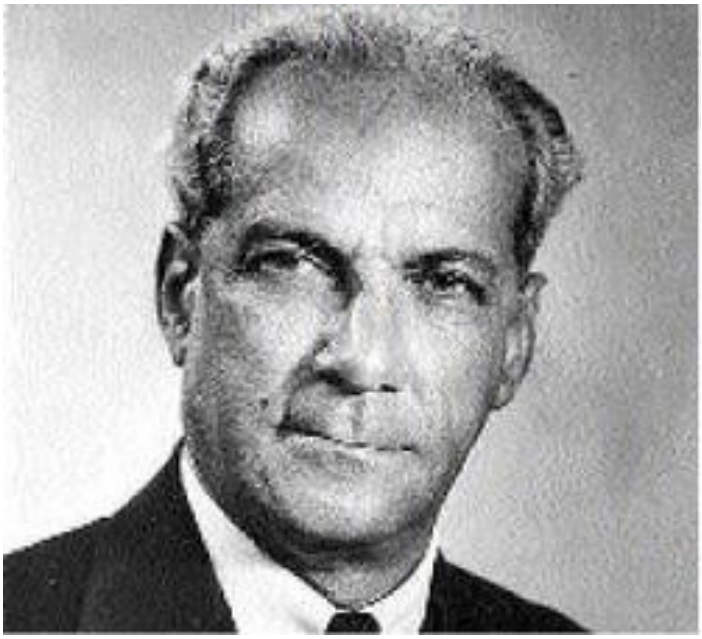
Speech given on the Anniversary of National Hero The Right Excellent Norman Washington Manley's Birthday, on July 4, 2010 at Roxborough, Manchester



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When I was first asked to give a speech in memory of Norman Washington Manley on the anniversary of his birth, an honour and privilege twice endowed, as I have spoken on this occasion once before, there was no doubt in my mind as to what would be the substance of that speech. It was a week after the momentous events of May 24, 2010 and I immediately thought that rather than deliver a somewhat dry, historical talk about Norman's remarkable life, my remarks should, influenced by the essence of his beliefs, be focused on the significance of that day and the events surrounding it.

It would however, be remiss of me on his birthday, not to invoke, at minimum, some of the words of Norman Manley himself, which I suggest are entirely appropriate to contemporary events as they were when first uttered so many decades ago. The first quotation is from a speech given in the House of Representatives in 1952. Leader of the Opposition Manley was incensed by the paltry and limited proposals put forward by the Governor for further constitutional advance which had been made recently. In his ringing critique, captured in Rex Nettleford's edited collection of his speeches *Manley and the New Jamaica*, he defines the true purposes of self government:

> We in Jamaica are at the beginning of a tremendous effort to achieve the one objective of government, which is the improvement of the conditions under which the ordinary people live. To that end we are attacking, thinking and planning all sorts of developments in agriculture and industry. But let it never be forgotten, Mr Speaker, that if you are to succeed in a crusade for improving the economic conditions of your country, hand in hand with it there has to be a social revolution. There must be a complete release of the energy and drive of the people. Because, in the long run, the most important aspects of progress are human beings, their attitudes to their own government and the part they play in their own development...' (Nettleford, p.127)

And second, I quote admittedly liberally, from a speech given in 1967, somewhat before the contentious elections of that year. It speaks for itself:

> I hate all forms of unfair pressure, of corrupt uses of power, of victimising people and denying them the right to live because they do not share your political callings
>
> I abominate fraud in all its disguises and forms, no matter how it may dress itself up or don an air of innocence to conceal the nasty thing that is below.
>
> I believe in the two-party system, not because it is ideal, but because it is the only system that can fully protect the right of every man to live his own life, free from fear and free from violence.

> I believe that the two-party system depends on the quality of leadership that we give it. There are limits beyond which we may not go.
>
> I believe in the toughness and determination of politics but within a framework that sets guide lines of tolerance and decency. (Nettleford, p.336)

How appropriate a set of fundamental ethical principles as we consider the events of the past year and the absence therein of ethical standards and decency!

