

B/W Manley, Michael

Michael Manley

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- a profile

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For Caricom Week

Michael Norman Manley could, with some amount of justification, claim that he was destined for leadership. Born December 10, 1924, he was the son of **Norman Washington Manley**, one of Jamaica's national heroes and the architect of its political independence, and **Edna Manley** (nee Swithenbank), an internationally famous sculptress, patron of young artists and one of the leaders of the nationalist movement.

"You could not grow up in a home such as ours, with such a father and such a mother and not be totally consumed by the things around you," Michael Manley once remarked.

In addition, Manley was also a cousin of **Sir Alexander Bustamante**, one of the founders of the trade union movement and Norman's key political rival, as well as to **Sir Donald Sangster**, a former prime minister, and **Hugh Shearer**, another former prime minister and Busta's successor as a trade union leader.

Michael Manley attended Jamaica College, one of the island's most prestigious schools and did a brief stint at McGill University in Canada before signing up with the Royal Canadian Air Force during World War II.

After the war, Manley entered the London School of Economics and studied economics. Having already absorbed the democratic socialist tendencies of his father, Manley in London studied under noted socialist theoretician **Harold Laski**.

He did a brief stint as a freelance journalist with the British Broadcasting Corporation after graduating, and returned to Jamaica in 1951 to a job as associate editor of *Public Opinion*, the weekly mouthpiece of his father's Peoples National Party.

Following a major upheaval in the PNP affiliate, the Trade Union Congress, the party in 1952 formed a new union, the National Workers Union, and Manley joined as an organiser. His skills as a negotiator saw him rising to island supervisor of the NWU and in 1962 Michael's father, then leader of the opposition, appointed him to the senate, thus starting a political career that would end 30 years later.

Five years later, Manley was elected to the house of representatives, although the PNP failed to form the government. At the same time, he was elected a vice president of the PNP.

When Norman Manley retired in 1969, his son won the party leadership in a hard-fought contest and automatically became leader of the opposition. In 1972, Manley led the PNP in a landslide electoral victory and became the first Jamaican prime minister without previous

cabinet experience.

In his first term, Manley pushed a wide range of social programmes, asserted his democratic socialist

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B/A manley, michael



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ideals and soon became known as a champion of the poor. But the private sector was wary of his attempts at increased state control and intervention.

Meanwhile, Manley's recognition of Fidel Castro's regime in Cuba, along with his support for liberation movements in Africa and his espousal of a New International Economic Order to try to give developing countries a fair share won him few friends in Washington.

As noted American linguist and political analyst Noam Chomsky noted in his 1991 work, *Deterring Democracy*, Manley's attempts "to explore the forbidden path of independent development and social reform" led to "the usual hostility from the United States."

Despite this, Manley went to the polls and emerged victorious in 1976, although the election was held under a still-controversial state of emergency and was marred by the first incidents of widespread violence and intimidation.

But the economic squeeze worsened, and Manley was forced to go to the International Monetary Fund for help - it took nearly 20 years for the country to extricate itself from IMF structural adjustment programmes. By the end of the 1970s, support for the government began to wane and the left and right wings of the PNP took to fighting one another. This led one noted local newspaper columnist to begin referring to Manley as "our fading matinee idol".

Manley called elections in October 1980 and was swept out in a humiliating landslide, winning nine seats to the Jamaica Labour Party's 51. The polls were the bloodiest ever: 879 were killed that year, a murder record that was not broken until 1996.

Chomsky notes: "US favourite Edward Seaga ... pledged to put an end to (the) nonsense. Massive aid flowed. USAID spent more on Jamaica than on any other Caribbean programme. Seaga followed all the rules of the much-admired trickle-down approach to aid the poor, introducing austerity measures."

"There was some economic growth," Chomsky continues, "the rest was the usual catastrophe of capitalism including one of the highest per capita foreign debts in the world, collapse of infrastructure and general impoverishment."

Opinion polls indicated the PNP's popularity began

to rise again, quickly, in the 1980s, except for the brief period in 1983 following the Grenada invasion, which Seaga had lobbied for and supported. The JLP called elections to take advantage of the favourable polls. The PNP alleged this violated an agreement to wait on a new voters list, and boycotted the elections.

"Nobody is ever going to persuade me that we would have a surviving, vibrant and fair democratic system if we had contested the 1983 general election," Manley said later.

Manley used the free time to serve as a vice president of Socialist International, write several books and hit the lecture circuit.

When re-elected in 1989, Manley dropped most of the socialist rhetoric of the 70s, but still clung to his belief in increased social welfare and worker participation in the ownership of companies, noting when he announced his retirement three years later that "in the end, I dream of a Jamaica in which every adult is a shareholder in some part of the economy, owning their share because they had the chance to do so and the understanding of why they should ... this is the final aim of democracy in the economic sphere, the final expression of participation."

Chomsky concludes: "Michael Manley, now properly tamed, was granted the right to return to power to administer the ruins, all hope for constructive change having been lost. Manley is 'making all the right noises' to reassure the Bank and foreign investors, Roger Robinson, World Bank senior economist for Jamaica, said in a June 1988 pre-election interview."

"Returned to office, Manley recognised the handwriting on the wall, outdoing Seaga as an enthusiast for free market capitalism," Chomsky states. "The journal of the Private Sector Organisation of Jamaica was much impressed with the new signs of maturity ... the private sector is 'on the verge of collapse', the PSOJ report continues, with schools, health care and other services rapidly declining. But with the 'nonsensical rhetoric of the recent past' abandoned, and privatisation of everything in sight on the way, there is hope."

"Manley has won new respect from the important people now that he has learned to play the role of 'violin president', in Latin American terminology: put up by the left by played by the right," Chomsky wrote two years after Manley was elected. "The conditions of capital flight and foreign pressures-state, private, international economic institutions-have regularly sufficed to bar any other course."

Manley was diagnosed with prostate cancer in 1990, underwent five operations on his prostate and for diverticulitis, and a serious case of pneumonia left him with one-third of his lung capacity gone, forcing the charismatic leader to step down in 1992.

He then served briefly as CARICOM'S ambassador at large and as a consultant. His study on the cruise ship industry and its recommendations for a regional head tax and uniform regulations sparked a war of words between the region's hoteliers and governments, and the powerful Florida Caribbean Cruise Association. Manley also brokered an unsuccessful bid by Cable & Wireless to buy Cuba's state-owned telephone company.

Married five times, Manley was also a champion of regional integration and was one of the signers of the Treaty of Chaguaramas that created the Caribbean Community. He was one of just a handful of people to be invested with the Order of the Caribbean Community (OCC), its highest honour, in 1995.

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