

# Reinventing the Jamaican Political System

Brian Meeks

The New Year began with a bang. One Sunday in late January, these were among the leading stories in the *Gleaner*. The first, under the nonchalant headline "Higglers selling prescription drugs on the streets: Open-air pharmacy on the sidewalks," went on to note:

The illegal trade has left the health sector baffled about how so many different kinds of prescription drugs could have found their way on the street side, and concerned about the health risk involved in the abuse of these drugs.<sup>1</sup>

The second, under the photograph of a single telephone pole with a spider's web of hundreds of wires leading away from it, was, with more than a touch of irony, entitled "Wired up":

This is one of many illegal wire connections in Majestic Gardens in the Kingston 11 area. The Jamaica Public Service Company estimates that there are 50,000 illegal wire con-

nections island wide. Majestic Gardens is an inner-city community, but illegal connections are found in various forms in suburban and rural communities.<sup>2</sup>

The third, on page 3, blared the decidedly more pedestrian headline "Thousands of drivers using expired licenses." The new computerized system for issuing drivers' licenses had encountered a number of glitches; these, a Mrs. Ferguson of Inland Revenue indicated, would soon be ironed out, but then she raised the more burning problem of the proliferation of illegally issued licenses:

"We are talking about illiterate drivers," Mrs. Ferguson admitted.

She said drivers who have "bought" their licenses and avoided the standard examinations can hardly be singled out as long as their original documents were signed by legal authorities and they passed the reading test.

"If there is collusion at the depot, there is nothing we can do about that," she explained.

"If the person can read, the department cannot tell whether the license is bogus."<sup>3</sup>

The fourth, on the front page, was the increasingly familiar story: "Gun Battle follows boy's abduction: Seven-year-old Jovayn Miller abducted. Abductors demand \$10 million ransom."<sup>4</sup> In this instance, however, the good news was that the boy was later found and returned to his family unharmed.

Finally, and also on page 1, this now traditional though also increasingly antiquarian report of the political clash, in this case intraparty, appeared under the head "Charles, Broderick in heated brawl":

The police confirm that they had to break up a stone and bottle-throwing incident in Summerfield Clarendon Friday night, involving Parnel Charles, JLP caretaker for the Clarendon north central constituency and Dr Percy Broderick former JLP Member of Parliament for that constituency.<sup>5</sup>

My last visit to the Institute for Research in African-American Studies at Columbia was in 1994, at which time I presented a paper titled: "The Political Moment in Jamaica: The Dimensions of Hegemonic Dissolution."<sup>6</sup> The paper proposed that following the retirement of Michael Manley from public life in 1993 and the reelection of his People's National Party (PNP) under the new leadership of P. J. Patterson, the island was approaching a social and political crisis point. The main suggestion was that Jamaica was in a state of hegemonic dissolution: "The old hegemonic alliance is unable to rule in the accustomed way, but equally, alternative and competitive modes of hegemony from below are unable to decisively place their stamp on the new and fluid situation."<sup>7</sup>

In the absence of a populist organization to take the lead and carry events in a more radical

direction and in the context of an international conjuncture that did not seem to provide a permissive opening for radical action, three potential options were mooted: The first was the option of an increasingly authoritarian government, "within or outside the constitution";<sup>8</sup> the second was the possibility of a democratic renewal across the breadth of the Jamaican social and political terrain; and finally, following Marx, was an option described as the "common ruin of the contending classes," or widespread deterioration in the fabric of civil society and the state. In the seven years that have passed since then, this "strange, eventful history" is unveiling an alternative that is altogether none of these, though it appears to include elements of them all.

### The New Situation

The Zeeks riots of late 1998, in which thousands of nominally PNP supporters brought Kingston to a standstill in protesting against the detention of their "don," or area leader, and the April 1999 Gas Price riots, during which the entire island was under a state of siege from protests following budgetary increases in the price of gasoline,<sup>10</sup> signaled a new phase in the old situation. The decision by the besieged police officers to ask the detained Zeeks to quiet his own crowd graphically indicated their recognition of the relative autonomy of the dons and of the downtown "massive."

