A precarious balance: Neoliberalism, crisis management, and the social implosion in Jamaica

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This article examines the process of structural adjustment in Jamaica, and the various ways in which the contradictory tensions embedded in the current order are being contained. Although political, economic and social realities are deeply inequitable and potentially unstable, there are serious barriers to understanding, dialogue, organisation and optimism among the poor, which have produced implosive intra-class dynamics.

Assessing these barriers provides insight into the challenge of re-inspiring alternative imaginations and collective opposition to class structures in Jamaica, as well as in other adjusted and heavily-indebted countries where a neoliberal fatalism is contributing to social atomisation, rather than to mobilisation.

Everyone is cryin’ out for peace
No one is cryin’ out for justice.
Peter Tosh in ‘Equal Rights’

... laws for the constraining of violence are laws of the ghetto, wearing a democratic mask. A society of equality and justice does not live by the gun.
Ras Brown
Introduction

Neoliberal economic reforms obviously contain profound contradictions—the ratcheting-down of workers’ and citizens’ rights, while those of capital are privileged; the cut-back and privatisation of public services; the increasing subjugation of local production possibilities to the globally-determined logic of comparative advantage, with large areas of the world moving from exploitation to outright exclusion; and the disjuncture between the promise of freedom and prosperity, and their manifestation as commodified consumerism and rising inequality. These contradictions are particularly intense, and seemingly volatile, where they are layered upon the huge, colonially- ingrained disparities that exist in most Third World countries.

Not surprisingly, neoliberalism is cultivating frustration around the world, and there are many hopeful cases in which this frustration is being channelled into constructive mobilisations, both in protest and in building alternatives. From the Zapatistas’ creative engagement with civil society from the hills of southern Mexico, to the electoral success of the Workers Party in Brazil, to the strong support for Hugo Chavez amongst the poor in Venezuela’s intense class struggle, to Cuba’s dogged determination to pursue its own course, to the mobilisation of peasants and indigenous peoples to overthrow a neoliberal regime in Bolivia, Latin America and the Caribbean is a region where neoliberalism is facing mounting resistance.3

However, it is often the case that where contradictions are deepening with neoliberal reforms, and where conditions seem, objectively, to be very ripe for active alliances of the oppressed and the excluded, the frustrated energy is instead fuelling a social implosion characterised by spiralling crime, violence, fear, and, perhaps most destructively, anti-social behaviour. Amidst this mess, the struggle of political and economic elites has been to insulate themselves and their interests, keeping things from falling apart economically and struggling to disengage the poor, and to prevent discontent from radicalising and challenging the social order: as reggae icon Peter Tosh put it so plainly, crying out for peace, and not justice.

Jamaica provides a good setting in which to examine the interwoven nature of neoliberal economic reforms and an
unravelling social fabric, and the insidious efforts of elites in government, business, and international financial institutions to preserve the uneasy status quo. After a brief flirtation with social-democratic reforms in the mid-1970s, Jamaica began a prolonged and intense relationship with the IMF and the World Bank. Structural adjustment has since produced an enormous debt burden; exacerbated already huge social inequalities; rendered large sections of the population ‘irrelevant’, with productive sectors like agriculture and manufacturing reeling from trade liberalisation; and created a political climate in which the ideological hegemony of the Washington Consensus—‘there is no alternative’, in Margaret Thatcher’s famous words—is suffocating. The ensuing social implosion is most evident in Kingston, one of the world’s most violent cities.

This paper examines the disjuncture between the deep contradictions of the objective reality in Jamaica, and the adverse subjective conditions for change that exist at present. It points to the importance of deconstructing the practices and impacts of neoliberalism, as well as the processes mitigating the ingrained contradictory tensions: not only the way enclaves of privilege are being fortified in a concrete sense, but also how oppositional responses and imaginations are being manipulated and stifled.

In Jamaica, this involves an examination of the ‘crisis-management’ mode of economic planning; the hardening and atomisation of social ethics; the factionalisation of ghetto communities, by both politics and the drug trade; the rise of a ‘security complex’ (i.e. the militarisation of police forces and the proliferation of private security enterprises); and the derogatory, migration-aspiring youth culture.

For, while the current neoliberal political economic order is deeply unstable on many levels, there are serious barriers to understanding, dialogue, organisation, and optimism amongst the poor, which must be taken seriously in order for scholars and activists to contribute to a relevant praxis.

In order to establish the broader relevance of the Jamaican case, and explore the ways in which the social fallout from neoliberal economic reforms is being contained in Jamaica, it is necessary to review Jamaica’s experience with structural adjustment and the ensuing mountain of debt and collapse of the productive economy.
Sold and ‘delivered’ to the IMF

We are not for sale. We know where we are going.
Jamaican Prime Minister Michael Manley, January 1977

Manley made this caustic jab at US interventionism shortly after winning a strong electoral mandate under the banner of ‘democratic socialism’ in 1976, although his vision—which did not threaten property rights or the functioning of markets—was better described by another popular slogan at the time, portraying a ‘Third Path’ between the ideological poles of the Caribbean: socialist Cuba and free-market Puerto Rico. At the time, Jamaica’s economy was struggling, with the cost of imports having trebled since the oil-price shock of 1972-73, but Manley’s People’s National Party (PNP) rebuffed an International Monetary Fund (IMF) offer for balance-of-payments support.

Instead, he commissioned a plan to coordinate his government’s leftist but previously fragmented policies, which had included: a sharp increase on the bauxite export levy for the foreign corporations controlling the industry; improved workers’ rights and wage levels; strategic nationalisations; the establishment of a marketing agency and the promotion of modest land distribution for peasant farmers; support for the formation of worker cooperatives in the sugar industry; the elimination of fees for secondary-school education; the introduction of a national literacy campaign and skills training programmes; increased state support for low-income housing; and an independent foreign policy that involved prominent roles in the Group of 77, the Non-Aligned Movement, and in the formation of the International Bauxite Association, as well as a deepening friendship with Cuba. Manley’s resolve and ideological commitment appeared firm as he noted to parliament in early 1977 that ‘the Jamaican experience demonstrates that capitalist strategies of political and economic management cannot solve the basic problems of our people. And indeed, it is clear that the present economic crisis is caused by capitalism.’

But this crisis was squeezing Jamaica ever tighter. As occurred in much of the non-oil-producing Third World, the vulnerability of Jamaica’s narrow, dependent economy (dominated by bauxite, tourism, and sugar) was exposed by the onset of global recession in the 1970s, which triggered a rising trade imbalance. Although the reforms began to
improve social conditions for the poor, Manley’s government had no short-term solution for its payments shortfalls. Borrowing on private overseas markets merely deferred some of the pressure on Jamaica’s foreign exchange resources, and caused gross external debt to increase by 150 per cent between 1973 and 1976 (Thomas, 1988). Further, increased economic regulation was creating a spiral of declining confidence, shrinking investment, and capital flight.

