

# ELECTIONS MOST FAIR

JAMAICA HAS a parliamentary system of Government. Every five-years the people of the country have the opportunity of voting for representatives.

In the past there have been election malpractices for instance in the 1974 local Government elections there was the first occasion of over voting, when more than 100 per cent of registered voters voted in a polling division. This occurred in 1976. In 1974 it was West Kingston; in '76 it was West Kingston and South West St. Andrew.

In 1972, although the constitution required that all persons over 21 be allowed to vote, the use of an outdated voters list disfranchised all persons under 23 years of age. In 1976 there were accusations of electoral malpractices. Some of these have been challenged in court. In the past the court has changed electoral results but what all commentators have agreed about the 1976 elections is that the PNP won by a very clear majority.

Some feel the JLP adopted malpractices; some feel the PNP did. There were no doubt cases on both sides. Even those who say the main cheating was on the PNP side have admitted that the PNP would have won and won well. There is therefore one incontestable fact — the present Manley Government is the popularly and constitutionally elected Government of Jamaica according to the system we have. A system of elections which is as free and fair as most countries with electoral systems in the world.

Since 1976 Seaga has been in the op-



position. We all expected him to try his best to come back to power. In doing so the nature of the electoral system was a natural issue. In the past Governments, not least of all the JLP, had manipulated the electoral system to favour themselves and make it difficult for opponents to win. In fact it has been shown that because of the way seats were cut in 1972 the PNP could have won 51 per cent of the votes and still lost the election, something that actually happened to a party in our sister island of Antigua.

## JUST

MANY PEOPLE therefore supported Mr. Seaga's call for electoral reform as a just struggle. In fact the Government supported electoral reform. There were differences, however, over constitutional questions. But the Government put these aside; it made a concession that no other Government has made in Jamaica and few in the history of similar systems have made. It accepted the opposition's proposal on electoral reform. We therefore have in Jamaica a system of

elections which presumably should have the support of Government and opposition alike.

With this new system many people expected that Seaga would have begun to mobilise his party towards the not-too-distant electoral campaign of 1981. Many expected him to be working on selecting candidates and caretakers, building up his party branches, raising money, training scrutineers, canvassers and poll watchers. But this does not seem to be his main strategy at all.

If we go back and reflect on Mr. Seaga's struggle to return to power over the last three years, it is one which seems to place little emphasis on the electoral road. Not for one minute has the Government been allowed to govern. Recently the reactionaries have attacked the Government ministers for leading a demonstration two Mondays ago instead of being at their desks.

But this is a very cynical position. First, they make the country ungovernable by constant disruptive activity, whether through dishonest press campaigns about tourist cancellations or by constant street demonstrations; second, when the Government takes the necessary action of rallying their supporters to prevent the take over of the entire country by disruptive bands, they accuse the Government of not governing. This a very dishonest tactic.

IN CHILE the Government allowed the opposition to take over the streets of the

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country without mobilising its supporters to prevent this. The result was that the country became increasingly ungovernable until the fascists overthrew Allende. The popularly and constitutionally elected Government of Jamaica cannot allow this to happen. Not in the context where Pearnel Charles has already called for the "overthrow or underthrow" of the Government. Not in the context where Vincent Tulloch has called on the public to ignore Dudley Thompson's most useful appeal regarding demonstrations, if in the words of Tulloch, measures for stability and peace are to be "thrown out without even a second glance." The Government has to act based on the full range of its constitutional powers and utilising the support it retains from the majority of well-thinking Jamaicans.

The last three years have shown that the issues at stake are not Estrada, not gas

prices, ~~not the~~ economy, not electoral reform. Seaga himself has admitted that the economy needs a few years to get back on its feet. Why then does he act as he does? If he really believed he had popular support wouldn't he wait for election now that he has the system he proposed? Why then the massive BITU-JLP mobilisations, the demonstrations, the calls on businessmen to close down?

Is it not clear that this man is ruthlessly striving for power? Do his disruptive methods for society and the economy not indicate that he is not a leader for the ordinary working people? We must begin to examine the issues carefully.

It is not just a question of politics and politicians. It is a question as to whether this man will be allowed to manipulate his way to power.