Jamaica found that *it was now a net exporter of capital!* On top of this, the 'industrialisation by invitation scheme' had managed to provide a *total* of only 9,000 jobs at a time when the labour force was growing by 20,000 each year and, in addition, tens of thousands had emigrated to Britain and elsewhere. Unemployment, then, began to rise rapidly. During this period, none of the basic problems facing a small country just emerging from colonialism were tackled.

In 1972, the People's National Party, led by Michael Manley, was swept to power. At first, the new government enjoyed the support of both local and foreign capital, but after a two year honeymoon the PNP embarked upon a series of measures, grouped under the ideological umbrella of 'democratic socialism', aimed at increasing the economic, political and social role of the people and diversifying Jamaica's foreign relations, making it less dependent on imperialism. The years 1974-1980 saw a number of reforms, including the bauxite-levy (design-

ed to increase Jamaica's take eightfold, this measure preceding the negotiation of a 51% share in the various bauxite companies), the Minimum Wage Law, the Maternity Leave Law, worker-participation and many more. At the same time, Jamaica grew closer to first Cuba, then the Soviet Union, while also building links with other Third World countries.

Local capital quickly became hysterical in its hatred of Manley. Washington, meanwhile, began to employ many of the destabilisation measures which had proved so successful in Chile. Both hitched their wagon to the Jamaica Labour Party, since 1974 led by ultra-reactionary Edward Seaga. Despite a CIA-assisted campaign of terror which raged throughout 1976, the PNP was returned with a big majority in the election that year. However, the investment-strike by US capital and the illegal export of currency by local capitalists had brought about an acute foreign exchange crisis. In 1977, Manley turned to the International Monetary Fund which, over the next three years, proceeded to achieve what the CIA and the JLP combined had failed to do, eroding much of the PNP's mass support with its wage-guidelines, public expenditure cutbacks and devaluation.

In March, 1980, after a three year campaign led by the communists, the government finally slammed the door on the IMF. But by then it was too late. In the elections of October 1980, after a campaign of violence overshadowing that of 1976, the JLP

was elected, pledging itself to reinstall the discredited 'Puerto Rican model'.

In 1974, a number of discussion and agitation groups had come together to form the Workers' Liberation League, a Marxist-Leninist group. For the next four years, the League strengthened its links with the organised working class (mainly through its work in the University and Allied Workers

*In the election last year, the Jamaica Labour Party won 51 seats to the PNP's nine. How do you account for this?*

What happened was very simple.

First, sufficient middle of the road people were so battered by reactionary violence as to be terrified enough to put the very people responsible for it into power, so that the violence would stop. And it has stopped, or at least declined dramatically. It is important to understand the extent of that violence: six to seven hundred people were killed between January and October 1980. That's two people per day falling to submachine guns and automatic rifles made in the USA. At one time, seven people were shot to death in their beds. Two weeks before the election, the Deputy Minister of National Security was assassinated by reactionary elements in the security forces. So the middle of the road people began to say, 'We need peace at any price'.

Secondly, sufficient numbers of that same group had been battered by the economic destabilisation, which saw the British and American imperialists closing eleven lines of credit which were vital in providing food and other basic necessities. On top of the IMF's three year dictatorship over Jamaica, which produced hardship, price increases and unemployment of unprecedented proportions, there were artificial lay-offs and shortages.

Also, the leadership of the government was not firm enough in showing that it could manage imperialism and reaction, and this was another factor accounting for its defeat. The middle of the road people sensed that the PNP leaders had lost control of the situation and that if they had been returned a more bloody situation would have followed — either a military coup or a prolonged and open civil war.

I emphasise 'middle of the road' in all of this, because you would be mistaken if you did not understand that, in the course of last year's bitter struggle against imperialism, the Left in Jamaica became bigger, more conscious, more organised and more active than ever in the country's history. And despite the burnings and the shootings, 42% of the voters — 350,000 people — voted for

Union which, founded in 1971, soon expanded far beyond its original base at the university), conducted widespread Marxist education, at the same time applying these ideas in its growing public work. In December 1978, the League was transformed into the Workers' Party of Jamaica. Trevor Munroe was elected general secretary (he is also President of the UAWU).

## We anticipate for 1981 that there will be a 40% increase in the cost of living due to the IMF requirements

Manley. And within that figure we can say that 100,000 — 12% of all voters — are definitely pro-communist, people who, while not agreeing with everything we say or do, are objectively marching with us in the class struggle. So the violence has actually made the Left stronger and firmer than ever.