Globalization and neoliberalism, in drastically reducing the size and reach of the state, have undermined its critical power, deriving in part from the ability to distribute scarce resources. Simultaneously, new opportunities in the international drugs market provided the formerly loyal political enforcers with independent sources of wealth. Long before the 1998 crisis, then, the dons had begun to assume quasi-state functions as allocators of

social benefits and, in the absence of a reliable and trusted police force, as law enforcers.<sup>11</sup>

Yet, even now, the process is incomplete. Though following the Zeeks events there was talk of an alliance of dons across traditionally antagonistic party lines, and though it is true that a truce of sorts has held in the inner city for three years, the party divisions have not altogether been erased. Thus, in the Gas Price riots of the following April, Zeeks's decision not to block the roads in downtown Kingston provided critical relief in its politically most vulnerable zone for Patterson's government. Tactically, this was a brilliant move, for it both asserted Zeeks's autonomy and strategic importance and simultaneously sent the message that he was still "PNP," though now more an important ally than an operative of the governing party. If this were at all in question, then Patterson's visit to Zeeks's stronghold in Matthew's Lane immediately after the riots to thank him for his support should leave no one in doubt as to the not-so-subtle shift in power relationships. The Jamaican state is still in charge, but the cracks are opening up. Governments still rule, but increasingly they require the tactical support of these area leaders.

The complexity of the present moment is evident in all this, for the devolution of power to warlords who gain wealth from illegal drugs and the substitution of the rule of law with the rough retributive justice of the streets are an evident indicator of the collapse of the political and the approach of the Hobbesian "war of all against all." Yet, is there not a democratic kernel in the popular mobilization of people outside of the restrictive confines of middle-class-led political parties? Is there not a certain laudable autonomy that derives from the shrinkage of the pervasive and bloodily divisive patronage

networks of the seventies and eighties? None of this potential can fully bloom so long as authoritarian dons run these communities along the lines of feudal fiefdoms, but it would be remiss not to see the implicit potential for a democratic renewal in the collapse of clientele-oriented politics.

The more evident feature, however, is the growth of the authoritarian trend. This is manifest in the police force and in the formation of a new crime fighting group, the Crime Management Unit (CMU) under Senior Superintendent Reneto Adams. Following a new round of particularly heinous crimes, the CMU was set up in the middle of 2000 as the latest special squad to combat violent criminals.<sup>12</sup> Adams's unit has already gained special notoriety for its viciousness and scant regard for procedure. In the most recent incident, seven young men were killed in a shoot-out in a house in Braeton, a lower-middle-class suburb southwest of Kingston. The police claimed that the victims were wanted in connection with, among other crimes, the brutal killing of a headmaster of a local primary school. The police assertion that they approached the house and were fired on was hotly denied by citizens from the community. Firsthand reports of grieving neighbors and family members who heard the shoot-out suggest the degree to which notions of the rule of law have been abandoned and hint at a growing groundswell against the formal representatives of the system:

Residents find cold comfort in relating the blood-curdling reports of screaming youth, mercy pleas and explosions which dominate their conversations in the day, and their dreams at night . . .

"I heard 'Gallus' (Andre Virgo) saying the Our Father prayer. He was crying and begging for his life. Then I heard a barrage of shots and he went silent," a neighbor said.

"Mi hear an officer sey 'Weh yu a do bwoy? Try run?' and him seh 'No, officer, how mi fi run and yu a beat mi,' and then mi hear pure explosion and nothing else," another neighbor said.<sup>13</sup>

Any assumption, however, that these acts are carried out by rogue elements in the police force without the support of a significant body of the citizenry would be mistaken. In 1991, Carl Stone's polls showed a 56 percent support for vigilantism in the adult population, and Anthony Harriott in 1994 found that among Jamaican police officers there was a similar support of some 54 percent.<sup>14</sup> If there was any lingering doubt that support for summary justice exists in the very highest echelons of government, it would have been dashed when Justice Minister K. D. Knight, in an intemperate reference to violent gunmen—and no doubt spurred on by repeated, highly publicized acts of wanton violence—blurted out in early January that they belong in the morgue. Indeed, it is fair to assume that even as there is a growing and vocal constituency for justice and fair play, in the face of repeated incidences of brutal and wanton violence the constituency demanding law and order by any means necessary is also consolidating.

