

# Edward Seaga: Man who Turned Jamaica Around

A feature written specially for the Bajan on its choice of West Indian Man of the Year by Hubert Williams, Chief Editor of CANA, based on an interview with Jamaica's Prime Minister Mr. Edward Seaga.

Edward Seaga leaves nothing to chance. And as he moves to shape the destiny of Jamaica, this disquietingly intense man intends to apply to the challenges of government the same cool, calculating deliberateness that won him acknowledgement from friend and foe alike as the finest ever Finance Minister the island has ever had.

Socialist Manley. And it is on the basis of his efforts to arrest Jamaica's economic spin and turn the country around that the Prime Minister has won, hands down, this magazine's nomination as its West Indian "Man of the Year 1981".

The Jamaican leader's origins make a fascinating mix. Born in the United States,



Jamaica's Prime Minister Edward Seaga.

## Will a Policy of Head-Over-Heart Put the Economy Firmly Back on Its Feet?

Seaga believes that one sure way of avoiding dangerous political pitfalls as well as economic and social chaos, is never to allow the 'heart' to rule the 'head'. It is a tested formula for success at the personal level and, the nation's new leader asserts, it was precisely because the 'heart' held sway that Michael Manley's administration was such a dismal failure, creating one of the bleakest periods in the island's history.

The styles of Seaga and the man he succeeded are world's apart. He is so intense that he sometimes forgets to smile. Mainly he appears to be a cold calculating financial genius and an enigma to most people. Manley on the other hand, is dashing and articulate, warm and friendly, charismatic and, as his admirers would say, all 'heart'. Whereas Manley's personal magnetism drew people towards him, his political policies, in Seaga's view, reflected more 'heart' than 'head' and there was no extricating his administration from the bog of its own creation.

Undeniably, the recovery task which Seaga now attempts is a stupendous one. There had been eight years of negative economic growth, scarce trained manpower and badly needed money had fled the country in substantial quantities. Investors' confidence had been shattered and Western official aid flows had dwindled considerably. There was blood and thunder in the pre-election months, bringing this remarkably beautiful island the closest a Caribbean Community (Caricom) country had ever come to a civil war.

The first year of Seaga has brought many significant changes. First of all, and because of the free enterprise system which he espouses, he has begun to untie the purse-strings of the United States which had been drawn tight against the Democratic

nearly Caucasian, married to a Black Jamaican beauty (Miss Jamaica 1964), crown prince of the proletariat's Tivoli Gardens in West Kingston and yet the hope of big business. Everything else virtually stops when Seaga walks through Tivoli Gardens, the shining monument of his ideas for urban slum clearance. "What we set out to do in West Kingston", he says, "was to reverse the process of decay. Where there were cemeteries, there are now playing fields; where yesterday there was crime, there is learning for tomorrow. What we have achieved is not only to take the man out of the slum, but the slum out of the man".

While some analysts have hastily dismissed the Jamaican leader as rabidly anti-Communist and willing to do Washington's bidding, others have been more cautious, holding him to be a much more complex person than his detractors believe and whose policies time and circumstances may shape in surprising ways. For instance, Jane Patmos, writing in the Gleaner newspaper, has placed Seaga within fairly broad parameters, describing him as being "trans-race, trans-class and trans-national." University lecturer Dr. Rowan Locke has also examined the possibility of Seaga developing as a "pocket socialist" and becoming a "trans-race, trans-class and trans-national man who decides to make an empathetic leap and identify with the supporting Jamaican poor. If he makes that empathetic leap", reasons Dr. Locke, "then he would be the 'Castro of Jamaica' who has created an egalitarian society. He could succeed where Manley has failed. This is a mammoth mission. But if Tivoli Gardens is an example of his empathetic leap, then the Jamaican poor who expect so much from Mr. Seaga will not be disappointed."

## Back on Its Feet?

Seaga has himself remarked on the differences in the images widely held of himself and Manley and the critical importance of the roots he has among, and deep understanding of, the Jamaican masses. "The fact of the matter is that one cannot claim to have 'heart' if the end result of what you do destroys the standard of living of the people", explains Seaga. "We lost 57 percent of our standard of living over the last eight years by a government that claimed it had the interests of the people at heart, but because they didn't have the 'head' to determine how to satisfy the interests of the people, they ended up doing something that was entirely in the wrong direction in which they themselves wanted to go. So even if you have 'heart', you must start with your 'head' because your heart can lead you in the wrong direction. Your head never will, if you use your head wisely."