The economic problems of the 1970s had an independent momentum, but the political changes—both real and feared—exacerbated them. Manley’s friendship with Fidel Castro and his non-aligned foreign policy had made Jamaica a significant Cold War theatre, and the US, determined to prevent Cuba from gaining a regional ally, began to conduct covert destabilisation operations in Jamaica after 1974 (the recent US-backed coup in Chile, at the time, made this especially ominous). Rising energy costs drained foreign exchange and reduced the competitiveness of an import-dependent manufacturing sector, while bauxite production contracted as the foreign corporations responded to both the new levy and falling global prices. Tourism proved extremely vulnerable to heavy US propaganda, and earnings fell by half shortly after 1974. Reactionary Jamaican elites, incensed with Manley’s economic policies and foreign posturing, either fled or sent their capital abroad, further depressing production and investment and increasing the need for borrowing. Responding to the migration of propertied elites and professionals, Manley noted with anger and dismay that there were ‘five flights a day to Miami’ for those who would not make sacrifices to build a new Jamaica—rhetoric that further fanned resentment within the elites. While some businesses simply closed as owners left, others conspired to sabotage the reforms by withdrawing basic goods, and this hoarding by merchants led to scarcity amidst rising expectations.

In the face of this crisis, Manley’s avowed ideological conviction wavered, and he rejected the plan he had commissioned (completed in March), and began negotiating with the IMF for payments support in April. While the PNP thought that it had managed to secure relatively generous terms it was, according to Bartilow (1997: 18), actually ‘a carefully constructed IMF trap’. In essence, the IMF set ‘unrealistic conditionality targets to encourage the Jamaican government’s non-compliance’, and when these targets were
not met in 1978, the IMF began ‘a very stringent adjustment programme’ (Bartilow 1997: 21). The Extended Fund Facility of 1978 brought demands for price liberalisation, interest-rate adjustments, currency devaluation, and cuts to social spending.

But the PNP’s swift turn into the IMF’s embrace did little to either reverse the economic decline or placate the elite opposition. With only the modest success of peasant-oriented agricultural reforms (Weis, 2004a), and a bigger piece of bauxite’s shrinking pie to show for its economic reforms, by 1980 the PNP was presiding over an economy in tatters: cumulative output and per-capita GDP had fallen by 20 per cent and 30 per cent respectively from 1973, and unemployment was at 28 per cent (Levitt, 1996; Robinson, 1994; Beckford & Witter, 1991; Thomas, 1988). Having angered the elites, scared some of the middle classes and disappointed the poor, Manley made a last, desperate turn to the left before the 1980 elections.

But this ‘zig-zag politics’ could not stop the erosion of the PNP’s social base and its internal fracturing (Beckford & Witter, 1991), and economic anxieties were exacerbated by political violence that left over 800 dead prior to the election, most of them in Kingston’s factionalised slums (the culmination of the build-up of party militias that established the rut of single-party or ‘garrison’ constituencies, which will be discussed later).

In the end, the Jamaica Labour Party’s (JLP) Edward Seaga, whose campaign promised ‘Deliverance’ from the menace of socialism, resoundingly defeated Manley. (It is not clear whether Seaga had any direct connection to covert CIA destabilisation efforts or simply benefited from them, but he was derisively tagged Ciaga by opponents.)

As occurred throughout so much of the Third World, IMF and World Bank loan conditions did not solve Jamaica’s payments imbalances but rather set it on the infamous treadmill of debt, Washington-dictated policy reform, rising imbalances and interest costs, and more borrowing with stricter conditions. The forsaken commitments to Jamaica’s poor in the 1970s still permeate a widely-held fatalism that ‘there is no alternative’ to adjustment.
Encircling adjustment

Seaga enthusiastically blazed the economic path on which Manley had reluctantly started out in 1977. In addition to more IMF stabilisation loans, three World Bank Structural Adjustment Loans (SALs) were signed between 1982-84, and open markets, foreign investment and external prescriptions were proclaimed the remedy for export competitiveness, payments imbalances, capital flight and economic growth. IMF-World Bank conditions loosened controls on investment, liberalised interest and exchange rates (leading to interest-rate hikes and currency devaluation), selectively cut tariffs and non-tariff barriers, dismantled state services and subsidies, reduced real wage levels, and established Export Processing Zones (EPZs) or ‘Free Zones’ (i.e. free of unions, regulations, and much taxation) in Kingston and Montego Bay. In effect, Jamaica was defined by adjustment planners ‘as a supplier of cheap, low-skill labour’ (Anderson & Witter 1994: 23).

In foreign policy, Seaga put Jamaica firmly back in the US’s corner, supporting its invasion of tiny Grenada and severing ties with Cuba. This allegiance produced major support from the US Agency for International Development (USAID)—in 1985, Jamaica received twenty-seven times more per-capita USAID funding than did sub-Saharan Africa (McAfee, 1991). The fact that the US saw Jamaica as a critical arena is further reflected in the warning of a USAID official that ‘the failure of the programme in Jamaica would confirm the view of those in the Caribbean and elsewhere in the Third World that cooperation with the IMF and stimulation of the private sector is a hopeless endeavour’, and in Ronald Reagan’s declaration that ‘free enterprise Jamaica, and not Marxist Cuba, should be the model for Central America in the struggle to overcome poverty and move toward democracy’ (in McAfee, 1991: 126).

The combined injections of loans, aid, and renewed foreign and domestic investment helped kick-start the economy, which experienced rising production and employment levels, reduced inflation, and real positive growth rates in the early 1980s. This was led by a hotel-building boom coupled with soaring tourist arrivals, rapid growth in light manufacturing in the Free Zones (primarily garment sweatshops), commercial real-estate development, and an expanding financial-services sector (which benefited from the increasing cost of capital). On the heels of this fledgling growth, and abetted
by devious politicking—calling a snap election while Manley was abroad, which the PNP boycotted in protest—Seaga secured a second term at the end of 1983.

But by 1984 unemployment was rising, growth had stalled, and Jamaica's payments problems—which had initially precipitated its borrowing—had worsened, as the trade deficit tripled between 1981-83. While adjustment reforms and foreign and repatriated elite capital contributed to the growth of services, especially tourism, there was very little productive investment outside of the sweatshops. Adjustment dramatically reduced state support for agriculture (especially for the peasant sector), but there was not the anticipated surge of private investment to enhance the competitiveness of traditional export crops, or to spur significant growth in non-traditional crops. Non-sweatshop manufacturing also lost out to other investment and began a period of protracted decline.

At the same time as austerity demands and debt servicing requirements were reducing public investment in education, healthcare, low-income housing, infrastructure, and social security—undoing many of the social gains of the 1970s—much of the rising multilateral and private lending was going to finance excessive importation, and elite-dominated consumption (Levitt, 1996; Anderson & Witter, 1994). This dynamic is described well by a peasant farmer from St. Mary: 'When de money grant, from some other country or some banks, like de World Bank or whatsoever ... when it come all de big man dem a do is drive more vehicles, can put in more a-c [air conditioning], an live more comfortable.'