The weakest tendency in all of this is that of democratic renewal. There is a significant increase in community organization. Trevor Munroe records, for instance, the increase in the number of registered youth clubs from some 596 in 1989–1990 to 727 in 1996–1997.<sup>15</sup> And there is a laudable return of elements of the middle class to political activism, evident in the formation of human rights groups such as Jamaicans for Justice and the University of the West Indies (UWI) Faculty of Social Science's initiative to educate citizens in the inner-city community of Craig Town. But there has so far been no indication that these disparate tendencies might

coalesce into some kind of new social movement. Indeed, with the gutted trade union movement struggling for its survival and a new round of emigration undermining nascent community organization, the likelihood of the emergence of new political formations in the short run is limited.

Certainly, from the perspective of the initiative of the PNP regime, there has been very little that can be considered supportive of a new democracy. If one thinks about the early years of the Patterson regime, there was an explicit trend to make government more open and to make politics more accessible to the ordinary people. Thus, the important Values and Attitudes conference of 1994 brought hundreds of delegates together and sought to tap broad national opinion on the ways to address and overcome the evident deterioration in manners and civic responsibility at the social and individual levels. The prime minister's own "Live and Direct" meetings, in which he established face-to-face contact with people at the community level, were also a part of this period, as was the local government reform initiative of Arnold Bertram's ministry. But these, particularly since the cataclysmic financial sector collapse of 1997,<sup>16</sup> have receded across the policy horizon.<sup>17</sup>

In their place has emerged the silhouette of a largely unimaginative regime, one that is presiding over a decade without any real growth and that, in deciding to underwrite the profligacy of the banking sector, has placed an enormous yoke of debt around its own neck, as well as around the necks of this and future generations of the country's citizens.<sup>18</sup> The structural adjustment policy of high interest rates, further enhanced to deal with the fallout of the financial sector, has served as a "blunt instrument" to reduce inflation but, more damagingly, it has facilitated, in the context of an already-skewed pattern of distribution, the



*Thinking It Over*

PHOTO BY CHESTER HIGGINS

transfer of wealth from the poor to the rich. Thus, the United Nations Development Program's (UNDP) 2000 *Human Development Report* sought to single out Jamaica, along with Brazil and Guatemala, as among the countries with the greatest income inequality, where the top fifth's share in national income is more than twenty-five times that of the bottom fifth's.<sup>19</sup> The outcome of these policies, alongside the decline of any positive democratic initiatives in an already sharply divided community, has resulted in greater alienation and the feeling that the government does not care, that individual ministers are corrupt, and that the ship is rudderless.

Thus, even positive administrative moves, such as Minister Peter Phillips's road repair

and rebuilding efforts and the attempt to re-suscitate a public urban transport system,<sup>20</sup> have so far had little discernible impact. The peculiarity of the PNP's third term is this: Not everything that has been done has been misguided, nor has everything collapsed. The 1999 *Survey of Living Conditions* asserts that mean consumption has increased, there have been statistical improvements in education, and the health status of the population has remained stable; on the negative side, there has been a noted stagnation in housing development and when the sample was asked whether their personal economic situation had improved from that of five years ago, 55.4 percent of all respondents said it had improved or remained the same, whereas only

44.6 percent said it had worsened.<sup>21</sup> As to purely statistical performance, aside from the damning failure to grow and the hard inequality indices, it can be credibly argued that the government's performance, in a generally difficult situation, could have been much worse. The regime has certainly not presided over a total demise of the island's infrastructure, evident in the previously mentioned road-building program, the upgrading work on the two international airports, and the proposed new trans-island highway.

What, then, accounts for the anomie and drift in which solutions to the endemic violence appear as elusive as ever and the sense of lawlessness and disorder pervades every sphere of life? What accounts for the dissatisfaction, when in December 2000, the Jamaica Labour Party (JLP) for the first time in seventeen years nosed past the PNP in the national public opinion polls and then defeated the governing party's candidate in a by-election in one of its safest seats in North East St. Ann?<sup>22</sup>

Many reasons can be put on the table for disenchantment and political dissatisfaction. Ever more blatant, income inequality is obviously one reason. The feeling that the government does not care, that it has looked only after itself and has become too fat and operates at a bureaucratic level without reference to the popular base, is another. There is also the simple factor of having been in power for twelve years, an unprecedented length in modern Jamaican politics. An entire cohort of new voters was six years old when the JLP was last in power. For them, there is no memory of the authoritarian "one-manism" of the Seaga regime of the 1980s. All their frustrations about unemployment, their real experiences of police brutality, and their sense of alienation from an apparently uncaring society are focused on one known reality: the "third-term" PNP government.