In addition to all of this, whilst our party is convinced that the JLP won the election, we are equally convinced that the margin which has been officially declared does not reflect the votes which went into the ballot boxes. We have found a number of cases of 'traditional' fraud — ballot boxes being substituted, in some cases by the security forces, and stuffed. However, we feel that this cannot explain the extent of the fraud which we believe to have taken place, and so further investigation is required.

*How would you describe the new regime?*

We characterise the Seaga administration as one of right-wing bourgeois democracy with fascist elements and tendencies. It is a regime which will pass to fascism in a situation where the national movement, while not strong enough to prevent this from taking place, is strong enough to make bourgeois democracy an obstacle to Seaga imposing the rule of the rich minorities and of the multinationals.

*What economic policies has Seaga been following?*

First and foremost, he has been trying to close the foreign exchange gap and the gap in the fiscal budget, and secondly to ensure that enough food, medicine and basic commodities come into the country. He has narrowed the gap due to the emphasis placed by the US imperialists on helping him. All the lines of credit have been re-opened.

Since the WLL period, the communists have maintained an informal alliance with the PNP, extending 'critical support' to the Manley government in order to secure the broadest unity of the anti-imperialist forces. The WPJ has grown rapidly in both numbers and influence and the circulation of its fortnightly newspaper *Struggle* currently stands at 17,000.

The main area where things remain rather up in the air is that of new investment. A joint committee of the US and Jamaican private sector, very similar to those in Taiwan and South Korea, has been established. But state to state aid has not been forthcoming to the extent required to begin the process of stabilising and reviving the economy. So he has, as expected, kept things together, but nothing more.

In addition, he is about to sign an agreement with the IMF. This will require the same standard conditions — devaluation, wage guidelines, public expenditure cut-backs, removal of price controls and the contraction of the public sector — as before. But because Seaga is such a close and trusted friend of international finance capital, some of these measures will be disguised.

All of this has an anti-working class edge to it, because it's not just a question of getting in money but of building up the bourgeoisie and squeezing the working people. Basically, then, this period has seen the reinstatement of the biggest bourgeoisie, overtures to finance capital and pressures of extraordinary proportions on the working people.

*And the period since the election has seen serious attacks on democratic rights.*

That's right. Professional journalists who have committed no crime other than daring to tell the truth have been under systematic attack. At the Jamaica Broadcasting Corporation, almost the entire newsroom staff was made 'redundant', only to find the 'redundant' jobs advertised immediately. This form of censorship has the aim of seeing that no news or analysis unfavourable to the government is published, that Edward Seaga's picture appears on television almost nightly and that the only news the people get from the state media is literally the reproduction of BBC newscasts.

*How have the people been affected by Seaga's economic policies so far?*

For the working people, the past four months have meant, first of all, lay-offs and redundancies. This started with the termi-

nation of the Youth Employment Programme which, begun by the Manley government, was providing temporary employment for 12,000 youths. Workers have been laid off at the Ministry of Housing. At both Air Jamaica and at the public bus company, 600 workers (which in the latter case means 35% of the workforce) face lay-offs.

As the landlords are now free of Manley's rent restrictions, rents have risen unprecedentedly. Water rates are up 70%, light bills 100% and both bus fares and rail fares are to rise. At the same time, the most militant workers, regardless of their trade union or political affiliation, are being subjected to a determined offensive, with shop stewards being summarily dismissed and strikers being attacked by JLP thugs.

We anticipate for 1981 that there will be a 40% increase in the cost of living due to the IMF requirements and no reduction in unemployment. This currently stands at 35% overall, although it is 50% among youths and 60% among women. In fact, there will be more lay-offs due to the divestment of state enterprises and capitalist rationalisation.

*What has been the workers' response to this?*

Within the first four months, the beginnings of resistance are apparent, with a number of strikes, industrial actions, protests and demonstrations taking place. At the Cigarette Company of Jamaica, the dismissal of the shop steward provoked a prolonged strike. At United Dairy Farmers, strike action again, this time over wages and the victimisation of the shop steward. At the bauxite companies, the workers threatened to lock down the entire industry in order to protect the right to retroactivity in wage bargaining. On top of that, the price increases are beginning to stimulate protests from workers as consumers.

*What have been the developments in the PNP since the election?*

Acute inner-party struggle is taking place within the PNP, with the Left saying, 'We should stand on the progressive programme adopted in 1979, the structures which made the party more democratic and the tactics which made Jamaica such an outstanding representative of the striving of the Third World peoples for independence and social progress'. The Right counters this with, 'That may well be the case, but we need to change the party's image'. Thus, they disguise their attempt to change the party's position by saying that it is an attempt to change the party's image.