The Prime Minister's acquisition of intimate knowledge of the sociology of Jamaica has come as he said, "the only way I think it can — not from the textbooks. After I left Harvard, I went into small Jamaican communities and lived. I don't mean driving in a car or going out at night ... I mean living, taking a house, living in the house as a villager would, and over a period of months participating in every aspect of the life of the community, and therefore thinking, feeling and becoming part of the community as if you were always there. I did this in both urban and rural communities and that has given me the background of understanding which I treasure til today. It has been the basis of my success in political life and in the planning that enables me to formulate the kind of plans with the 'head',

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# that also help to satisfy the 'heart'. From 1952 when I spent three years living in Buxton Town, St. Catherine and in the West Kingston slum area doing research work, I learned a motto I have never forgotten: 'Treat people with respect and dignity and they will treat you likewise'."

More so than even Donald Sangster and Hugh Shearer, Seaga seems the true protege of Sir Alexander Bustamante, that redoubtable lion-maned battler who epitomised the spirit of Jamaica. And much of what the present Prime Minister is, is a reflection of his embrace of the concepts that his mentor held dear. Therefore, if there has been one man from whom the most inspiration came, it was the late Bustamante one of the country's most revered national heroes.

# "Yes", says Seaga, "Sir Alexander certainly did have a special impact on me. He had that impact on me from when I was in my teens, long before I came into politics, or was even thinking of going into politics. In fact, I would say that were it not for Sir Alexander, I would not have been in politics. I had only a sort of backroom association with the Party. He was the one that considered me to be the type of person he wanted to have in his party and politics, and that was how I became involved.

"So it was that I had a specially close relationship with Sir Alexander. I admired his courage, I admired his strong love for the little people, his great passion for life and his feeling for social things."

# Seaga feels the Jamaican pattern to progress will have to be a composite of such models as Singapore, the Philippines, South Korea, and Mexico. A rich mosaic of economic dynamism and cultural vibrancy. But how have his ideas about political concepts, systems of governments and structures of economies changed over the decades?

# "I am able to say quite categorically that there has been no change", the Prime Minister replies and elaborates: "in the earlier days of my political life when, for instance, I focussed attention on the disparities between incomes in the country, I didn't simply focus attention on the problem. What I did in addition was to focus attention on a solution. The basis of that solution was that you could not correct the disparity by a 'pulling down process', but rather by a 'pulling up process'. My objective is the same as the other parties that seek to, in the final analysis, improve the lot of the people and to narrow the gap between the 'haves and havenots'. But in order to do that, you must first generate the revenues which will then enable the government to have the resources to do the things which can narrow the gap. You do not generate revenue by a 'pulling down process', you reduce revenue, as the last government of Jamaica found to their cost. Consequently, the strategy that I form-



Seaga (right, in front of Police) at Bustamante's funeral. When his mentor died he was only Leader of the Opposition while Michael Manley (centre foreground) was in his first term as Prime Minister.

ulated, from as far back as 1961, is, until today, the very strategy that I follow."

There have been major successes, Seaga maintains, flowing from the implementation of that strategy over the past extremely difficult year. "Principally, we have been able to restore the country to the path of prudent financial management. We have been able to restore the finances of the country to a level on the basis of which there are no more stops and starts, but a smooth functioning of the economy. Secondly we have been able to restart the cycle of investment. Investments are now pouring in at a level that is totally unprecedented and unbelievable. Some two new projects per day, a total of some 500 that are now before us being processed, with a total value of \$840 million in terms of U.S. dollars."

# Inflation, at 23.2 percent for the first nine months of 1980 was down to 4.2 percent for the first nine months of 1981. "I think this must be one of the lowest inflation rates in the world", boasts Seaga. "Unemployment has dropped 6.0 percent, tourism is on the rebound, showing positive gains over the previous year, industrial activity is on the upswing and the lethargic construction sector is about to take off. "The mining sector which started very brightly has had severe setbacks because of depressed international markets," explains Seaga. "But notwithstanding that, with the assistance of Washington and other negotiations we are carrying on, we hope to be able to overcome that setback". Agriculture remains the problem child of the

economy, with some notable failures, sugar being the principal one.