Let us now return, with inevitability, to the May 24 'Dudus' events and to locate their significance in the stream of history of modern Jamaica. The supreme irony of course, is that the invasion and pacification of the barricaded and armed community of Tivoli Gardens occurred on the celebration of Labour Day, the seventy second anniversary bar an extra day to allow for the long weekend of the great 1938 labour rebellion in which both Bustamante and Manley rose to national leadership and that signalled the beginning of the movements for labour rights, universal adult suffrage and ultimately, via a process that carried us first to Federation, of independence.

Some pessimists might argue that there is very little to be gleaned from the events of that day and the weeks and months preceding it. A recalcitrant don who refused to allow access for a warrant to be served and whose supporters vowed to protect him until death, was pursued, many of his supporters engaged and killed in battle, while he himself got away. Somewhat shy of a month later, he was captured and extradited to the United States. That, some might argue, was that; and it is time to get on with the prosaic day to day matters of business and government, of balancing budgets, of seeking ways to make a profit of fixing roads, etc.

That approach, I suggest would be a grave error, based on a complete misunderstanding of recent Jamaican history. The brazen show of opposition to the state, captured in the immediate barricading of the community once the signal had been given by Prime Minister Golding of his government's intention to relent on the extradition matter and the march of residents a few days later; effectively expressing the community's view that it was autonomous from Jamaican law, is the culmination of a process that I refer to elsewhere as **'hegemonic dissolution'**. I

suggest that what has been happening in Jamaica since the Nineteen Eighties has been the breakdown of commonly held notions of law, of ethics, of manners, of order and ultimately of the meaning and purposes of a nation called Jamaica. The notion of Jamaica as a coherent nation was not always there, to be taken for granted. There is a longer version of history, but we can safely say that it had been previously developed and forged by Norman Manley and others after the cataclysmic events of 1938; the first stage of which ended with the implementation of Universal Adult Suffrage in the elections of 1944, which Manley, ironically, lost.

This 'pact of 1944', as I call it, was never written down, though it was as substantial as if it had been forged in cement. This was an arrangement in which the vast majority of the Jamaican people gave their allegiance to one of the two dominant political parties at election time in exchange for tangible benefits. In the first three decades of this pact, it worked reasonably well, with a vibrant and exclusivist two-party system developing alongside clear social and material benefits for the majority of the population. These included limited though ever increasing access to secondary and tertiary education for the poor, a radically improved health system and a growing economy which led to overall improvement in the standard of living, though this was always heavily skewed in favour of the middle and upper classes. By the nineteen sixties, the pact, already flawed because of its tendency to amplify inequalities, was further compromised as the world economy began to move out of the boom phase that had characterized it in the first decades after World War Two. This was manifest first, in the drastically restricted emigration to the United Kingdom and what this meant for further unemployment and misery in Kingston and other urban areas; but as the Sixties moved into the Seventies, it had become apparent that without a fundamental revision of the social and political arrangements of the previous thirty years, there was likely to be severe social disruption.

This was the context of the Michael Manley government of the Seventies. The attempt to rethink social and economic policy through the slogan 'better must come' and later Democratic Socialism, was a recognition that it was not business as usual; that without a new and revised social pact that could address the exclusion of a significant part of the urban poor; that could

frontally address and overcome the cultural weaknesses of the earlier arrangements, then a nation defined as Jamaica could not go forward as a coherent, peaceful and viable entity. Michael Manley was defeated in 1980 and the circumstances of that equally momentous event, while requiring substantial historical rethinking and revision, are not the central purposes of this conversation. Suffice it to say that the defeat of Michael and Democratic Socialism in 1980 heralded the beginning of a long political night, which continues into the present and which, despite laudatory attempts to address specific policy issues in a generally difficult climate, has failed, through intervals of both parties in power, to address fundamental questions of refashioning and redesigning the social and political arrangements of the island of Jamaica. Summarized simply, since the decadence and dissolution of the old arrangements – the pact of 1944 – no new coherent and compelling set of arrangements have emerged to reintegrate the vast majority of citizens into a common polity with an overarching set of common beliefs.