But to further understand the present moment, we need to return to the notion of hegemonic dissolution, or the disconnection by significant sections of the population from a formal order that they no longer feel any loyalty toward, that they perceive to have disrespected them repeatedly, and that is no longer able to provide many with the modicum of a decent livelihood.

At the economic level, the world built around remittances—the barrel and moneygram<sup>23</sup>—has grown exponentially. Swathes of the island are now completely dependent on this avenue for survival. At the community level, the dependence on the don for social welfare has grown exponentially. At the level of justice, the disconnection from the formal justice system takes two forms: For those living in the downtown ghettos, the justice of the dons is increasingly more available and reliable. For those living in the fortresslike middle-class townhouse complexes, a similar reliability is to be found in the justice and efficiency of the fast-response guard services. So, as is characteristic of many prerevolutionary situations (though Jamaica is not quite yet at this point), even when there is some apparent statistical social and economic reprieve, the disconnection from the law and from official society, bred on the intensity of the previous downward spiral, intensifies.

### **The Turn in the Global**

The "election" of George Bush in a deeply flawed electoral process in which he received fewer votes than his opponent, Al Gore—and in which he would have lost, by all indications, on a careful recount of the decisive Florida vote<sup>24</sup>—signals a new and dangerous moment in the neoliberal globalization project.<sup>25</sup>

Like every stock market bubble before it, the particularly long ten-year boom, fueled

by the fanciful optimism in technology stocks, has recently burst.<sup>26</sup> In the harsh glare of the morning light following the collapse of Nasdaq and then the Dow Jones, the weak fundamentals of the U.S. economy are once again on display for all to see. In an insightful article in *Newsweek*, Fareed Zakaria points out the growing U.S. current account deficit, in which the United States spent \$435 billion more dollars than it earned in 2000, a figure roughly equivalent to 5 percent of its GDP.<sup>27</sup> The United States, he argues, has sustained its profligate consumption habit because countries with "spare cash" have found it appropriate to invest in U.S. stocks and bonds. If, however, due to falling confidence even a fraction of this infusion of resources were to stop, then, "It could produce a spiral of problems: a falling dollar, which produces rising interest rates, which weakens stock prices and further slows the economy. Practically every time an advanced country has run a large current account deficit this vicious cycle has emerged."<sup>28</sup>

In favor of the possibility of such a vicious cycle is the fact that this "correction" is occurring at a time when the Japanese economy is doing badly, the Asian economies have not yet recovered from the crisis of 1987, and the German economy is slowing. Against the odds, the United States has emerged as the sole surviving world power, and the dollar as a world currency. Thus, the United States is the only nation that pays its foreign debts in its own currency, significantly enhancing its ability to pay its way out of crisis.<sup>29</sup>

There is, therefore, no certainty that the vicious cycle will be the only option. Zakaria, however (in what, to be fair, is only an op-ed piece), fails to sketch the outlines of a broader and more dangerous secular crisis facing the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) economies. Whereas in the period 1950 to

1973 the OECD economies as a whole grew at an average annual rate of 4.3 percent, in the period 1973 to 1995, this average shrank dramatically to 2.4 percent. This was accompanied by a parallel contraction in the rate of growth of private consumption, from 4.3 percent in the earlier period to 2.6 percent. The relative contraction in the rate of increase of final demand has led to a decrease in the propensity to invest in fixed assets. Thus, fixed capital formation, which grew at an annual rate of 5.7 percent in the 1950-1973 period, grew by only 2.1 percent from 1973 to 1995.<sup>30</sup> This secular decline in growth, consumer demand, and the demand for fixed capital has contributed to the exponential growth of investible funds without a clear productive "home." Thus, as Harry Shutt suggests: "Inevitably this coincidence of a continuing steady growth in investible funds with slowing demand for both fixed investment and working capital meant that a significant proportion of such funds were channeled into speculation—that is, into assets that held out greater prospect of gain from capital appreciation than from earnings yield."<sup>31</sup>