In short, adjustment spurred a shift towards services and a marked decline of the productive economy, and although some new spaces for accumulation were opened up, historic class inequalities widened. New wealth was highly concentrated in the upper echelons of the tourism, mercantile and financial sectors, and the ratio of GDP accruing to foreign interests doubled in the 1980s (Anderson & Witter, 1994). And with economic self-interest now framed as a social good, unabashed displays of materialism re-emerged with a vengeance—seen most visibly in the mansions climbing up Kingston's hillsides, a new fleet of luxury cars, and in the growth of high-end shopping centres.

For the poor, most formal-sector job growth was characterised by low wages and skills, insecurity and minimal protections, with garment sweatshops the most notorious
case. Devaluation, reduced subsidies, increased user fees in
education and healthcare, and inflation (which rose again,
owing to the disjunction between consumer demands and
the productive economy) all increased the costs of living for
the poor (PIOJ/UNDP, 2000; Anderson & Witter, 1994;
Robinson, 1994). The decline of the productive economy
also meant that high levels of unemployment persisted,
producing two major responses. First, nearly 200,000
Jamaicans migrated during the 1980s—about one-twelfth of
the population at the time—mainly to North America.\footnote{9}
Second, there was a rapid growth of the informal sector,
from large-scale drug entrepreneurs to small-scale vendors;
the latter branching out from their traditional role in the
domestic food economy to distribute a range of imported
foods and small-scale manufactured goods.

While the remittance economy later came to play a major
role in financing imports, rising trade deficits and debt
servicing costs still had to be plugged with more loans—the
borrowing treadmill, noted earlier, that was becoming so
familiar to adjusting Third World nations. In all, Jamaica
signed twelve IMF programmes between 1977 and 1995, and
was at one point—at 430 per cent—the IMF’s heaviest
borrower relative to its quota (Robinson, 1994). As Jamaica
repeatedly failed to meet loan-performance conditions, it
effectively fell into ‘trusteeship to the International Financial
Institutions’ (Levitt, 1996: 214), with new loans bringing
more interwoven policy directives (or ‘cross-conditiona-
lities’) from the IMF, World Bank, Inter-American Develop-
ment Bank (IADB), and USAID (Anderson & Witter, 1994).
Examining the ill-health of their patient in 1986, a tripartite
mission of the IMF, World Bank, and USAID blamed Jamaica’s
poor economic performance on the fact that ‘the reform
efforts had been piecemeal’ (Robinson, 1994: 101), and issued
the typical IMF-World Bank prescription: a more intensive
dose of the same medicine. A series of World Bank Sector
Adjustment Loans (SECALS) followed: the Public Enterprise
SECAL (1987); the Trade and Financial SECAL (I: 1987 and II:
1991); the Agricultural SECAL (1990); and the Private Sector
Development Adjustment Loan (1993).

By 1990, Jamaica’s GDP was no larger than it had been a
decade earlier; aggregate economic output was still below
1972 levels; the social and physical infrastructures were
deteriorating; and its total external debt had risen to
US$4.4bn—one of the highest per-capita burdens in the world.
Parrot-time: Manley’s return and the suffocation of ideological debate

Seaga’s support waned with the growing social pain and polarisation of adjustment, and boiling resentment over his egomaniacal approach, and Manley returned to power in 1989 with his populist image refined—earlier ‘idealism’ had given way to ‘realism’. Bound by his earlier failures (and the way in which they were popularly read) and his sense of the geo-political and economic constraints to radicalism (Manley 1987, 1982), Manley assured foreign and domestic capital that adjustment would continue. Debt service also severely constrained economic planning. The ratio of debt service-to-exports had risen from 17 to 50 per cent between 1979-89, which meant, as Manley noted: ‘we’re running a 50-cent economy’.

Three months after his re-election, Manley negotiated another IMF loan, and the PNP’s swift ideological conversion continued as PJ Patterson took over from an ailing Manley in 1992. Neoliberalism was soon championed ‘with the same enthusiasm, untempered by pragmatism or caution, which had characterised the socialist rhetoric of the 1970s’ (Levitt, 1996: 215), and the consistency of the general policy framework from the JLP-1980s to the PNP-1990s is reflected in key policy documents from the respective periods, which all emphasise foreign investment as the engine of export-led growth (GoJ, 1996; GoJ/NPA, 1982). Deepening adjustment in the early 1990s included steeper commitments for liberalisation and the onset of a wave of privatisations, while social priorities, despite incredible and worsening disparities, remained firmly subordinate to—or hazily conflated with—economic strategies determined from abroad.

As Meeks (2001: xiv) put it, adjustment overwhelmed debate about political and economic alternatives, and effectively compressed discussions to tinkering within predetermined bounds: ‘along with the devaluation of the currency went the devaluation of the intellectual endeavour ... if the terms of engagement with the world economy were already set, why waste time exploring failed paradigms when the task at hand was really to make the local economy more efficient and to get the already predetermined essentials “right”? This ideological hegemony has, according to Thomas (1996: 239), eroded ‘the impulse to creativity and
originality in Caribbean thought’, with discussions of paradigms ‘becoming parrot-time’.

The debt mountain and crisis management

Debt service and persistent payment imbalances have significantly shortened the planning horizons throughout much of the Third World, forcing many governments into a crisis-management mode—a reality that Jamaica’s Finance Minister readily conceded (Davies, 2000). Thus, Jamaica’s mountain of debt is the starting-point for discussing current political economic realities and prospects.

Jamaica’s debt-to-GDP ratio declined in the first half of the 1990s (from 134 per cent in 1990), but then rose significantly, owing in large measure to a massive bail-out of the collapsing financial sector.¹⁰ Jamaica’s debt is now roughly 150 per cent of GDP, and since 1999, debt service has consumed roughly 100 per cent of the government’s core budget revenue (i.e. taxes, grants, import duties, proceeds from selling state assets), and more than three-fifths of total expenditure. Interest payments alone are equal to 16 per cent of GDP (World Bank 2003). In other words, state funds once invested in basic services, development programmes and infrastructure are committed to debt service, while further borrowing continues to help finance the decimated state.

One government ‘solution’ has been to diversify its borrowing from different capital markets, in order to extend the maturity profile of its debt portfolio and find cheaper interest rates. To this end, borrowing parameters were relaxed in 2002, with the upper limit more than doubled. In the 1990s, profits from the adjustment-induced privatisations also acted as short-term props for budget shortfalls, though they were justified by IMF–World Bank planners as a means to boosting efficiency (spuriously so, as Jamaica’s Finance Minister pointed out¹¹).

As elsewhere, debt servicing has very uneven outcomes: while the quality of public services deteriorates and fees rise, government payments are increasingly flowing to wealthy Jamaicans through high-yielding government bonds issued in crisis (roughly 60 per cent of Jamaica’s debt is now internally held). With so much expenditure devoted to debt service and a growing, seemingly intractable trade deficit,
debt management will dominate Jamaica’s economic planning into the foreseeable future. Yet while budgets cannot be propped up indefinitely by selling state assets, or by successful forays in international capital markets, there remains no long-term vision for the productive economy.