This is partly the result of a campaign launched by reaction, through Seaga himself, which claims that the PNP lost the election because of flirtation with communism.

The Left in the PNP has not succumbed to this obvious misrepresentation. The leader of the PNP Youth Organisation has stated in a radio broadcast that, despite fundamental differences, cooperation between democratic socialists and communists is a necessity for the national liberation struggle in Jamaica. The NEC of the PNP, consisting of over 200 people, is not buying the line either. On January 25, eleven new members, drawn overwhelmingly from the Left, were elected to this body. The right wing, however, has bought the line almost wholesale. As this position is weak among the rank and file, they concentrate on winning Manley and people like him to their view. Unfortunately, there are signs that Manley is closer to the Right than to the Left on this question.

He offered his resignation unless the NEC promised to meet unspecified terms and conditions. Of course, his standing and popularity remain, although the rank and file's position has objectively moved ahead of him. He remains the leader, and there is no attempt by the Left to displace him. What there *is* an attempt to do is to keep him as leader on the basis of the party programme, which is strongly anti-imperialist, instead of on the basis of a more moderate PNP of Centre-Right social democrats. However, his resignation was not accepted and this provided him with the basis for setting out his terms. These have yet to be made public.

*How do you characterise Manley and the PNP? Are they, as they claim, socialist?*

The PNP is a national-democratic party. It is a party, therefore, in which the national

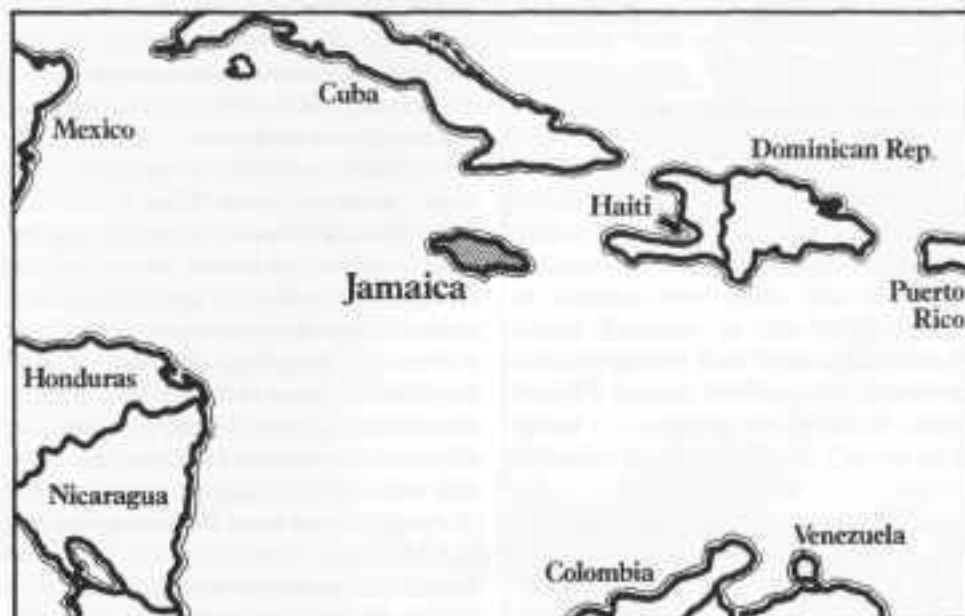
bourgeoisie, the petty bourgeoisie and middle strata, the peasantry and the working class are all represented. Not only that, but it is a party in which these different social forces are becoming more self conscious and more organised. It is therefore a party in which there are constant struggles around not just day to day issues but also around long term, strategic goals and around ideological orientation. In the history of the party's development, different social forces, differ-

## despite all the reactionary propaganda, people can and do support communist representatives

ent ideological tendencies and different programmatic orientations have dominated at different times.

Unless we understand the character of the party, we really will be in great difficulty in understanding the explicit characteristics of Manley himself.

As a leader, Manley summarises and expresses both the strengths and the weaknesses of the petty bourgeoisie and the middle strata he has a deep hatred of imperialism, but that deep hatred is qualified by a class fear of imperialism and of the strength of the rich minorities in Jamaica. He has a deep love of the working people, but that deep love is qualified by a deep lack of conviction concerning the strength of the working people, both nationally and internationally. Hence, a hallmark of his leadership has been to find a way to serve the people without straining what he considers to be their incapacities. In our judgement, then, Manley is a leader of the movement against imperialism, but from the standpoint of the petty bourgeoisie.