If this fundamental reality is used as a point of focus, then much in recent global economic policy can be discerned. The World Trade Organization (WTO) project, for instance, can through this lens be understood as an attempt to find a means of kick-starting the Western world by opening up new markets and somehow stimulating the stalled consumer demand. And yet, by shifting wealth from the wage sector to capital, neo-liberal economic policies have, if anything, exacerbated the problem. For although more markets have been liberalized and the marginal productivity of capital has improved, failure to stimulate growth and the shift in the distribution of wealth means that there are fewer consumers able to exercise effective

demand for the increased production of goods and services. Therefore, with mountains of idle cash and insufficient productive enterprises to invest in, there is the even greater possibility of speculation to put this cash to work. The result has been the proliferation of a variety of strategies, from the privatization of governmental assets to junk bonds to futures markets to derivatives and the promotion of so-called emerging markets. The outcome of what is essentially a massive speculative bubble based not on production and growth but on the artificial inflation of stock prices without foundation must ultimately, as Shutt bleakly suggests, lead to a correction of epic proportions:

All the (new financial) devices . . . are ways of artificially boosting the rates of return on investment in response to unrelenting pressures to push them ever higher. Theoretically, of course, this problem might be resolved if these forces were somehow to abate, so that the market rate of return could fall to a more readily attainable level. However, history suggests unambiguously that the only way this can happen under a competitive market system is by means of a destructive "crash" rather than an orderly retreat to lower returns. . . . Hence a sober assessment of these various financial stratagems must surely conclude that, for all the undoubted ingenuity of the financial manipulators, it can only be a matter of time before the forces of gravity reassert themselves and the reality of systemic financial failure must be faced.<sup>32</sup>

The implications for the developing world in such a context are both well known and well documented. Countries caught in the quagmire of indebtedness find themselves in a permanent cycle of structural adjustment. Primary goods exporters, traditionally "price

takers," have now become "policy takers" as well.<sup>33</sup> The policies of "opening up," export orientation, and privatization that they have been forced to adopt have not, for the most part, led them on to autonomous paths of growth, but rather,

These countries must forever "export themselves out of debt," no matter that they are competing with a dozen other countries exporting the same coffee or cocoa—or shoes and shirts. No matter that domestic food production is declining, as export agriculture is favoured over food crops and natural resources are pillaged for instant returns, with long-term damage to the environment. The export of commodities, both primary and manufactured—because labour intensive manufactures are the new "commodities"—is a way of exporting cheap labour. . . . The increasing volume of these developing country exports have assisted the United States to maintain the long boom of non-inflationary growth in the 1990s. This is the one sense in which "globalization" has increased wealth—in a unidirectional way.<sup>34</sup>

For countries like Jamaica, then, caught in the fakir's stare of neoliberalism, the primary policy question has been how to follow the rules of the game more thoroughly, how to make the state "lean and mean," how to find that elusive niche, and how to take full advantage of the purported comparative advantage with the economic wealth and well-being that should naturally follow. The dismal result has been a collapse of the productive economy; the exacerbation of the gap between the rich and the poor; the impoverishment of the countryside; a massive export of talent; the undermining of the state; and, in some instances, an all-class crisis, or process of hegemonic dissolution.



Above all, there has been a patent failure at the governmental level, by the "loyal opposition," and by most leading intellectuals and representatives of civil society to heed lessons perceived by Michael Manley two decades ago: that capital follows its own logic of accumulation; that powerful nations set the rules and look after themselves; that economically powerful states are always the advocates of open markets even when, like the infant United States, they were premier defenders of protectionism in earlier phases; and that it is therefore absolutely necessary to begin the debate on alternative futures against and beyond the false horizons of neoliberalism.<sup>35</sup>

There is, of course, the present bear market aside, no certainty that a cataclysmic crash will occur. Unprecedented growth (barely understood as a phenomenon), along the lines of that in the 1950s and 1960s, could come again and so effectively utilize the capital overhang as to undermine a devastating correction. But if there is any substance in the foregoing analysis—and the general unease with which leading Western commentators view the present bear market would tend to support it<sup>36</sup>—then the need for an entire rethinking of the Jamaican agenda is not only necessary but any delay in doing so would verge on the criminal.

