

B/N Manley, Michael

HON. MICHAEL MANLEY
PRIME MINISTER OF JAMAICA - 1972-'80

Michael Norman Manley, was first appointed Prime Minister of Jamaica on March 2, 1972, following the success of the People's National Party in the General Elections held two days earlier on February 29. The P.N.P. won 37 seats and the Jamaica Labour Party 16, in the 53 seat House of Representatives.

He was re-appointed on December 20, 1976 after his party was overwhelmingly returned to power with 47 of the Parliament's 60 seats.

Mr. Manley was born on December 10, 1924. His early years were spent at the family home "Drumblair" in St. Andrew.

His father, the late Rt. Excellent Norman Manley, who died in 1969, is one of Jamaica's five National Heroes. He was the founder of the People's National Party (1939) and was Chief Minister of Jamaica from 1955 to 1959, and Premier from 1959 to 1962.

The Prime Minister's early recollections are of a father who, as a barrister, had become the pre-eminent figure in legal circles; and of a mother, Mrs. Edna Manley, who had made an international name for herself as a sculptor of disturbing originality. Mr. Manley was also a distinguished patron of the Arts.

"I think my earliest recollection," he said recently, "is of playing all sorts of games - such as cricket and football at Drumblair. I also have a vivid early recollection of my mother in her studio doing her carving with the chips flying; and you know, to a growing kid, the chips were more interesting than the carving! Later on, of course, the carving became more interesting than the chips!"

In 1935 - at the age of eleven - he entered Jamaica College (his father's old school.) Unlike his father who had excelled at school as a track athlete, he concentrated on swimming, and as captain, led

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his school to victory in two annual Inter-Scholastic Swimming Championships.

He left Jamaica College in 1942, and in September of the following year, he registered at McGill University in Canada. Two weeks later, however, he joined the Royal Canadian Air Force as a volunteer.

He left this Force in 1945 as a Pilot Officer and returned to Jamaica where he worked for Public Opinion, a weekly newspaper, as sub-editor for six months.

In September of that year, he decided to resume his University education, and chose the London School of Economics and Political Science.

He received an honours Degree (B.Sc.) in Economics in 1949, and did post-graduate work there for a year. During that year, he did a study on "Contemporary Political Developments in the Caribbean."

Mr. Manley remained in London for another year as a free-lance journalist with the British Broadcasting Corporation. For the BBC he did book reviews and was a member of the panel of broadcasters in the weekly "Caribbean News." Among his broadcasts was a series of specially prepared programmes on "comparative Post-War Economic Development in the Caribbean."

In 1951, he accepted an offer to return to Jamaica as associate editor of Public Opinion. The Managing Editor of this newspaper was the late Mr. O. T. Fairclough a foundation member of the People's National Party.

His appointment at Public Opinion began in January, 1952. In that same year, he plunged into the political arena by addressing group meetings of the P.N.P.

In April of that year, also, he started a political column in the newspaper titled "Root of the Matter."

He was elected to the National Executive Council of the P.N.P. in September, 1952.

The National Workers Union, which was founded in April of the same year, also began asking him to address workers' groups. By the following year, he had begun to handle union negotiations.

As he became increasingly involved in Union activities, he made an arrangement with the Public Opinion management which allowed him to undertake part-time trade union and political work. This arrangement continued for some months until he was offered, and accepted, the post of Sugar Supervisor with the N.W.U. in August, 1953.

Mr. Manley's involvement in the Trade Union movement was based on a deeply held belief that "it is indispensable to the progress of the working classes and that the progress of the working classes is indispensable to the progress of the nation."

As Sugar Supervisor of the N.W.U. Mr. Manley set about familiarising himself with the workers' conditions in the industry which were deplorable and were characterized by low wages, negligible fringe benefits, and poor worker-management relations. In his own words, the industry was "literally crying out for tough single-minded, efficient, professional deputation."

His first major triumph as a Trade Unionist came in 1954 when the N.W.U. decisively won polls at Caymanas and Bybrook Estates in the parish of St. Catharine and at the New Yarmouth Estate in Southern Clarendon.

This victory triggered a surge of support for the N.W.U. and within two years, the union had established itself as the only major union in the Industry, apart from the B.I.T.U.

In 1955, Mr. Manley was appointed Island Supervisor and elected First vice-President of the N.W.U.

Under his leadership, the N.W.U. continued to make significant gains for sugar workers, but it was in 1962 that Mr. Manley achieved one of his major triumphs in Trade Unionism during the Goldenburg Commission of Enquiry into the Sugar Industry.

Drawing on years of investigative work, he proved to the Commission that in the five years prior to 1950, the industry had made four million dollars (Jamaican) unreported profits. As a result he won a record settlement of two and a half million dollars (Jamaican) for the workers.

This settlement is still regarded as the definitive example of Trade Union presentation in Jamaica and the papers associated with it have been placed in the archives of the University of the West Indies.

One of the highlights of his early association with the National Workers' Union, was the Alcan strike in 1953. (Alcan - the Aluminium Company of Canada - is one of the Bauxite mining companies operating in Jamaica.)

