THE POLITICS OF CHANGE

A Jamaican Testament

New Edition

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Preface

THIS book is written with two not unrelated objectives in mind. After twenty-one years in the public life of Jamaica as a journalist, trade unionist and politician, I felt the need to clarify, in my own mind, the effect of this activist involvement upon the ideals and principles which I brought to the enterprise in the first place.

At the same time, it seemed to me that there was need to reconsider and restate, from the standpoint of the 1970s, a philosophical road which Jamaica might explore as an independent nation.

The anarchists, the racialists and the extremists of the radical left and intransigent right have offered labels interspersed with fragments of advice. These prescriptions, however, have added up to something rather less than a viable strategy.

I hope that this book may serve as a point of departure for the realistic discussion of Jamaica's future; her possibilities and problems; her strengths and weaknesses; most importantly the hopes she may dare to entertain and the ideals to which she should be committed; the dream, the vision of justice against which she must measure her shortcomings.

I do not attempt to specify a plan of action nor a quantitative analysis of our problems. Neither do I presume to articulate a new political philosophy. Rather, I seek to remind my reader that a number of categories in the political dialogue have real meaning and summon us to both commitment and action. The notions of equality, social justice and self-reliance are, accordingly, invoked as reminders of human purpose.

Hopefully, this book will be of interest to people in all developing countries, indeed to all who are concerned with politics and the human condition. It is of course written by a Jamaican for Jamaicans and by a working politician for people who must, every day, seek to make some sense of lives beset by difficulties which are as pressing as they must seem incomprehensible.

My gratitude goes first of all to my wife who gave me the courage to try; and for her patience and unflagging interest; to Doctor, the Right Honourable Eric Williams, Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, who encouraged me with the supreme compliment of thinking I might have something worthwhile to say, and, also in this regard, to my lifelong friend, the author, Mr John Hearne; to Mr Rex Nettleford of the University of the West Indies for his help with editing, structuring and the ordering of ideas alike; to Mr Alister McIntyre, also of the University of the West Indies, for his constructive criticism and many useful suggestions; to Mrs Corina Meeks for a close reading which yielded much of benefit; to Mrs Barbara Mowatt who, helped by Mrs Carmen Gauntlett, Mrs Linda Schmitt and Mrs Ena Keating from time to time, bore the brunt of the typing with unfailing good nature and much skill; to my publisher, Mr André Deutsch, for a transatlantic correspondence which bolstered my spirits when they seemed to flag; and finally to all the others, too numerous to mention, who have helped in so many ways.

Of course, gratitude is not enough for my mother and late father whose efforts separately and together contributed so much to the processes of transformation which we must now seek to continue.

M. M.
Jamaica. April 1973.

PART I

A Philosophy of Change

Introduction

ALL organized societies depend on a power system; and politics is the business of power, its acquisition and its use. Observation of history suggests that there have been three approaches to politics and, therefore, three approaches to the use of power. There are men, perhaps the majority, who see power as something to be acquired for its own sake. Then there are those who see power as something to be used for purposes of minor adjustments in the society. Finally, there are the idealists who seek to arrange fundamental change.

In the first case, men who pursue power for its own sake usually do so, either because it satisfies something in their own egotism or because they want for themselves the fruits of power; and of course, it is in this stream that the great tyrants of history are to be found.

The second group does not necessarily want power for its own sake so much as for the achievement of some immediate adjustment in the society. It sees society as an amoral phenomenon to be accepted in all fundamental respects and adjusted in terms of obvious points of inefficiency or in response to the particular pressures of discontent. Throughout history these have been broadly grouped in the great conservative parties such as the Conservative Party of Great Britain; the conservative wings of both the Democratic and Republican Parties of the USA; the Christian Democratic Party of Germany and so on. In all these parties it will be observed that the people who lead them begin with the assumption that their existing social framework is sound and reasonable; but more importantly, just 'is' in the sense that it exists. Thus, beginning with a complete acceptance of the *status quo*, society is viewed in an essentially superficial way and the question then asked: 'How can it be made a little more efficient?' This type of politician is conscious of points of pressure, seeming to require change, that arise from discontent and seeks,

in response to that pressure, marginal adjustments in the organization of society for the purpose of relieving the discontent and removing the points of pressure.