The gods of Washington and the liberalising imperative

Another important aspect of Washington-directed policy change in Jamaica in the 1990s was the constriction of the state’s ability to intervene in the process of global market integration, with the state’s primary economic function reduced to maintaining the macro-economic stability needed to ensure investor confidence. With macro-economic stability consistently trumpeted as an overarching policy objective by PNP officials, controlling inflation has been dubbed their ‘Holy Grail’, reflected in PJ Patterson’s (2001a) assertion that the attainment of single-digit annual inflation rates (down from as high as 80 per cent per year in 1991) since the mid-1990s was one of his administration’s biggest achievements. The Finance Minister put it even more bluntly, calling ‘the objectives of low inflation and the tight fiscal policy ... non-negotiable imperatives for the future’ (Davies, 2000: 93). One of the key strategies to this end was the deepening of trade liberalisation in the 1990s, including in agriculture, where liberalisation had largely been withheld in the 1980s for fear of its impact on domestic production (Weis, 2004a). The unplanned windfall of rapidly-growing remittances in the 1990s also allowed consumption to increase amidst an ailing productive economy, without stronger inflationary pressures.

Given his party’s ideological conversion, it is not surprising that PJ Patterson (2001b) also cited ‘the reform of our international trade policy’ as a point of pride:

The extensive reforms carried out by the government during the last decade have cemented Jamaica’s integration into the world economy ... we have done more to build the market than any other administration in our history ... Liberalisation, deregulation, privatisation, and the elimination of price controls are fundamental strategies in the building of a market economy. No other government has done more in this regard than we have
... Our action in freeing up Jamaica is recognised internationally.\textsuperscript{12}

In making this claim, the costs of liberalisation were not lost on Patterson, only framed as unavoidable, since 'our economic and social policies must be consistent with what is feasible in the international context'—not only as determined by the IMF and World Bank but also, after 1995, by the World Trade Organisation. While he acknowledged that 'the process has been difficult and there have been dislocations', and expressed empathy for 'those adversely affected' by redundancies and firm closures, these were not seen to outweigh the benefits such as 'a greater range of goods and services at lower prices, improved customer service, and greater efficiency' (Patterson, 2000b). The Planning Institute of Jamaica (PIOJ) also identified 'the intensification of global competition and the implementation of trade liberalisation policies' as the reforms with the 'greatest impact' on Jamaica in the 1990s and, like Patterson, implied that associated dislocations are secondary to other imperatives (PIOJ, 2000).

This vigorous commitment to liberalisation stands in stark contrast to the uncertainty about where Jamaica will find competitive niches in an integrating global economy, especially in light of the devastating impact that rising imports are having on domestic agriculture and manufacturing.

**Swimming with sharks: Trade, competition and production**

While PJ Patterson sought credit for having 'built the market' in Jamaica during the 1990s, the state is better understood as having been abandoned to the market in a way that it has less ability to regulate. A central assumption of such restructuring is that export growth and improved efficiency will follow liberalisation, as capital and labour move into comparatively advantaged sectors. But amid all the theoretical advice about liberalisation, it has been unclear what sectors Jamaica could hope to compete in, apart from becoming a bigger and more competitive tourist destination (Webb, 1997). For instance, a member of the Jamaica Trade and Adjustment Team (formed in 2001 to help prepare for
trade negotiations and find solutions for the productive dilemma) admitted that, with respect to hemispheric trade, ‘we don’t really know what the key openings are, and where they are to be found’ (in Clarke, 2002). Rather, advocacy for trade liberalisation has consistently been draped in abstraction, and ignored two key questions: what if there are no significant productive comparative advantages in the global marketplace for a small nation like Jamaica? And how will small-scale, domestically-oriented producers fare in opened markets, amid highly uneven global competition?

The Jamaica Human Development Report described the answer so far, noting how liberalisation has produced a ‘massive growth of imports’ that ‘has reduced the incomes of small farmers and contributed to retrenchment of workers in the manufacturing sector’, while ‘export growth has remained sluggish, resulting in widening trade deficits’. So ‘instead of stimulating exports, trade liberalisation has induced a shift from production to trading, as inefficient domestic producers have reduced production and shifted to distribution of imported goods’ (UNDP/PFOJ, 2000: 11). From 1980 to 1990 to 2000, Jamaica’s trade deficit exploded from US$216m to US$785m to US$1907m (SIOJ, 2000), and has since topped US$2bn, with exports equalling only 40 per cent of imports.

The director of the Jamaica Chamber of Commerce described this steadily-deteriorating trade balance as ‘absolutely frightening’, and framed the cause bluntly: ‘the problem is that the country is not producing’ (in Green, 2002). In other words, Jamaica is fast becoming a ‘consuming appendage’ of the US corporate economy (Witter, 2000), with its consumption largely sustained by a servile tourism product, bauxite exports, the drug trade, remittances, and the borrowing treadmill. The economic or social sustainability of this foundation remains to be seen.

Tourism now accounts for nearly half of Jamaica’s gross, non-remittance foreign exchange inflows. However, local elites and foreign interests dominate the profits, while most jobs are low-paid and low-skilled. Exuberant growth projections regularly ignore the social costs of the prevailing model and the level of market saturation, and downplay its vulnerability to the negative publicity associated with Jamaica’s growing reputation for violence and to shocks in the international system.
Bauxite remains Jamaica’s largest export, and forty years of recoverable reserves remain. The sector is a minute employer though, and competitive pressures recently led the state to reduce its earnings in the hopes of encouraging new technological investment from the corporations with which it is partnered (joint ownership is rooted in the policy changes of the 1970s). Environmental and peasant land-access problems related to the sector have long received little attention.

The most dynamic export growth has been in illicit drugs. Marijuana production and export expanded in the 1980s, but this was overshadowed by cocaine transit in the 1990s. Recent government estimates are that 110 metric tonnes of cocaine move through Jamaica every year (The Jamaica Gleaner, 2004), making it one of the largest drug transhipment points in the region for Colombian cartels, and it is also a significant centre for money-laundering. While its economic contribution is difficult to measure, there is a widespread perception that the drug trade ‘explains much of the affluence in the context of an economy that registered no growth for 10 years’ (The Jamaica Gleaner, 2002b).

Jamaica’s other increasingly profitable export is its people. With the largest per-capita remittance economy in Latin America and the Caribbean, and migration continuing to act as a critical valve for unemployment, an IDB official suggested that ‘Jamaica has shifted from an agricultural-exporting nation to a labour-exporting country’ (in Beers, 2002). Jamaica’s remittance earnings grew roughly fivefold in the 1990s, and topped tourism as the largest net source of foreign exchange in the economy. This growth poses challenging new questions for the future, economically and culturally—discussed below—especially since remitted income has been concentrated in rising import consumption, rather than improving domestic savings or productive investment.