Though various problems persist, there is spreading confidence among the Jamaican people. Prime Minister Seaga reports a process of remigration. Those who had fled to Miami and elsewhere in Manley's time were not only returning, but also bringing back the money and other material possessions which they had hustled out. However, accurate figures on the reverse flow are hard to come by. "We do not know how many. Statistics cannot be made to show, because they left as Jamaicans, they are coming back as Jamaicans and there is no immigration data that can help us to identify them. However we do know, from personal experience, many of the people who have either returned or are planning to come back."

Some of the people who will definitely not be going back to Jamaica in a hurry are, of course, the Cubans. It is a matter of record that the Prime Minister's first act in office was to request the withdrawal of Cuban Ambassador to Jamaica, Ulises Estrada and the final act to climax his first 12 months in office was to break diplomatic relations with Havana. While the action is unquestionably an expression of Jamaican sovereignty, might not the unilateral break have adverse implications for Caricom's efforts to coordinate foreign policy, in view of the fact that it was on the basis of a joint decision that Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, Barbados and Guyana had established relations at ambassadorial level with Cuba in December 1972?



Michael Manley's recent denial of Seaga's charge that his government was more attached to Cuba than the present one with the U.S.A., is hardly supported by the looks of these two pictures. LEFT: Manley embraces Castro. RIGHT: Seaga and wife (right) on White House balcony with the President and Mrs. Reagan.

The above was one of the questions put to the Jamaican Prime Minister. He was also asked whether Caricom can realistically accommodate the principle of ideological pluralism, given the widely divergent positions of some of its governments. "We broke relations with Cuba," Seaga says, "because of problems that arose which are peculiar to Cuba-Jamaica relations, not having anything to do with the other islands. Consequently, we would not consider that the other islands would have found themselves in a position that they would have had to act likewise. Caricom has accommodated ideological pluralism up to now. Whether it can continue to do so depends upon the conduct of the people who are the 'odd men out' in the system. If their conduct is such that they do not infringe all the rules that govern inter-governmental relations and therefore they are full and trusted partners in the Caricom movement, then that's an entirely different thing from whether they act on behalf of others who are not members within the Community, and in so doing they either end up creating distrust or committing acts of hostility or in fact, subverting the whole system. So I cannot say whether it is incompatible or not. But I can say that so far it hasn't been, and it can only remain that way, if the game is played according to the rules."

Seaga rejects the vanguard image which Manley carved out for Jamaica on the international stage, and says instead that the 'head' dictates a foreign policy of moderation. "We do not believe in high profiles", Seaga points out, "for the very simple reason that we are at the centre of the wheel, the spokes of which radiate out into many areas of relationships and influences that we have. We are part of the Commonwealth in one direction. Regionally we are part of Latin America. We are within that part of the Caribbean which is Caricom. We are within the Western Hemisphere, with our trading and financial flows that have been developed. We have very strong links

culturally and historically with Africa and even other areas, too. All these radiating spokes of vital interests — our heritage, financial interests, trading interests etc. — are such that a country at that focal position has to carry the kind of foreign policy that retains its friends while building and finding new friends. You can't do that by taking high policy profiles in one direction which burn bridges in the other. So what we have been doing is continuing to build a solid reputation as one of the countries to which in any conference you can look to help find solutions, rather than advocate positions."

As he enters 1982 convinced that the course he is charting is the right one for Jamaica, and determined to achieve full recovery by the end of 1983, Seaga is the most optimistic among the region's leaders that there is great substance in the U.S. proposed 'Caribbean Basin Initiative'. This is the aid-trade-investment plan that is to involve the U.S., Canada, Mexico and Venezuela. "It does not involve a one-on-one relationship between two countries, nor one dealing with several countries, but a number of donors dealing with a large number of countries. I am very satisfied with the direction in which the plan is moving and am very hopeful that it will shortly be put before the public."

On crime, drugs and their impact on tourism Seaga says the level of crime in the resort areas, "is very minimal" and that no one can really claim there exists a campaign directed specifically against the tourists.

"The levels of crime overall have been reduced in terms of violent crime to some 50 percent of what it was in 1980, which now brings it down to sort of more normal levels."

Marijuana is as much Jamaican now as is Seaga himself (in spite of his foreign birth), but the quantum grown on the island and the magnitude of its exportation and earnings is ludicrously overblown. In fact it has become almost a point of hysteria in the American market.