Finally, there are the idealists who begin by rejecting existing social relationships and proceed to construct a model of how they think society should be ordered. They are concerned with the basic changes that are necessary to effect the transformation from the one state to the other.

Our second group are the pragmatists of political history. They probably spend more time in power than any other kind of politician because, obviously, societies discover in the end that tyrants exercise power at the expense of everybody else. So our first category is liable to sudden and violent elimination.

On the other hand, idealists, the third category, are vulnerable because they are concerned with change. Change and oppression both breed fear, and therefore, the pragmatic politician who is content to tinker is the one with whom societies feel most comfortable. Tyranny, as a method, has no place in this book. On the other hand, Jamaican society is disfigured by inequities that go too deep for tinkering. Our concern, therefore, must be with the politics of change.

Idealistic politicians seek first a moral foundation for political action. At different points of history, different issues seem of preponderant significance and, therefore, lead to different emphases in the search for a moral frame. But at the root of all idealistic political thinking is the question: What is the purpose of political organization? Some answer this with the notion of stability. Taking, therefore, stability as the first order of priorities, a theoretical social system is constructed with order as its main objective. Others take the contrary view and see individual freedom as their first order of priorities. With equal devotion these will construct a system that seeks to reverse every priority of the first category. Where the first will make obedience, conformity and 'law and order' the dominant consideration, the second group will seek a system that minimises these considerations and prefers rather to walk as close to the edge of anarchy as social survival will allow.

More recently, the dialogue has shifted from questions of authority and liberty to the more apparently relevant consideration of wealth. And so most contemporary political idealism has

centred on the question of the distribution of wealth within a society. In the last hundred years, this question has dominated the political dialogue and has produced political philosophies claiming allegiance to capitalism with its emphasis on notions of liberty and the creation of wealth; and to communism, which has evolved into the idea that the equitable distribution of wealth can only be ensured within the frame of an authoritarian system.

In all this, the Socialist, so called, has sought to resolve the paradox by suggesting that a libertarian democratic system can provide the matrix within which wealth is distributed and individual liberty preserved.

Like all political leaders who belong to the idealistic stream, broadly defined, I have found myself constantly in the presence of a personal, moral imperative: How to isolate a single, central thesis of belief from the welter of conflicting moral categories. Of course, one must be concerned with equitable distribution of wealth, with social stability and order, with individual liberty. But always the suggestion has lurked that these categories are in conflict and that the political idealist must make a choice. I reject this notion. The more that I have thought about the morality of politics, the more there has emerged for me a single touchstone of right and wrong; and the touchstone is to be found in the notion of equality.

Basically, society is a group of people pursuing the common objective of survival. Stripped of all rhetorical excess, this is the point at which social organization begins. However, even at the survival level, this implies the survival of every individual; and if we accept that everybody is entitled to survive, then we have conceded the foundation of the notion of equality. Later, societies can expand the notion of survival to include the category of progress. By this I mean, not merely eating enough to keep alive for tomorrow's tasks. One may plan further ahead and wish to put aside enough for next year's drought. In due course, having provided for next year's drought, one may wish to produce enough in six days to be able to enjoy a day of rest. In due course, one wants to be able to produce enough in forty-eight working weeks of five days to be able to rest two days a week and four weeks a year. In due course, one will be concerned with producing enough to have a real opportunity of creative activity within the two days of rest and the four weeks of vacation. And

at no point can one logically abandon the notion that everybody is seeking the two days of rest and the four weeks of vacation and the ability to enjoy them. The more I have thought, therefore, about social organization, the more I have concluded that here is only one supreme, moral imperative that cannot be affected by time, by circumstance, by the seasons, by man's moods or intellectual distractions, by the injunctions of philosophers or the sermons of pastors; and it is the notion that social organization exists to serve everybody or it has no moral foundation.