As noted, Jamaica’s productive economy has been very negatively affected by liberalisation. Agriculture remains a vital sponge for labour, providing more jobs than any other sector (22 per cent of the workforce), but both the plantation and peasant sectors are in crisis. Traditional plantation exports are on the brink of collapse given WTO rulings that are already phasing out decades-old preferential European markets for bananas, and which threaten to undermine preferential European markets for sugar, on which these industries have
been dependent. At the same time, the peasantry’s historic spatial marginality has been compounded; first, by the decimation of small-farm support programmes in the 1980s; and second, by a liberalisation-induced flood of food imports, which more than doubled in the 1990s (Weis, 2004a).

Jamaica’s manufacturing sector has also been hurt by rising imports as well as growing security costs, which have added to old problems of high energy costs, scale limitations and inadequate investment. The sector has experienced negative growth and extensive redundancies since the mid-1990s, with the starkest case being the sweatshop sector. Free Zones are coming to resemble ghost towns. Employment fell by half between 1995 and 2000, with firms leaving to exploit cheaper or ‘more docile’ labour in Central America and Asia.16

In short, adjustment and liberalisation have induced a dramatic shift towards services—increasing by 9.4 per cent, as a proportion of GDP, in the second half of the 1990s alone (PIOJ, 2000)—while Jamaica’s economy has ‘remained fragile, un-diversified, and non-competitive’ (PIOJ/UNDP, 2000: 10).

Further, the assumption that liberalisation would bring productive investments, spurring efficiency gains and the establishment of competitive niches, has largely rung hollow. Part of the reason for the lack of productive investment is related to the historically risk-averse and short-term horizon of the Jamaican bourgeoisie, which has long preferred trade over productive activity (Levitt, 1996). Investment and risk-taking in productive activities have also been discouraged by rising violence and crime (Witter, 2000), and by the high cost of capital, as high interest rates (connected to government efforts to contain inflation) and the debt crisis (in particular, the government’s need to diversify its debt portfolio by floating bonds) favour investment in financial assets, especially when these come in the form of secure, high-yielding government bonds.

The decline of production is exacerbating Jamaica’s inability to service debt and reduce persistently high unemployment levels (officially estimated at 15-16 per cent, though the large informal sector and loose definitions of employment mean it could easily be double that), which are particularly high for youth (ADA, 1999).

The World Bank (2003) recently acknowledged the link between Jamaica’s reduced competitiveness and productivity
and its debt and job-creation problems. But rather than considering how its prescribed policies have contributed to this, a familiar set of recommendations was laid out, such as reducing public-sector wages, privatising remaining public utilities, improving cost recovery for basic services, enhancing transparency, and systematising anti-crime efforts (couched in the warm and fuzzy discourse of being based on social dialogue and consensus-building, so that stakeholders would ‘take ownership’ of the reforms).

Meanwhile, the shortage of opportunities continues to combine with massive income disparities and the erosion of public investment in housing, infrastructure, health, and education, to fuel increasing disorder.

**The social implosion**

... today’s disorder [is not] channelled through political processes informed by a vision of the future which is collectively shared. Rather, it is the spontaneous result of individualistic anti-social behaviour sanctioned by the morality of the free market that is more aptly described as a social implosion.

(Michael Witter and Louis Lindsay, 1996: xxii)

There has long been a dialectic of cooperation and individualism in Jamaica, rooted in the plantation economy and the evolution of the post-Emancipation peasantry (Beckford, 1972; Weis, 2003). While the emergent peasantry of ex-slaves developed strong cooperative traditions as they carved out farms, roads and villages in the rugged interior after 1838, with virtually no support from the colonial state, the violent and hierarchical plantation system fomented a series of pervasive social pathologies, identified by Jamaican scholar George Beckford. These include such things as: the ‘strong individualism that contributes more to clashes of interest in interpersonal relations than to co-operative activity’; the ‘exploitative authoritarian tradition that prevents co-operative decision-making and associative productive effort’; and the tendency for the masses to emulate the ethics of those higher in the social order and aspire ‘to a “great house” lifestyle with characteristic high propensities to consume imported luxuries and to invest in non-productive assets’ (Beckford, 1972: 216-17).
The triumph of the market in Jamaica, especially when set on top of colonially-embedded scars and the shortage of opportunities, has intensified these social pathologies. That is, in the face of deepening disparities, the hegemonic politics and discourse of adjustment, competitiveness, and global market integration—the ‘suffocation of ideological debate’ discussed earlier—has exacerbated feelings of alienation whereby the social order is conceived as something to individually ascend rather than collectively struggle against. One manifestation of this shifting balance between cooperative and individualistic tendencies is in the widespread breakdown of mutual aid and cooperative labour traditions amongst the peasantry (Weis, 2003).

Anderson and Witter’s (1994: 54) insistence that adjustment has produced an ethos of ‘negativism and futility’ was reflected in a poll that found that ‘two-thirds of Jamaica’s over-18 population see no hope in the country for the island’s young people’, and described a picture of ‘gloom and despair’ and a ‘landscape of hopelessness’ (The Jamaica Observer, 2000a).17 This has been compounded by the lack of countervailing progressive forces opposing Jamaica’s neoliberal transformation.

The PNP’s neoliberal conversion, together with the mutual stranglehold of the PNP and the JLP on the electoral machinery (two recent third-party movements have flopped), have not only stifled alternative imaginations, but the tactics associated with their rivalry are a major impediment to organising in poor communities, as discussed below. Jamaica’s trade union movement has always been tightly connected to party politics,18 and its influence has weakened with the haemorrhage of jobs in the productive economy.

Non-governmental organisations have proliferated to fill various gaps left by the retreating state, such as in healthcare, education, skills training, and community projects, but most are apolitical and focused on charity rather than change, with narrow and short-term targets (often shaped by funding pressures) as opposed to education and organising around the structural foundations of these problems (Tracy, 2001). One prominent citizens’ organisation, Jamaicans for Justice, has emerged to challenge police violence, but it is generally perceived to be ‘uptown’ or middle class, with a limited definition of human rights (sans social justice).

Collectively, churches have the loudest voice in civil society, though most avoid political economic commentary
(ADA, 1999) and, as in other parts of Latin America and the Caribbean, the spread of evangelical Christianity and the wane of liberation theology have encouraged acquiescence with social inequities.

In the absence of constructive channels, frustration and alienation have produced a violent backlash: not against structures of privilege and injustice, as occurred in the past, but with implosive dynamics, increasingly turned 'inward within families, neighbourhoods, communities, and other primary social groups' (Witter, 1996: 192). This anti-social behaviour is a pervasive aspect of life in contemporary Jamaica, especially in Kingston, home to 40 per cent of the population.