The machete and fanner, symbol of the WPJ

## If this fails to break up the party, they will try more repressive measures, such as proscription of our trade union work and selected assassination

*How has the relationship between the PNP and the WPJ fared since the election?*

It has taken a dip, although there is no split, either openly or otherwise. Joint activity and cooperation has proceeded at the lower levels in a number of spheres, and the exchange of views between leaders of both parties is continuing. So imperialism has not achieved its objective of polemics and disunity between us, but there's room for improvement.

*And the WPJ itself?*

Partly due to the developments we've discussed, the role and activity of the PNP has declined since the election. Correspondingly, that of the WPJ has increased.

The Central Committee met two weeks after the election, assessed the political situation and elaborated a new line of tactics. We had a total internal party discussion during which the assessment and the new line were thoroughly explained, immediately establishing ideological unity and organisational cohesion. This meant that, while we

lost some people, we also made new recruits, so the party came out of that round unreduced in size and ready to continue its mass work. This has shown itself in the fact that *Struggle* newspaper, whilst we did not expect it to maintain its pre-election high of 20,000 copies per fortnight, has steadied at 17,000. All the party organs down to branch level continued to function, although in some areas, where the tide of reaction was particularly strong, some of our groups were broken up, so we redeployed the members elsewhere.

Evidence of our increased role is shown most of all in the trade union sphere, where the UAWU is drawing more workers, including from manufacturing and the sugar industry, than ever before.

In January, two months after the election, we founded our Young Communist League, and despite all the talk about the people having turned against communism, this was done successfully. The main area of activity of the YCL will be among unemployed youth. In the few weeks it has been in existence, it has been showing its colours well. In one case, a community was under attack from the police and security forces. The YCL comrades mobilised the people in a march of 1,000 through the area, publicly exposing what was taking place. The attacks have since ceased.

We recently took the decision, in our continuing effort to show that anti-communism is not as strong in Jamaica as it is portrayed, to put up two candidates in the deep rural areas in the local government elections. We wanted to demonstrate this was no ordinary third party and that, despite all the reactionary propaganda, people can and do support communist representatives. The results were satisfactory. We got more votes - 12.5% and 15% — in those two divisions than any third party in the modern political history of Jamaica has ever been able to achieve in any division.

For the immediate future, our main emphasis is going to be on mass work to strengthen the party's links with, first and foremost, the unionised working class, with the working people as consumers and with the young unemployed. True, our tactics are defensive now, but there's a difference between defensive tactics of retreat, when you're trying to preserve your forces after

being badly clobbered and defensive tactics designed to hold the line at the point you've reached, to engage the enemy as he advances and to accumulate the forces to resume the offensive. Those are our tactics — defensive leading to offensive.

*How will reaction respond to the increasingly leading role being assumed by the WPJ?*

Insofar as there have been sharp attacks since the election, they have been mainly directed at the WPJ, one reflection of the fact that imperialism and reaction recognise that our party is going to be playing a bigger role and therefore needs to be crushed immediately. Needless to say, we are not going to be crushed. We are ensuring that our comrades are prepared psychologically and practically, as far as our strength allows, to resist this onslaught.

At present, the main attack, while not directly by the government, is the attempt to silence *Struggle*. This is printed by the *Daily News*, in which the government has a majority holding. They have told us that unless we deposit a 50,000-dollar bond against possible libel actions, they will be unable to continue printing. Also, they have trebled the printing cost. The PNP newspaper, although printed by the same company, has not been asked to post a bond. This is a firm indication that they see us as the main danger.

As far as possible, the Seaga administration is going to try to limit the activity of our party and to attack our main cadres within the constitutional framework.

This will take various forms. Firstly, trumped-up charges against the leaders. They are already pursuing that tactic against D K Duncan, general secretary of the PNP and a leader of the Left within that party. They tried it in the days before the election with some of our leaders, most of whom were released without having to state a defence, and they're going to try it with me.

Secondly, they're going to do more of what they've started already — identifying our party members who work in the state apparatus and harassing them, transferring them and sacking them. Thirdly, we expect them to identify our party members in the various communities, planting guns on them and then swooping in to arrest them.

If this fails — and it *will* fail — to break up the party, they will try more repressive measures, such as proscription of our trade union work and selected assassination, as is practised in several Latin America countries. They will resort more and more to open terrorism if they think they can get away with it.

We intend that they will not get away with it.

### A subscription brings Marxism Today to your door promptly each month

The rates for one year are:

**Inland** individuals £7.20, institutions £9.60

**Overseas** individuals £9.60, institutions £12.

send Marxism Today for one year,

1 enclose cheque/PO for £

Name

Address