At this point, one has to be clear that the notion of equality in society does not imply either that everybody possesses equal talents or interests, or capabilities; nor that everybody ought to receive the same reward for the function they perform. Obviously, it is of the essence of the human condition that the variations of human personality are infinite. Equally, the fact of specialization within the social organization implies a difference of function, which, in turn, leads to differing rewards. But the fact that society cannot function effectively without differentials in rewards together with the fact that men are manifestly not equal in talent must not be allowed to obscure the central purpose of social organization. This is, and must always be, the promotion of the welfare of every member of the human race. The moment that this intellectual distinction is understood, the concept of equality becomes clear and free from confusions that arise from other aspects of the social mechanism. If you begin with the notion of equality, all the other moral considerations in social organization take their place. Authority ceases to be an aim in itself and becomes merely the pre-condition of the survival of the whole group. Individual liberty ceases to be a petulant distraction and becomes the extent to which all men may pursue their creative potential within the framework of social survival. And to the extent that the requirements of survival conflict with the thrust for individual expression, the notion of equality provides a frame of reference within which a solution may be found.

It will be the purpose of this book to examine the condition of a newly independent society encumbered with the economic, social and psychological consequences of three hundred years of colonialism and to see how far the notion of equality can supply the key to an economic, social, political – indeed, a national strategy.

I

The Setting for Change

IN the early post-colonial phase of a developing country, only political movements devoted to the politics of change have relevance. An analysis of the legacies of colonialism suggests a degree of social debilitation together with economic and social malformations so grave as to make the politics of tinkering within the *status quo,* irrelevant to our condition.

Let us, therefore, turn to a consideration of some of the broad characteristics that are common to most post-colonial societies and that are all the more evident the longer the particular exposure to the colonial experience.

Jamaica is a classic example of this situation because its history involved being born in the colonial condition followed by three hundred years of unbroken experience in that milieu before it finally attained its political independence.

A mere 4,000 odd square miles, 144 miles long, with mountains soaring to more than 7,000 feet, Jamaica is an interesting mixture of challenge and opportunity. Its fertile plains boast first-class soil and are ideal for intensive agriculture. Much of the island is mountainous, however, and poses for the farmer the special problem of sloping terrain. Its bauxite deposits are among the largest in the world. Its beaches are a standing invitation to the vacationer and its interior often breathtakingly beautiful. Its two million people are ninety per cent black, the descendants of slaves and most of the rest coloured. There are very few unmixed survivors of the former white slave-owning planters.

The plains are still devoted to sugar cane cultivation. The hills support a small farmer population that traces its origins back to first escaped and, later, freed slaves who sought to rest their new-found freedom upon the economic foundation of bits of land that were their own. This, then, is the land that was born to the colonial experience when the British captured it from the Spanish in 1655 and that knew no other political experience for

three hundred and seven years: surely one of the longest, unbroken periods of colonial rule in modern history.

Jamaica was the meeting place of two expatriate populations: the Britisher uprooting himself in search of quick wealth through sugar; and the African uprooted by force from his environment to supply the slave labour upon which his owner's dream of wealth depended. Two uprooted populations, the one adapting its own culture to a new environment and the other subjected to pressures designed to obliterate all cultural recollection, confronted each other in Jamaica and provided through their common experience a unique variant on the colonial theme. This is so because all colonialism involves a process of cultural displacement. Where, however, the subject people are conquered on their home ground, a measure of cultural continuity is preserved. At least, it may be presumed that cultural confidence will reflect an element of indigenous survival. Jamaican, indeed Caribbean, experience has this significant difference, however, in that the African slave was torn from his family, transported across an ocean and there assiduously prevented from forming new family groups which could pass on the remembered culture of the homeland. It is in this cultural vacuum that colonialism held unbroken sway for three centuries.

Much has been written of the economic consequences of colonialism, but it might be as well to remind ourselves briefly that colonial economies were conceived in the context of dependence. The purpose of a colonial economy was to produce primary products for the metropolitan power and to provide a market for the more sophisticated range of consumer goods which were the economic preserve of the metropolitan power. The wealth that was created was in the main repatriated to the 'Mother Country' and provided one of the primary engines in the capital accumulation process which marked the industrial revolution in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Since the colony was seen as existing only to serve metropolitan needs, the use of slave labour was a natural extension of the system which, as is the case with all empires, found its rationale in the conscious assumption of the superior moral and historical destiny of the colonizing people. The end product of this system was a colonial economy consisting of three main elements: the productive sector of the economy was geared to supply primary

agricultural products, the labour force was in the main controlled to supply the cheap labour needed to plant and reap these products; and the rest of the economy consisted of traders whose sole purpose was the importation of the entire range of consumer goods required by the population. To this one could add, in Jamaica's case, a peasant farmer structure and a cadre of professional and vocational people providing basic services such as health, education and the like.