Amnesty International (AI) has detailed Jamaica's 'appalling levels of violent crime', including rates of murder and police killing that rank amongst the worst in the world (AI, 2001); the National Security Minister described the struggle against crime as being 'necessary for the salvation of Jamaica' (The Jamaica Gleaner, 2004); and the Director of the PNP stated that 'crime and violence is undermining every aspect of our economy and society, posing a systemic threat to the viability of the society ... it is not an exaggeration to suggest that if we fail to deal with this crisis, Jamaica runs the risk of ultimately disintegrating and being classified as a failed society' (Hughes, 2001).

The poverty of politics and the politics of poverty

Another important reason why so many Jamaicans are currently disengaged from the struggle for social change relates to frustration over the factionalised political system which is premised upon patron-client relations. This system takes its most extreme form in Kingston's warring 'garrison constituencies', heavily-armed ghetto communities that are sharply divided according to party affiliation, though otherwise indistinguishable.

Party allegiance is formed not by ideas but by the 'politics of scarce benefits', as it is known (e.g. housing, grants, construction jobs, infrastructure projects), and is administered in the community by autocratic strongmen known as 'dons', who also direct internal systems of policing, courts, and social welfare. This system had its roots in the 1960s, expanded and became violent in the 1970s, when it briefly took on
ideological overtones, and grew significantly during the 1980s and 1990s after adjustment subsumed meaningful differences between the parties.

Over time, dons have increasingly generated income through both legal businesses and illicit means (e.g. drugs, extortion), but strong party loyalty persists and Kingston remains a political checkerboard, with garrisons routinely voting 100 per cent (or more) one way or the other. These divisions have made ‘Jamaica’s political system simultaneously more volatile and more stable. During elections, competition between the two parties spills onto the streets and gunfights erupt between competing party gangs. This periodic instability is balanced by long-term popular demobilisation, as the poor focus their political energies on acquiring hand-outs and gaining the attention of political bosses’ (Gordon et al., 1997: 192).

This struggle for scarce benefits has diminished the politics of the poor immeasurably, with the discontent of the urban masses destructively conditioned through patronage to emphasise short-term band-aid and obscure structural readings of inequality. This is illustrated by the fact that autocratic dons have an exalted status—a Robin Hood-type image—for many in the garrisons. Frustrations with formal politics are reflected in shrinking voter turnout (from 84 per cent in the 1976 elections to less than 50 per cent in recent elections); in surveys estimating that 60 per cent of Jamaicans want a change in the system of governance (ADA, 1999); in the fact that 80 per cent believe the government is corrupt (The Jamaica Gleaner 2001); and in the popular language—‘tribalism’, ‘politricks’, ‘mobocracy’—that is used to describe the democratic façade.

While politics once provided the major spark to tensions in Kingston’s sweltering ghettos (and still does occasionally, mainly around elections), Jamaica’s position in the drug trade has become a more prescient factor in the rising violence (which is evident, to varying degrees, throughout the Caribbean).

In essence, the gun culture that was given birth to by politicians was taken over and intensified by Colombian drug barons, who found Kingston’s garrisons to be a haven for cocaine trafficking to the US and the UK, with tough, experienced, and entrepreneurial leaders in the dons, and a large supply of foot-soldiers in the masses of uneducated and unskilled young men, frustrated by their lack of resources,
opportunities, and identity (Gunst, 1995). The end result is the poor fighting the poor in complex webs of allegiance, often for meagre shares of this lucrative trade and a chance to climb the ladder, while security forces struggle to maintain order amidst the lawlessness.²⁰

The emerging security complex

One of the hallmarks of neoliberalism in Latin America and the Caribbean has been the rise of repressive state and private institutions to contain mounting social discontent (McSherry, 1998), from the militarisation of police forces to mercenary paramilitaries protecting the interests of large landholders, to ubiquitous armed security guards protecting everything from factories to supermarkets. While the use of force to contain social unrest in poor communities is certainly not new, it is important, as Subcommandante Marcos insists, to appreciate how a security complex is essential to the spread of neoliberalism:

It is not possible for neoliberalism to become the world’s reality without the argument of death served up by institutional and private armies, without the gag served up by prisons, without the blows and assassinations served up by the military and the police. National repression is a necessary premise of the globalisation neoliberalism imposes. The more neoliberalism advances as a global system, the more numerous grow the weapons and the ranks of the armies and national police.

(EZLN, 1996)

This is clearly the case in Jamaica, where disorder has been met with more (and more aggressive) police, more incarcerations, and more gates and guards. One of the most obvious manifestations of this is what Amnesty described as the ‘serious and systematic human rights violations at the hands of the police and security forces’ in Jamaica. According to Amnesty, the pattern of violent tactics, extra-judicial executions and impunity ‘borders on a human rights emergency’²¹, which has led to the perception of police in many Kingston ghettos not ‘as protectors from crime but as a force to be feared, almost akin to an occupying force’. Amnesty has also investigated the miserable, severely
overcrowded prison system, in which inmates face 'cruel, inhumane, and degrading treatment' (AI, 2001).

The fact that the Jamaican government has sought to contain spiralling crime and violence with force, rather than address underlying social and economic problems, is exemplified in recent budgets allocating the Ministry of National Security more than twelve times the funding of the Ministry of Agriculture, though the decline of the rural economy has fuelled urban migration and exacerbated Kingston's social malaise.22

The for-profit security industry has also grown significantly, both in the official private sector and as a major part of the garrison economy, as numerous protection rackets extort money from businesses. The World Bank (2003) estimates that crime costs Jamaica the equivalent of 4 per cent of GDP, while in a survey where managers were asked to rank the factors affecting employment and investment, 92 per cent cited crime as the biggest problem (The Jamaica Gleaner, 2003). Criminality is also deterring investment and production in agriculture: most plantations employ armed guards, and peasant farmers regularly identify crop theft as a major hindrance (Weis, 2003).

The evolution of Jamaica's tourism industry further reflects efforts to contain rather than address social problems (which the nature of the industry has no small part in cultivating, magnifying hierarchies between race, class, and nations). To insulate visitors from pushy merchants, assaults and ugly social disparities, a few Jamaican moguls pioneered the gated compound (or 'all-inclusive') resort model, which now accounts for two-thirds of all hotel rooms in the country. While these gluttonous, Americanised playgrounds for wealthy foreigners dominate the most beautiful coastlines, ordinary Jamaicans have limited public space for recreation.23 The physical segregation between classes within Jamaica is equally stark, with huge, fortified mansions perched on Kingston's hillsides overlooking the squalid slums below.

Amidst the everyday violence of poverty and partition, the often heavy-handed tactics of the police, and the spread of private security guards and gated tourist enclaves and suburban communities, property crime has steadily declined over the past 25 years, at the same time as the rates of violent homicides have risen, a reflection of the implosive dynamics at work. Meanwhile, frustrations over violence and insecurity
have been manipulated in such a way that a majority of
Jamaicans supports hard-line policing and punishment
(including the reactivation of capital punishment). The
government has painted Amnesty as a meddling organisation
opposed to the public good, and Amnesty’s criticisms of
Jamaica’s police force and prison system have had little
resonance with the Jamaican public.

