

F.S.J. Ledgister

Michael Manley and Jamaican Democracy, 1972–1980: The Word is Love. Lanham MD: Lexington Books, 2014. xii + 129 pp. (Cloth US\$ 75.00)

Fragano Ledgister's *Michael Manley and Jamaican Democracy* is a welcome foray into what one hopes will become a new wave of literature reflecting on the Manley regime of the 1970s and the severe social and political conflicts that erupted when it sought to reform the Jamaican class and racial social structures inherited from the colonial period. As the title suggests, Ledgister focuses less on Manley's international dimensions (for a New International Economic Order and against Apartheid, for instance) and more on his personal philosophy and the politics of his declared "Democratic Socialist" government. This he does mainly by reviewing Manley's books (*The Politics of Change*, *A Voice at the Workplace*, and *Struggle in the Periphery*) and critiquing the respective roles of Manley's nemesis and successor as prime minister, Edward Seaga, and the erstwhile leader of the party's left wing, D.K. Duncan. The results provide a critical sketch of the country's challenges in addressing urgent demands to improve the welfare of the poor in the face of adversely shifting terms of trade and in the teeth of the 1973 game-changing energy crisis. Ledgister also captures very well the essence of Manley's philosophy, with its peculiar hybridity—advocating a radical participatory democracy by maintaining liberal, parliamentary forms and legislating for greater social equality, while at the same time operating within an essentially capitalist framework. It is a useful sketch of the man and his turbulent times, though quite evidently, there is much more that could have been said.

In examining the electoral defeat of the regime in the violent elections of 1980, Ledgister steers clear of discussing Manley's charges of external destabilization. Manley himself in his retrospective *Struggle in the Periphery* is explicit as to the nature of foreign intervention, but here it is largely missing. Even on the local front, Ledgister avoids serious analysis of the burning questions of causality and which parties are to be blamed for the initiation and escalation of violence before and during that decade. There is a dark lacuna in studies of Jamaican politics in which references to who did what and when is either absent altogether or papered over through the anodyne notion that "both sides are to be blamed." Ledgister, despite devoting chapters to both former JLP Prime Minister Seaga and sometime PNP General Secretary D.K. Duncan—certainly perceived as among the leading protagonists—fails to shed light on this critical dimension, so central to a fuller reading of Manley and his legacy.

There are a few other questionable calls and elisions. In Chapter 3, an exploration of Manley's *A Voice at the Workplace* and his early stewardship of the

National Worker's Union (NWU), Ledgister reports on Manley's involvement in the union without reference to its historical role as the alternative to the left-dominated Trades Union Congress (TUC). The NWU emerged to shore up PNP support among the organized working class after the PNP's left wing, who built the TUC, had been expelled from the party under severe Cold War pressure. This history and Manley's role in undermining the influence of the TUC is well established and the irony is that the very person who consolidated the NWU—and by affiliation, confirmed the PNP as a moderate party, acceptable to Western Cold War sensibilities—would, some two decades later, re-emerge as a major gadfly and irritant to U.S. interests as “Joshua,” the democratic socialist hero of the people. This entire metamorphosis is unexplored.

The D.K. Duncan chapter is particularly unsatisfying. Ledgister introduces Duncan as the left-wing counterpoint to Manley's more moderate version of democratic socialism. But instead of focusing in any depth on the substance of Duncan's history as a former black power advocate and carefully tracing his points of agreement and disagreement with both Manley and the more radical elements within and outside the PNP, Ledgister hinges the chapter on the strange anecdote surrounding Duncan's controversial statement at the opening of the Jamaica German Automotive School. Duncan, then Minister of Mobilization, is purported to have said that the school was too sanitized, implying, depending on one's interpretation, that he was either condescending to Jamaican working people, hostile and unmannerly to the German government, or simply gauche. Despite the relative obscurity of the incident, this could have been used to launch a far more textured investigation of Duncan's ideological positions, but the chapter ends with the rather tentative conclusion that Duncan stood for a “proletarian democracy” (which, however, is never explored in any detail).

Ledgister has managed to put together a compact and accessible reintroduction to one of the most significant postcolonial leaders and his protean attempts to tear the country away from its colonial moorings. At the same time, a more substantial analysis still needs to be undertaken in order to better understand Manley and take us beyond this not-insignificant effort.

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