Nature abhors a vacuum and even more poignantly, this applies to politics. In the absence of a new and compelling philosophy of what Jamaica should be, individuals gradually and then more rapidly, abandoned any innate belief in the law along with other tenets of social order, throwing out genuinely archaic, hierarchical practices alongside basic norms of conduct appropriate to any coherent and peaceful society. Others, in this grab bag social environment in which everything became everything, sought to forge their own versions of utopia. This is the context within which driving on the roads of Jamaica became increasingly anarchic with fatalities ballooning out of all acceptable proportions; when get rich quick lotto and ponzi schemes came to replace ideas of hard work and sacrifice as avenues to economic progress. And, this is the contest within which the Dons and the so-called garrison communities grew and consolidated power, at first as armed protectorates of the political parties and later as quasi-independent fiefdoms, threatening as in the case of Tivoli - the most well-developed of the genre - to hoist at any moment their own flag of complete independence. Let us for a second, however, pause and disabuse ourselves of one notion that has emerged in the last few years and has come back in the wake of the occupation of Tivoli: this is the concept of the pristine garrison, in which there are better modalities of peace, social welfare and justice than those to be found in the wider society. Let us remind ourselves, that peace in the garrison is

ensured by the absolute and unquestioned authority of the Don; that there is no court of appeal and that there are no organisations like Jamaicans for justice to argue to the court of public opinion and modify the judgement of the Don once he has made his decision. Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. The garrison comes close to the notion of absolute power as imagined by Lord Acton in his famous remark and its corruption is therefore of equal proportion.

However, an equally fallacious notion needs to be disabused and that is the utterly myopic one that the military occupation of Tivoli and that of other garrisons and garrison communities, the purging of the dons and the arrest of all outstanding criminals will somehow solve the problems of crime, violence and social decay that have been facing us for the past four decades. While vigorous police intervention, of course exercised within the bounds of the law, is an inevitable and critical part of any solution to the present impasse, the real answer to a social and political crisis has to be found, I suggest, in social and political solutions.

I suggest the following as a series of arguments and pointers that, I would like to think, influenced by the spirit of Norman Manley's thought and work, might lead in the direction of a solution.

*The overwhelming failure of the politics of the last fifty years has been **the inability to bridge the gap between the Two Jamaicas**, between the Haves and Have Nots, to use the phrase popularised by former Prime Minister Edward Seaga.

*This has been accompanied by the **failure to find a robust strategy for growth of the Jamaican economy** over the same time period. Jamaica ranks close to the bottom of Caribbean countries in this regard.

* These two apparently discrete phenomena are in fact closely related. **The failure to grow is a direct product of the failure to create a vibrant rural economy** that would provide a robust source of demand for urban production and would stanch the flow of impoverished rural dwellers into the city. Urban unemployment has in turn been the fertile ground for violence

which has encouraged emigration of the skilled and talented and discouraged further investment.

*Economic failures associated with inequality and low growth have been closely accompanied by forms of **political and social marginalisation**. While Jamaican party politics is in many respects a robust and rambunctious affair in which wide cross sections of the people participate, particularly at election time, the efficacy of politics as a vehicle for social improvement has diminished over time. Thus the meaning of politics as it emerged after 1944 under Norman Manley and Bustamante, as a vehicle for social mobility and improvement has been exhausted of its content. Politics to use the powerful Rastafarian phrase has become **'politricks'** - an empty game of jockeying for power and sloganeering which inevitably betrays or at best, disappoints.

*If the above theses are correct, then the short and mid-term solutions to Jamaica's dire problems must lie in policies and approaches that lead to greater inclusiveness of the marginalized at both the economic and political levels, accompanied by policies geared towards a model of balanced economic growth that would not exacerbate inequality, either in the social sense, or between urban and rural communities.

* As a first proposal, at the economic level, I suggest a rethink of the old, but still important notion of land reform. The Government of Jamaica is the largest landowner and it is the proprietor of vast acreages of sugar lands. Recently there has been discussion as to what to do with these lands as we consider whether to keep them in sugar for ethanol production or for the production of molasses for our still viable rum industry. Both of these are of course legitimate concerns, but I put a third on the table. I suggest that Government should consider the divestment of a significant part of its fertile sugar 'bottom' lands to the citizens of rural Jamaica, based on principles of transparency, equity and the continued employment of the land in agricultural production. Such an approach would not only address the structural inequalities of the last two hundred years, but could potentially release a wellspring of hidden collateral wealth and empower rural Jamaicans. It would be very close to the successful models employed by South Korea, Taiwan and Japan before them that released rural wealth and allowed urban

economic development to proceed at a pace. There are many pitfalls to such an approach and it would have to be considered very carefully; but I suggest that we have exhausted most of our other options. At any rate, no strategy of development, whether based on services, tourism, sports, entertainment or even (though unlikely) industry, can proceed without a determined attempt to end rural poverty, which will undermine everything else if it is not addressed.