### Thinking Outside the Box

The postwar system, based on competitive parties dispensing scarce benefits and led by heroic leaders, is moribund. The populist party, whether in its nationalist, PNP garb or its private sector-oriented JLP form, is dying. The results of the North East St. Ann by-election suggests the degree to which Patterson's PNP, which was elected to power eight years ago with genuine popular support, has lost credibility. In the absence of a genuine alter-

native, then, popular support will flow in the direction of the default alternative, the JLP, in the Jamaican tradition, though it would not be surprising if the overall turnout at the next general election were the lowest in Jamaican history.

If the present situation can at least in part be accounted for by the alienation of people from politics, then what is urgently required to correct the dangerous drift to the rocks of nihilism and authoritarianism is a popular renewal. The ideal alternative would be a new, democratic federation of local and grassroots organizations that would unite a critical mass of Jamaicans around a politics based on participation, inclusion, and transparency. Such pure forms, however, seldom present themselves. An alternative, in keeping with the country's two-party tradition, might well be a critical alliance of well-thinking men and women across party lines that would allow them to maintain their vestigial party loyalties while beginning the conversation that will lead to a new formation.

Such a national alliance might evolve into a government of national unity, but the danger in that possibility is the reassertion of politics from above without the limited safeguard of an opposition in waiting. Such an outcome would not only prolong the politics of the last half century, but possibly entrench an even more dangerous monopoly, when what is desperately required is a new popular politics from below.

The first task on the agenda of such a formation would have to be a constituent assembly of the Jamaican people at home and abroad. The year 2002 marks the fortieth anniversary of Jamaican independence. What more important milestone to begin the debate around a new social contract, this time discussed and ratified by the people, than this important date! The notion of "abroad" is particularly stressed in this formulation, as

roughly half of all Jamaicans live overseas. They are "taxed," as it were, by their remittances to their families on the "rock," but they have no representation. The slogan of Jamaicans overseas must be the classical one of "no taxation without representation." Any new contractual arrangements must include the input of the diaspora and must make constitutional arrangements for its inclusion beyond the conclusion of the initial debates.

The constituent assembly would not be a one-off meeting, but would involve a series, perhaps hundreds, of meetings in Browns Town and Above Rocks, Brooklyn and Brixton, to discuss alternative agendas and to ultimately mandate delegates to a national convention to debate and ratify a new constitution. Issues on a possible agenda should not be preempted, but if the experience of the past forty years suggests that there needs to be a thorough democratic reform of the political system, they might include

1. The appropriate constitutional arrangements to undermine the constituency-based spoils system and the ruthlessness endemic in a winner-takes-all election. This might include discussions around proportional representation to partially or completely replace the first-past-the-post system, the question of term limits, the matter of the recall of nonperforming representatives, and the entire question of the transparency of elections, with particular emphasis on electoral funding arrangements.
2. The devolution of power from the center to the communities. This process has already in a de facto sense begun, as the patronage system has receded. To the extent that

people have real local control, then the process of reconstructing community can genuinely take hold.

3. The political inclusion of overseas Jamaicans in any future electoral arrangement, whether by transparent overseas voting procedures or otherwise. The obverse of this is the development and fostering of powerful lobbying groups in the main immigrant centers. The strength of the overseas Jamaican and Caribbean community can only be manifest to the extent that there is active organization at the community level with close ties to natural allies in the African-American community and among environmentalist groups, organized labor, and elsewhere.
4. The unprecedented extension of democratic procedures into all spheres of government, including (a) a publicly elected commission to oversee the operations of the police and the military; (b) the opening up of the budget debate to the nation by a discussion at the grass-roots level months in advance of the preliminary budget and the election of mandated delegates to a national budget debate; and (c) the further extension of the principle of democracy and accountability to key national institutions, such as the election of direct delegates to the Public Accounts Committee to sit alongside members of the house and similar directly elected representatives to sit on the committee of the Ombudsman and that of the Contractor General.