The N.W.U. asserted the then revolutionary view that wages in the Bauxite Industry should reflect the ability of the Companies to pay. The Union therefore demanded (and won after a decisive strike) a 300% increase in the industry's wages. Previously, bauxite wages were tied to those paid in areas such as Agriculture and Government.

The Alcan strike had two important effects on Trade Unionism in Jamaica. First, its innovative contract negotiations set a blue print for the industry, and set off a growth rate in the N.W.U. which equalled the 1938-41 growth rate of its rival union, the Bustamante Industrial Trade Union.

It is significant that Mr. Manley considers the issues surrounding a protracted 97-day strike at the publicly owned Jamaica Broadcasting Corporation to be of such importance that he regards this as one of the highlights of his union career. The strike revolved around an apparently simple case of dismissal of two employees. In fact, Mr. Manley regards this strike as the battleground on which a more profound issue was at stake, that is, whether an employer had the absolute right to terminate a particular contract of employment "not because a worker was deficient not because the job itself had ceased to exist, but for no reason other than the arbitrary desire of the employer to get rid of the particular worker."

During this strike, Mr. Manley organised a number of demonstrations. Choosing peak hours, Michael Manley and the workers (men and women) together with supporters, lay in the streets at major cross roads and blocked traffic for miles around. They were only removed by mass arrests and by the use of tear gas. The demonstration aroused nation-wide interest in the issues surrounding the strike and support for the case of the workers came from all strata of the society.

A public enquiry into the strike and its cause, vindicated the workers and Mr. Manley and the N.W.U. won nation-wide acclaim for the conduct of the strike.

During the twenty years as an active Trade Unionist, Mr. Manley introduced highly sophisticated contract negotiations which improved the standard of Trade Union practices in Jamaica.

His achievements in Trade Union representation in Jamaica, led to his election as President of the Caribbean Bauxite, Mineworkers and Metal Workers Federation in 1964, an office which he held until 1974.

Appointed a member of the Senate (i.e. the Upper Legislative Body) in 1962, Mr. Manley remained in that post until 1967, avoiding elective politics. He has since explained that this was a deliberate attempt to avoid the charge of trading on his father's name.

"To find one's own identity, involves searching for one's own role in life," he said.

However, events beginning in 1967, propelled him into the active political arena and he found himself "trapped by the forces of history," as he has subsequently described it.

As a result of the decision of the Government (then the Jamaica Labour Party) to increase the number of constituencies, prior to the General Elections, the boundaries of the Central Kingston Constituency - represented by a Vice President of the P.N.P., Mr. Willis O. Isaacs were changed. This altered its electoral character and it was therefore suggested that Mr. Isaacs seek re-election in another constituency.

Shortly before the Elections, Mr. Manley was asked to campaign for election in the constituency vacated by Mr. Isaacs. He accepted the challenge and was elected by the narrow margin of 43 votes. Two years later, in 1969, when his father resigned from the leadership of the People's National Party, he was selected Leader of the Opposition in Parliament. He served in this capacity until his appointment as Prime Minister in 1972.

As Prime Minister, he took office committed to the idea that significant, even controversial, changes would have to be made in Jamaica's domestic and international policies if the nation was to become more than formally independent.

At home, new concepts of self-reliance would have to be encouraged, a new distribution of wealth and property would have to be pursued by legislation if the society was to witness a real transformation of human relationships rather than a mere reformation of existing inequalities.

Abroad, new alliances would have to be sought among other Third World countries ... to complement Jamaica's traditional attachments to Great Britain, Canada and the United States ... if the island was to realise, fully, its economic and cultural potential.

On November 20, 1974, in the House of Representatives, Michael Manley stated the principles and ideology from which his government would continue to serve and which inspired the party from which his government was selected. After two and a half years of close, internal debate, the government and the party were agreed that Jamaica could be developed best, in both human and material terms, only if its legislators and their advisers accepted the philosophy of Democratic Socialism.

Central to this philosophy was what Manley has defined for himself as the "single touchstone" in the morality of politics: the notion of equality.

This egalitarian concept is, perhaps, the most stubborn constant in Michael Manley's perception of the just society. It is certainly the factor in his thinking, his feeling and his policies to which every shade of opinion in his party subscribes and which, by its moral weight, commands the general recognition that the leadership of the party should be his.

It is a stubborn conviction that he has carried and argued, into Jamaica's new foreign policy ... with a success that few could question, and fewer would care to deny.

Mr. Manley has expressed time and again his passionate belief that each person, like each nation, is or should be treated as sovereign. Superior talent, superior power, are mere assets to be used with discrimination.

They impose obligations, not privileged rights of passage from the cradle to the grave.

Since becoming Prime Minister, Mr. Manley has been honoured with the Order of Liberator in Venezuela, Doctor of Laws at Morehouse College in Atlanta, and the Order of Jose Marti in Cuba. (1975)

His first book, The Politics of Change, was published in 1973. In the preface of this book, Mr. Manley expressed the hope that it 'may serve as a point of departure for the realistic discussion of Jamaica's future; her possibilities, problems, her strengths and weaknesses, most importantly, the hopes she may dare to entertain and the ideals to which she must be committed; the dream, the vision by which she must measure her shortcomings.'

His second book A Voice at the Workplace dealing with his Trade Union career was published late 1975.