*Second, at the political level. There has been much debate at what needs to be done politically and much of it is completely true. We need better corruption legislation like the new 'whistleblower' measures as indeed we need new more determined crime fighting laws, though always with due care that we don't undermine the very rule of law that we seek to enforce. There is also the need for an entire series of checks and balances on the awesome power possessed by Prime Ministers and cabinets in general via various measures some of which have been in the public domain for thirty years or more. Where recent discussions have failed to go, however, is in the direction of what is commonly considered as **'deeper democracy'**. One well-known measure for, instance, associated with a deeper democracy is the concept of **recalling elected officials** who fail to perform or who fail to live up to promises given blithely at election time. While it is not a panacea, I suggest that a carefully worked out policy of recalling recalcitrant MPs who fail to perform would subtly shift the balance between the member of Parliament and his constituents in such a way as to return him/her to the position of servant of the people instead of the contrary position which is often the case. I mention one further proposal here worthy of consideration. Years ago **Carl Stone proposed a constituency committee** that would require constitutionally representatives of both parties and members of citizens groups within the constituency. This body duly composed and transparent in its operation, would manage and dispense all contracts, facilities and perhaps even schools and other agencies at the constituency level, taking this level of government entirely out of partisan control and returning it to the people.

*Most importantly from the perspective of a deeper democracy, I suggest that we should consider the convening of a Constituent Assembly of the Jamaican People at Home and Abroad. No strategy, whether it includes any of the points mentioned here, or whether it decides that it

is business as usual, should be allowed to proceed without a conscious attempt to convene the Jamaican people and consult with them as to the future of the nation. One of the failures of the Jamaican constitutional arrangements was that of not attempting to solicit public opinion on the final document. True, there had been raging debate from the Forties, much of it generated by Norman Manley and the PNP as the country moved in fits and starts on the road to self-Government. Yet the final document was never signed and sealed by the Jamaican people. This historical oversight needs to be corrected. A **Constituent Assembly of the Jamaican People at Home and Abroad** would not be a single event, but a series of debates and encounters that would sample the opinion of people on a wide variety of constitutional matters, rights, economic and social directions and last but not least, values. There is an entire cohort of young people, now approaching maturity, which has grown up without the values, ethical standards and guidance of parents, family, mentors and community. A conversation surrounding values and ethics that would discuss the very ideas of right and wrong and why they are of value would be a central feature of the Constituent Assembly. It would ideally establish consensus around a wide range of broad matters that would not tie successive governments to any single set of policies, but would provide a compass and guide around which all Jamaicans could unite. It would be the worthy successor to the pact of 1944 and would allow the nation to proceed deep into the Twenty First Century with a clear sense of direction and purpose. Without such a process, associated with a deepening democracy and an inclusion of the entire family of Jamaica within its ambit, the future is likely to be a futile and disastrous one of trying to navigate the rocky waters of globalization, without a compass, a rudder or a captain.

In perhaps his most famous words given as his farewell address as leader of the People's National Party in September 1969, Norman Manley said:

> I say that the mission of my generation was to win self-government for Jamaica. To win political power which is the final mission for the black masses of the country from which I spring. I am proud to stand here today and say to you who fought that fight with me, say it with gladness and with pride, ;Mission Accomplished for my generation'.

> And what is the mission of the generation, the generation that succeeds me now I quit my leadership? It is to be founded on the work of those who went before. It is to be made up by the use of your political power of tackling the job of reconstructing the social and economic society and life of Jamaica.'

Norman Manley's words resonate with truth some forty one years after he gave this remarkable testament and require little modification for the present generation. Yet, if indeed we might take liberty with the words of our national hero and amend them slightly, I suggest that the charge of the new generation, the Jamaicans under thirty who were born after the watershed year of 1980, is not simply to utilise political power, as Manley suggests, but to transform the very nature of that power in such a way that it might more fully incorporate the marginalised and the poor - the entire nation within its circle, to more meaningfully and completely begin the long-delayed social and economic reconstruction of Jamaica, which is the only hope for a peaceful, prosperous and coherent nation in the Twenty first Century.