This economic pattern is so well documented and has been so accurately analysed and exhaustively discussed that it has often obscured a deeper consequence of colonialism which, not understood, can reduce to impotence the most skilfully devised plan for reshaping the very economic pattern which I have just summarized. I refer here to the psychology of dependence which is the most insidious, elusive and intractable of the problems which we inherit.

If a man is denied both responsibility and power long enough he will lose the ability to respond to the challenge of the first and to grasp the opportunity of the second. One has only to look at what happens to the youth of the ghetto if they fail to find a job over a number of years. The time comes when they become incapable of performing inside that complex framework of disciplines that make up the average working situation. So too with societies; denied responsibility and power long enough, they show a similar tendency and can become almost incapable of response to opportunity because there is not the habit of self-reliance.

If one scans the horizon of the Jamaican experience in, say, 1962, at the moment of our independence, (Jamaica became independent on 6th August, 1962) one has only to select areas at random to see the insidious, pervasive effect of the colonial experience. Neither did the heroic call to racial pride of a Marcus Garvey; nor the momentous march to independence under Norman Manley; nor even the collective experience of self-discipline of the modern Trade Union Movement launched by Alexander Bustamante, Florizel Glasspole and Ken Hill, together with the political party system, make more than a dent upon the problem.

Take, for example, our educational system. It was imported lock, stock and barrel from England without a moment's thought

about its relevance to Jamaica's needs and aspirations. This was not because of a failure of the intellect on the part of those who transplanted it. Rather, I suggest that there was a failure of perception: an inability to perceive that the first responsibility of the educator is to address his mind – *his* mind, not somebody else's mind – to the question of *our* needs. In a very profound sense this calls for an almost traumatic process of release from the psychology of dependence. It is a trauma that we are only now, in 1972, beginning to face as the necessary precursor to the development of an educational system of our own.

Take again, the attitude of the average community in Jamaica. The basic instinct of the majority of the members of any community precludes the chance that they ask themselves the question: 'What do *we* need and what can we do to provide it for *ourselves*?' – adding as a necessary afterthought: 'Let us see what we need from government to bridge the gap between what *we* can do and the totality of *our* needs.' On the contrary, the question is phrased the other way around: 'How much can we get the *government* to provide of what we need now?' They will add, as an after-thought, 'I suppose we will have to wait until some unspecified point of time in the future for the difference between what government can do now and the totality of our needs to be met by the government.' Again, the whole question of psychological dependence lies at the root of the distinction between these two attitudes.

Consider finally, the Trade Union Movement. Critics have constantly inveighed against the tendency of the Jamaica Trade Union Movement to reply upon middle class leadership. The criticism is well-directed, but the nature of the problem is misconceived. At the root of the psychology of the Trade Union Movement in Jamaica, is not, as one might expect, the self-reliance that is normally inherent in the institution itself. Instead we find the same psychology of dependence which tends to seek in this case, not a government, but a leader who is expected to bear the brunt of the decision-making process. Obviously, where individual authority is substituted for collective responsibility, the better-educated man is more likely to be able to cope with the situation and produce solutions. Again, the critical question is: 'Why is there this tendency to assume that responsibility does not reside in *me*, in my own situation, but in some external

authority which I will invest with authority for the translation of my dreams into reality?'

Later on we will attempt to deal specifically with colonial attitudes in the wider sense and this will involve the exploration of attitudes to work. But for the moment, it is enough to make the broad assertion that the first task that a post-colonial society must tackle is the development of a strategy designed to replace the psychology of dependence with the spirit of individual and collective self-reliance. Until that exercise is successfully embarked upon every other plan will fail. Indeed, without the spirit of self-reliance, it is doubtful if a successful indigenous plan can be devised; instead time and energy may be dissipated in the adaptation of other people's plans, designed for other situations, to solve other people's problems.

When one considers the magnitude of the economic and attitudinal restructuring which our condition demands, it becomes clear that the politics of conservatism and tinkering are not only irrelevant to our situation but represent an intolerable default of responsibility. *Man can adjust by tinkering but he cannot transform.* Nothing less than transformation can provide answers to the dilemmas within which we are currently trapped.