The youth culture and the dream to ‘go foreign’

While circular and long-term migration patterns (or
‘international households’) are an indispensable part of the
Jamaican economy, this culture of migration has a dangerous
flipside that threatens to create new forms of dependence,
not only on the money and the barrels full of consumer
goods being sent back, but at the level of ideas and
aspirations. Many Jamaicans, especially young ones, visualise
their prospects primarily in terms of migration—one recent
poll found that a staggering two-thirds of the population
would migrate immediately if they could (The Jamaica
Observer, 2000b)—and this raises very difficult challenges
for organisation: how do you get people engaged in a
collective struggle for change at home when their future is
seen or hoped to lie abroad?

The dream to ‘go foreign’ is fuelled not only by migratory
patterns but also by the increasing penetration of US media,
which plays a large role in the formation of contemporary
youth culture (Patterson, 2000). The spread of cable and
satellite and widespread splicing has brought US television
shows and movies into the poorest households. A PROJ survey
found that that 95 per cent of children have a television in
their home, more than half have cable or satellite feeds, and
that preteens watch over 14 hours of television a week (The
Jamaica Gleaner, 2002a).

Another rapidly-spreading plague is that of video games,
with small arcades springing up throughout poor
neighbourhoods, equipped with modern micro-units like
PlayStations and XBoxes to provide mind-numbing and
atomising amusement to youth. These games, which often
venerate and desensitise bloodshed, could well romanticise
gun culture much as old Western films did in Kingston’s
garrisons in the 1970s and 1980s (Gunst, 1995).
Compounding the impact of these imports from Hollywood and Nintendo is the fact that the indigenous pop culture of Jamaican youth has lost much of its progressive social message. For the majority of the island’s young people today, reggae has been replaced by dancehall, a genre which has arisen out of the anger and frustration of urban youth, yet which often celebrates greed, consumerism, guns, gangs, homophobia and the objectification of women—a sad degeneration from reggae stars and radical poets like Bob Marley, Peter Tosh, Burning Spear, and Culture.

Conclusion

It is regarded by many that one of the outcomes of several years of implementing structural adjustment policies is the creation of two Jamaicas: one in which a small privileged group has become richer and the other in which the vast majority of its citizens become more impoverished and alienated from the mainstream of decision-making over things that affect their lives.

(Association of Development Agencies 1999: 1)

In the contradiction lies the hope.

(Bertholt Brecht)

While scholarship can help in understanding the social pain and economic illogic of neoliberal reforms, to use it in a way that can feed the struggle for social change requires attention to the different ways in which contradictory seams are being held together. The fact that a fraying social fabric is not necessarily inclined to tear along those seams is plainly seen in Jamaica, where the incredible disparities between privilege and poverty, power and subjection, and hope and opportunity are not tending to produce solidarity and united responses to injustice.

The tone of this article reflects the negative subjective conditions for social change existing in Jamaica at present, including: the demoralising political discourse, where ‘socialism’ (which never was) is widely interpreted to have failed, and policy initiative to have shifted from Kingston to Washington; the crisis-management mode of economic planning, which has suffocated discussions of real alternatives; the rise of an aggressive individualism and of implosive,
often violent, social behaviours; the politics of patronage and its related extremes, fanatical loyalty, or apathy and avoidance; the penetration of the drug economy into the vacuum of unemployment and despair; the ubiquity of segregating and repressive social forms; and the impact of foreign-centred cultural aspirations. But this is not intended to be a fatalistic exercise—rather, it is inspired by the hope that is always latent in contradictions, as Brecht insisted. Where this hope is obscured, as in Jamaica today, it is necessary to examine the ways in which constructive dialogue and organisation amongst the poor are being stunted, so that new forms of popular education can be more effective.

For the task of rebuilding a radical, relevant pedagogy, there can be no better model than that of Walter Rodney, the great Guyanese historian who, while lecturing at the University of the West Indies in Jamaica in the late-1960s, engaged in a process of mutual education in the Kingston ghettos, teaching history and political economy while learning from the struggles of the people there (Rodney, 1969; Alpers & Fontaine, 1982). Rodney’s ‘groundings’ were so resonant and so threatening to the governing JLP at the time that it revoked his work visa, which incited the ‘Rodney riots’ (this uprising, in turn, contributed to the radicalising social currents that emboldened Manley’s populism and helped to push the PNP leftward in the early 1970s). Rodney’s approach also contributed to the trajectory of cultural expressions emerging out of the ghettos at the time, as ska evolved into reggae, and artists famously began emphasising issues of historical dispossession, racism, social injustice and war. The enormous influence of dancehall culture on Jamaican youth today, and the fact that most artists come from ghetto communities, highlights the need and possibilities for educators to convey theoretically-informed ideas that can help disaffected youth to analyse and explain their problems in new ways.

Grounded educators could target high schools, neighbourhood associations, unions, and socially-inclined churches and non-governmental organisations (where they can be found) in poor communities. Here, efforts must be made to shift the focus away from party divisions in analyses of political economic problems, as a step towards overcoming the fierce rivalry that still so debilitating the objective interpretation of material conditions in these areas. This could, admittedly, be an exceptionally touchy (and hence
dangerous) subject in places, so the emphasis must be on class, and on the puppeteers behind the puppets, internally and externally. One possible inroad to discussions about class, economic policy, state repression and solidarity is through the issue of police violence, given widespread fears and hostility over this in poor urban communities (it is also a common theme in dancehall lyrics). Efforts could also be made to bring social content into the ‘uptown’-led movement against police violence, Jamaicans for Justice, which has a significant media profile. Movies and television cannot be ignored, as they have a powerful and growing place in Jamaican households, and the documentary film *Life and Debt* (www.lifeanddebt.org) provides one useful example of how political and economic issues can be introduced in creative ways.

Another critical opening for education and organising—and one that could provide a foundation for constructing economic alternatives—is the issue of land. Jamaica’s landscape continues to bear the scars of its colonial past, with 3 per cent of landholders controlling more than three-fifths of all land, and the peasantry marginalised to small, hilly plots. But with the deepening crisis of plantation production there is an historic opportunity to transform the flat, fertile coastal plains into small-producer models, in accordance with peasant conceptions of how farming could be reinvigorated.

With the current political context and discourse as it is, there is a tactical need to build a case for land reform in multiple ways, so that it might resonate with people across the political spectrum (Weis, 2004b). Related to this is the argument for the reclamation of food sovereignty and increased market protection against dislocating import competition (Weis, 2004a). In order to promote such initiatives, the advice of Marx in an 1864 letter to Engels should be heeded: ‘Time is necessary before the revived movement can permit itself the old audacious language. The need of the moment is: bold in matter, but mild in manner.’ The ultimate hope is that if a land-reform programme could be initiated, it would have the potential to help unleash alternative imaginations from their current shackles.25
Notes


2. This was very evident in a hemispheric summit in Monterrey, Mexico in January 2004, where Latin American heads of state together told George Bush that US-backed policies had failed their nations, capped by Lula’s assertion that “after the 1980s—the so-called lost decade—the ‘90s was a decade of despair ... It was a perverse model that wrongly separated the economic from the social, put stability against growth and separated responsibility and justice. Economic stability turned its back on social justice’ (Reuters, 2004).