5. The initiation of a debate around national social and economic imperatives. These must no longer be subject to secret negotiation by international agencies with no responsibility for the survival of the Jamaican people. Thus, a national food policy that would ensure a strategic agricultural sector and educational and health policies that would have twenty-year plans, subject to variation only on the basis of democratic decision-making, would all be high on the agenda.
6. The beginning of a conversation on the role of international capital and its character. Such a debate cannot begin after a crash, when it is too late, but must raise some of the critical issues mentioned in this article with a full recognition that capital and the market is not only far from benign, but is, as we speak, in deep crisis, with profound implications for the future of the world.
7. The proposal for a federation of the Caribbean peoples. The island-by-island sovereignty of the 1960s is as moribund as its accompanying political system. The Caribbean is our natural region, geographically and culturally. It is here that we need to look for the forms of solidarity and cooperation that will give us more meaningful space, allow us to develop while taking better advantage of economies of scale, and allow us to play a more coherent role in world affairs. There is no danger to be found in a federation based on democratic principles, in which power is de-

veloped to the grassroots and cooperation is based on principles of respect and the search for mutual benefit.

To many, these proposals may seem far-fetched and tendentious. They are meant to be. For too long we have played it safe by restricting ourselves to thinking only within the box. That box, the stultifying paradigm of neoliberalism, is now in tatters. We need to begin thinking outside of it. It is therefore appropriate to end on a quote from Kari Levitt, who has recently sought, in a similar vein and spirit, to address the elements of a program for the Caribbean and all developing countries beyond the failed neoliberal paradigm: "You may dismiss this wish list as idealistic. Perhaps so, but it is certainly more realistic than the assumption that the world can continue on its present path without courting disasters more terrible than any we have yet visited upon ourselves. Without dreams, nothing is possible. Without hope, there is no future."<sup>37</sup>

The collapse of Jamaica in its present form, whether by slow burn or more rapid denouement, may be closer than we think. Jamaica, I submit, shall be democratic or not at all.

## Notes

1. *The Sunday Gleaner*, January 21, 2001.
2. *Ibid.* A crude calculation suggests that if there are 50,000 connections and each leads, say, to a household of 5 people, then there are roughly 250,000 people, or 10 percent of the entire population, that is illegally connected to the electricity network.
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Ibid.*
6. The paper, under the title, "The Political Movement in Jamaica . . ." was first published in *Race and Reason*, Vol. 3 (1996-1997), pp.39-47. It was later republished as a chapter in my collection *Radical Caribbean: From Black Power to Abu Bakr* (Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 1996) and more recently in Manning Marable, ed., *Dispatches from the*

*Ebony Tower: Intellectuals Confront the African American Experience* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), pp. 52–74. References are to the version in the UWI collection.

7. Meeks, "The Political Movement in Jamaica," p. 134.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 137.

9. William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, II, vii (139).

10. See, for a critical reading of these events, the Introduction to my *Narratives of Resistance: Jamaica, Trinidad, the Caribbean* (Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 2000).

11. See, for an insightful analysis of the social situation in the inner city and the root causes of violence, Horace Levy, Barry Chevannes, et al., "They Cry Respect: Urban Violence and Poverty in Jamaica," Centre for Population, Community and Social Change, University of the West Indies, Mona, Jamaica, 1996.

12. Although police killings per year have declined from the average of some 200 in the 1980s to 130 in the 1990s, the numbers are still unacceptably high, as are the numerous reported cases of summary justice, though, as Harriott suggests, very few of these cases were ruled as unjustifiable and the offenders charged with murder. See Anthony Harriott, *Police and Crime Control in Jamaica: Problems of Reforming Ex-Colonial Constabularies* (Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 2000), p. 82.

13. *The Gleaner*, March 20, 2001.

14. See Carl Stone, "Survey of Public Opinion on the Jamaican Justice System," Unpublished report to U.S. Agency for International Development, Kingston, 1991, p. 30; and Anthony Harriott, "Race, Class and the Political Behaviour of the Jamaican Security forces," Ph.D. dissertation, University of the West Indies, Mona, Jamaica, p. 324.

15. See Trevor Munroe, *Renewing Democracy into the Millennium: The Jamaican Experience in Perspective* (Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 1999), p. 127.

16. In 1997, after a half decade of a freewheeling financial bubble, the banking sector experienced a severe crash. Many smaller banks folded, leaving depositors high and dry. When the momentum threatened to engulf the entire economy, the minister of finance intervened purportedly to rescue the small investors with a sector-wide bailout. The cost of this and the subsequent "restructuring" exercise has even more severely encumbered the government and, by implication, the taxpayers in debt. See, for instance, "Davies Explains Restructuring," *The Sunday Gleaner*, April 26, 1998.