One, then, might summarize social justice as being concerned with the organization of access. There must be equal access to jobs, to food, clothing and shelter; to social security; to the decision-making process; to the sense of belonging and being of equal value; to creative leisure; to the processes and remedies of the law, and to education. Men are not equally gifted but they are severally endowed and to each there must be accorded access to society's opportunities.

PART II

The Strategy of Change

Introduction

I HAVE sought to define a moral frame, a social objective and a possible methodology for our political system. The rest of the book will be devoted in the main to the consideration of strategies aimed at accomplishing the changes that are necessary for the transformation of the society.

I will not attempt any quantitative analysis of what is required. I will not be dealing with growth rates or gross national product, the rate of school construction and the like. This book attempts a qualitative assessment of our situation and seeks to suggest strategies as they relate to the adaptation of the quality and style of life that are a necessary part of a just society. Quantification is the business of the technician. Quality of life is the business of the philosopher. It is the politician's task to bring to bear upon the philosopher's objectives the technical expertise that can support a life of quality upon an adequate material base in terms of the production and distribution of goods and services. However, the politician would be unable to order his priorities and would be confused by the technical options which are presented to him, if he had not made his peace with a social philosophy that is at once moral in its structure and relevant in its appreciation of the possible.

I have suggested that any attempt at the politics of change will fail if it is not supported by popular will. But popular will can only be mobilized in a context of understanding. In the post-colonial world, understanding can be difficult to come by in popular terms, because of the accumulated confusions that are induced by the colonial experience. People's attitudes are profoundly influenced by colonialism which often produces a value system that is totally at variance with the kinds of attitudes that are necessary to construct a just society. Equally, one must distinguish another problem. It is not only that colonialism produces false values. At an even more profound level, it can

be said that any situation which has separated people from power and responsibility for a long period of time undermines individual and collective self-confidence. Any kind of despotism will do this, and to the extent that colonialism is an externally manipulated despotism, it has precisely the same result. Thus when we look at the attitudinal climate within which we must attempt change, we find on the one hand, that we are confronted by a false value system and on the other, a condition that verges upon national inferiority complex.

Thus in a strategy of change, the initial assault has got to be upon the value system and the first attempts at psychological reconstruction must be aimed at the problem of inferiority complex. It might be as well here to consider a few examples of both those problems so that we can better illustrate some of the practical requirements in any strategic assault upon them.

First, there is the example of what is sometimes described as the appetite for conspicuous consumption. This attitude includes the assumption that there is a right of access to consumer goods regardless of productive contribution. It expresses itself in an unthinking appetite for and preoccupation with consumer goods, but a disinterest in productive responsibility.

Second, we must remember the problem posed by the individual and the collective assumption that responsibility for the solution of problems lies in other hands. Third, we can observe attitudes to work which are characterized by the assumption that a general stigma attaches to certain kinds of work, particularly those that depend upon the use of the hands or involve working the land; indeed anything that does not conform to either the professional aspirations, or that pattern of escape from reality that is symbolized by a preoccupation with the white collar job. One can, once more, make a number of reasonably valid assumptions about the historical processes that produce these attitudes, but must face the fact that they are inconsistent with the possibiliy of building a society upon viable economic foundations. Here it must also be observed that since it takes a wide spectrum of jobs to make an economy function, an egalitarian society cannot be built if our value system condemns a number of its functionaries to an automatic contempt because society itself will not accept the inherent dignity of every job.

Finally, we must consider the more generalized problem of the

inferiority complex. One must look a little more closely at the historical process to understand the impact of colonialism upon attitudes. At an obvious level, the very fact that one people can conquer another seems to provide a type of superficial proof of a superiority-inferiority relationship which inevitably will leave scars upon the psyche of the conquered. To this we must add the psychologically debilitating effect of the superior technology which the Western metropolitan powers brought to bear in the process of colonial economic exploitation. Then there is the fact of the dislocation of the cultural continuum which colonialism visits upon the subject people, and the displacement of local cultural systems by those of the conquerors. Here one must constantly remind oneself that it is not enough to be privately secure in the knowledge that local art and culture have as enduring a validity as the metropolitan form. On the contrary, there is, for the majority of a subject people, the danger that the implied superiority of conquest itself invests the conqueror and all his works with the quality of superiority. Hence the tendency of formerly dependent people to reflect two opposite but similar tendencies. There is the tendency to copy everything from the accent, and the literature, to the manners of the conqueror. Alternatively, there is the more positive, certainly more declamatory and possibly equally invalid tendency to repudiate all the ways of the conqueror and to invest the ways of the conquered with a quality of exclusive truth that owes more to the need for defiance than of objective truth.