3. Manley was specifically referring to US attempts to purchase his denunciation of Cuba’s role in Angola, in return for US development aid.

4. The authors took Manley’s professed commitment to socialism seriously, and produced a three-volume plan that included a philosophical-historical introduction and synthesis (Pathways to Progress: The People’s Plan, vol. i); integrated sectoral plans aimed at restructuring and enhancing production in the short term (The Emergency Production Plan, vol. ii); and an abridged collection of the more than 10,000 public suggestions that were received (The Voice of the People, vol. iii). The core of the plan was volume ii, which framed the economic crisis of the time in terms of both its immediate (termed ‘extrinsic’) and structural (or ‘intrinsic’) causes. The immediate problems, such as Jamaica’s growing payments imbalance, were described as being ‘mere manifestations and effects of deeper causes residing in the very heart of the economy and determining its motion and rhythm’: the deeper problem was Jamaica’s ‘dependent capitalist mode of production’ (vol. ii, ch. 1, p. 2). The plan sought to address the immediate causes in ways that would move the economy towards structural change. Since the plan was the property of a government that soon had no desire to have it accessible, it was buried on government shelves. However, following its rejection, the authors took Pathways to Progress and had it published by a local printing house (Beckford et al., 1980). The Emergency Production Plan was never made public, and only a handful of copies remains. Deep gratitude goes to Michael Witter, one of the Plan’s co-authors, for the loan of a rare copy of this remarkable document (GoJ, 1977).

5. This included increased regulation of imports to reduce foreign exchange demands and foster import substitution, and of prices, to improve access to basic goods and services
for the poor and contain inflation. However, tax increases were rejected, despite the growing fiscal deficit (Anderson & Witter, 1994).

6. The US also established the Caribbean Basin Initiative in 1983 to give preferential market access to some key exports from its Cold War allies in the region, including Jamaica.

7. Weis (2004a) examines the process and outcomes of agricultural adjustment in detail.

8. This quote comes from a series of interviews with peasant farmers conducted by the author in 2001 and 2002.


10. The Financial Sector Adjustment Company (FINSAC) was established in 1997 to bail out, rehabilitate, and ultimately divest insolvent financial companies, and began issuing bonds to cover the high cost of the acquired debts. In addition, the government took out further external debt at lower interest rates from the IADB to assist with the rehabilitation, and brought in IMF advisors. Although FINSAC saved depositors large and small, it also effectively: socialised the costs of the financial sector’s mistakes, while most principal figures behind the crisis emerged unscathed; encouraged elites to invest in high-yielding FINSAC bonds, producing high-cost debt service; and allowed foreign investors to swoop in on the ‘fire sale’ of cheap assets.

11. He stated that ‘the “Washington Consensus” ... led many countries, including Jamaica, to embark on a privatisation timetable without any careful analysis as to whether those to whom we were selling assets were capable of running these institutions, or indeed running them any better than the state had’, and admitted that ‘Jamaica has several unfortunate examples of failed privatisation schemes’ (Davies, 2000: 94).

12. This was a reference to Jamaica’s improved credit rating from the IMF, World Bank, IADB and private credit assessment agencies, and continued IMF endorsement of Jamaica’s macroeconomic policies.

13. In an International Narcotics Control Strategy Report, the US State Department claimed that Colombian narco command-and-control centres have been located in Jamaica, referring to this as the ‘Colombianisation’ of Jamaica (The Jamaica Gleaner, 2004).

14. This reflects a broader yet under-recognised reality in Latin America and the Caribbean: that the drug economy has been an implicit crutch for ‘US-supported free market and liberal economic programs’, acting ‘as a kind of social safety
net, providing jobs for those displaced by liberalisation', while the laundered drugs money that circulates within legal economies provides some 'cushion for nations otherwise battered by the region’s recurrent economic crises' (Kawell, 2002: 11).

15. In recent years, the US and the UK have raided significant numbers of Jamaican teachers and nurses, impoverishing Jamaica's education and healthcare systems and leading to proposals, including from PJ Patterson, to expand training and 'export' in these professions (The Jamaica Observer, 2003; Patterson, 2000).

16. Government incentives to replace these losses with call centres for North American businesses have brought far fewer jobs than anticipated, and there are indications that the US may seek to prevent call centres from moving offshore, as the garment sector did in the 1980s.

17. This sort of alienation extends to a regional level, according to Ferguson (2000: 188), who noted how the dominance of the market and the decline of the state in the Caribbean have produced a 'popular perception, particularly among the youth, that we are not in control, that we have no role in defining our reality'.

18. An island-wide worker uprising in 1938 marks the start of Jamaica's modern political history, as it gave birth to both parties and labour unions. The intertwining and bourgeois 'hijacking' of these movements played a critical role in the endurance of the class structure before and after Independence.

19. The original and most famous garrison is Tivoli Gardens, in the heart of Seaga's West Kingston constituency. Tivoli originated in the 1960s, when the ruling JLP demolished the Back O' Wall slum and replaced it with a large housing scheme filled with party supporters, converting a closely-contested seat into a JLP stronghold.

20. Despite this ghettoised warfare, targeted against increasingly autonomous dons and their militias, it is widely believed that the drug trade is corrupting large segments of public officialdom and law enforcement authorities. Even the National Security Minister admitted that the drug trade is contributing 'to the corruption of critical elements in our social institutions' (The Jamaica Gleaner, 2004).

21. Amnesty noted that 'the rate of lethal police shootings in Jamaica is one of the highest in the world. An average of 140 people per annum have been shot and killed, according to official statistics, for the last 10 years, in a country whose population is only 2.6 million'. They have also documented how extra-judicial killings are typically ascribed to 'victim-initiated shoot-outs', which witnesses commonly dispute,
and how police officers avoid prosecution. Murders of police officers have averaged one-tenth of the level of the fatal shootings by police (AI, 2001).

22. The Ministry of National Security, along with the Ministries of Finance and Tourism, are regarded as the most important and prestigious ministerial portfolios in the cabinet.

23. Nevertheless, it is impossible to shield the tourist industry from bigger social convulsions, which came into sharp focus following Kingston’s July 2001 riots (when intense gun battles shut down the city for three days, making the headlines on CNN and the BBC) and the September 11 attacks on the US; the subsequent high season incurred a 30 percent decline in revenues from the previous year. Another telling reflection of the government’s crisis-management approach is that the bulk of state funds released after the riots went to an international advertising campaign to rehabilitate Jamaica’s image as a tourist destination, rather than to the devastated ghetto communities.

24. An extreme case of this dependence is the new phenomenon of youth-headed households dependent upon Western Union transfers and barrels sent from abroad.

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