17. It should be noted, however, that in the face of the loss of the North East St. Ann seat there seems to be an early attempt to regroup the PNP around the slogan of "deepening democracy." The governor general's "throne speech" opening the 2001–2002 financial year in parliament emphasized, for instance, the need to deepen dem-

ocracy at the local and community levels. See "A Vision for Prosperity," *The Gleaner*, April 3, 2001.

18. Jamaica's GDP grew at a rate of 0.1 percent for the period 1990–1998. This put it behind all Caribbean territories except Haiti, which experienced negative growth, and its own performance in the previous decade, which, although relatively anemic, was at an average of 2.0 percent. See World Bank, *World Development Report 1999–2000, Entering the 21st Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 250.

19. United Nations Development Program, *Human Development Report 2000* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 34.

20. For a discussion of the convoluted and sorry history of urban transport in Jamaica, in which I laud the minister's efforts but argue for an as-yet-untried popular approach to the management of public transport, see my *Narratives of Resistance*.

21. Planning Institute of Jamaica, *1999 Survey of Living Conditions*, Table 7.22, p. 40.

22. In a three-way race on March 8, 2001, the JLP's candidate, Shahine Robinson, defeated the PNP's Carrol Jackson by a margin of 509 votes on first count. The significance of this is profound, as the North East St. Ann seat was one of the ruling party's safest rural seats. In the last general election in 1997, the PNP romped home in this seat by a margin of some 2,000 votes. If such a remarkable swing were to be repeated islandwide, the ruling party would be lucky to retain a handful of seats in the next election. See *The Jamaica Gleaner*, March 9, 2001 [www.jamaica-gleaner.com].

23. This is the name of a popular electronic service for the quick remittance of foreign exchange to family and dependents.

24. The *Palm Beach Post*, closely involved in the unofficial recount of the decisive Florida ballots, has suggested that if the infamous "butterfly" ballot alone had been less confusing, the Democratic candidate Al Gore would have gained some 6,600 votes, or more than ten times what he needed to win the election. See "Overvotes Cost Gore the Election," *Palm Beach Post*, March 19, 2001 [www.gobpi.com/partners/pbpost/news/election2000.html].

25. President Bush's early backtracking on a variety of environmental and budgetary issues has set off the alarm bells of many commentators, who see a return to the profligacy of "Reaganomics" and, more ominous, the inflated military spending of the cold war. Such an approach is likely to exacerbate the underlying weaknesses in the U.S. economy. See, for instance, Paul Krugman, "The Money Pit," *New York Times*, March 18, 2001; and Maureen Dowd, *The Asbestos President*, April 2001.

26. See "Stocks Fall in Early Trading As Wary Investors Sell Again," *New York Times*, March 14, 2001 [www.nytimes.com].

27. Fareed Zakaria, "Show Us the Money," *Newsweek*, March 26, 2001.

28. Ibid.
29. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) itself seemed to be supportive of the view that this bear market was more a correction than a crash. In an early comment, a senior official, speaking on condition of anonymity, felt that although U.S. growth would fall to 1.7 percent in 2001, it would recover in 2002 and register a healthy 3.0 percent growth. See *The Financial Gleaner*, March 16, 2001.
30. See *OECD National Accounts Statistics* and *IMF International Financial Statistics*, in Harry Shutt, *The Trouble with Capitalism: An Enquiry into the Causes of Global Economic Failure* (London and New York: Zed Books, 1998), p. 38.
31. Ibid., p. 39.
32. Ibid., pp. 130–131.
33. See Kari Levitt, "Fifth Sir Arthur Lewis Memorial Lecture," Eastern Caribbean Central Bank, St. Lucia, November 22, 2000, p. 13.
34. Ibid., pp. 13–14.
35. See, for instance, Michael Manley, *Up the Down Escalator: Development and the International Economy: A Jamaican Case Study* (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1987); and Michael Manley, *The Poverty of Nations* (London: Pluto Press, 1991).
36. The front-page headline of *Newsweek* in the first few days of the stock market decline is as indicative as any. It stated: "Are You Scared Yet? The Sinking US Economy. Will It Take the Rest of the World Down with It?" *Newsweek*, March 26, 2001.
37. Levitt, "Fifth Sir Arthur Lewis Memorial Lecture," p. 21.