Thus, the politics of change are likely to find themselves stuck in a quagmire if one does not begin with a clear-eyed appreciation of the problem in terms of its historical origins, present confusion and future possibilities. In the course of this, one must distinguish the arenas in which the battle must be fought. Some of the battles are negative in the sense that the conflict is aimed at the deliberate break-up of those attitudes which by being rooted in the colonial trauma represent clear impediments to the release of an indigenous creative spirit. Other battles have to be fought in the positive arena of releasing attitudes which are in themselves creative and upon which one can rest the thrust for change and development.

If one looks at the negative side first, one cannot escape the necessity to throw down the gauntlet to the past. For example,

let us take the question of dress. There are those who would delude themselves into feeling that concern with styles of dress is a childish waste of time. Not so. It is by no means the beginning or the end of the problem, but it has its place. If you live, for example, in a tropical country, that has acquired the jacket and tie as a style of dress for that country, you have made a number of unconscious concessions. First of all, you have adopted as your own a style of dress that is not suited to your climate. This is the first act of psychological surrender, since common sense would dictate that a style of dress should reflect the reality of the physical environment. Further, the very fact that you did not question the relevance of another man's style of dress to your physical environment is a confession of a paralysis of judgement. Third, where the style of dress is inherently expensive, you have placed a strain upon the ability of your society to create the external symbols of egalitarianism. Fourth, where the style of dress has become associated with the status symbol of class and the escape from economic reality through the 'white collar' syndrome, you have inhibited your own ability to identify reality and placed yet another psychological obstacle in the path of a realistic pursuit of your own social and economic possibilities.

In the face of this, your first duty is to challenge the chain that ties tomorrow's possibilities to yesterday's conclusions. The task is to break the chain even at the price of shocking the society. Indeed, it is desirable that one should shock the society, because only by the act of shocking are you likely to generate a form of collective introspection through which people will begin to re-examine the basic workings of their own unconscious assumptions.

The strategy of change must, accordingly, operate at the psychological and attitudinal level which involves a concept of mass education; at the structural level which involves a concept of social and economic organization; at a political level which involves a concept of mobilization; and it must envisage the problems of transition which involves a capacity for tactical accommodation. It is in this context that I will, in succeeding chapters, attempt to examine some of the problems that arise in the political system, the structure of the economy, the relevance of our foreign relations, the quality of our education and the nature of our institutions.

I

The Politics of Participation

JUST as a one-party state can mobilize by abolishing dissent, equally, I suggest, multi-party democracy can mobilize by abolishing remoteness. If we regard the right to dissent as too priceless to be curtailed, then we must discover our solutions within the other half of our dilemma. To do this we must begin by asking ourselves two questions. First, does government have to be remote? Second, can we make it intimate?

Obviously, the sheer size and complexity of modern government presents us with a problem of increasing difficulty. To begin with the size of government alone creates an ever-growing bureaucracy which increasingly separates the politician from the people. Then again the world changes so rapidly that governments often find themselves confronted by problems which no election manifesto could anticipate. All this tends to drive the politician into an increasing isolation from which he governs in a mood of mounting authoritarianism, hoping that somehow he will justify it all at the next election.

When we set this trend in the context of our earlier analysis of competitively oriented societies, we can readily see how difficult of accomplishment is any spirit of national co-operation. However, neither the one-party state nor the acceptance of the *status quo* are adequate solutions for a society like Jamaica's.

An alternative method must be sought and it is, I suggest, best described as the 'politics of participation'. The antithesis of remoteness is involvement. Since remoteness is the problem that we must tackle, involvement must be the objective of our method – by involvement I mean the conscious attempt to make people feel that they have a part to play in the decision-making processes of government. At this moment in history most democracies create a sense of popular involvement at election time, but the involvement tends to focus on, at best, two aspects of the total governmental process. These are the determination of an election