"Surveys have indicated that Jamaica's total production is about 2000 acres, with an earning capacity of \$3000 U.S. an acre, which means a total of \$6 million. That certainly is not a figure that should lead anyone to have hysterics. But the hysteria has been blown up because in Jamaica you have the new cults who delight in offering themselves as photographic models smoking marijuana; and so journalists coming to Jamaica can get a very lurid picture to go with the story, whereas when they go somewhere else, they can 'file' a story but they don't get the pictures to match up with it. So they continue to use Jamaica as the photographic model for a trade that is considerably smaller than elsewhere."

He believes that in Florida alone there is likely more marijuana grown than in all of Jamaica, and points to a recent report of the discovery of a 400-acre marijuana plantation in that southern U.S. state.

"There is no such thing in Jamaica.... there is no one farm of 400 acres".

Seaga was questioned about the Rastafarian phenomenon, which originated in his country early this century and in the past decade has spread like wildfire throughout the Caribbean, North America and Britain. Is there a definitive JLP policy with regard to Rastafarianism?

"Policies on Rastafarianism cannot be described in any formulated sense. The Rastafari followers are very active in the fields of music, craft....the arts in general. They have a reputation for being outstanding performers, outstanding craftsmen, virtually geniuses in many respects, and Bob Marley of course, was the prime symbol of that."

"They are therefore part of our whole artistic heritage and a part of the body of artists that are practising in the country in their particular fields of art. As such, they are a very valuable and important element of our society."

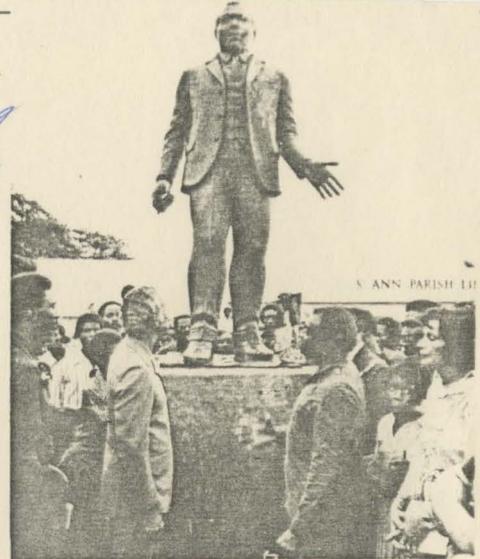
"Their religious practices and beliefs are

of a different grouping. But that does not mean that they are either shunned or ostracised. There are many different religious cult groups that practise their own beliefs separately; and the laws of Jamaica give the total freedom to anyone who wants to practise any religion that they wish." This description of Rastafarians does not, however, generally fit the types that have been developing in the Eastern Caribbean.

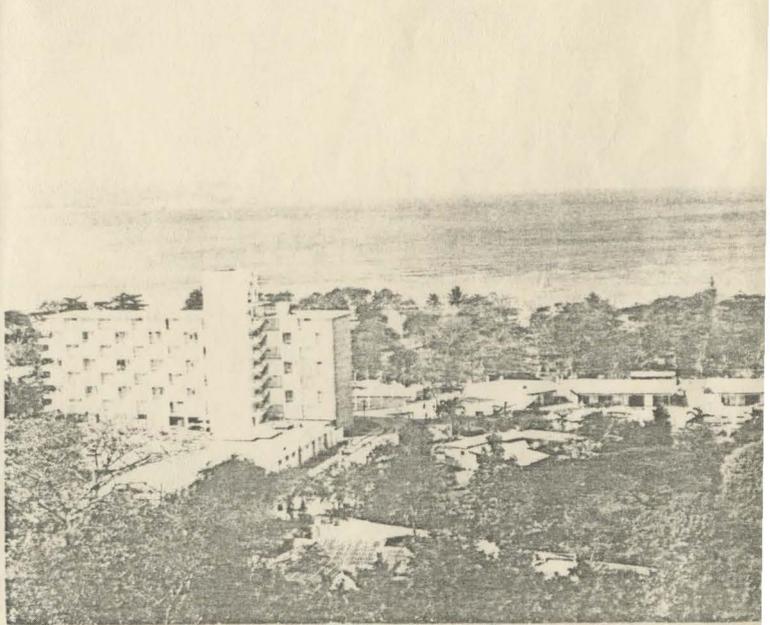
Governing Jamaica at the best of times is a difficult and demanding task. The past year must have been doubly so, as an administration with an unfettered mandate (50 of the 60 House of Representative seats) struggled to deliver on the promises it had made. Seaga was asked how, with such a bruising schedule, did he ever manage to squeeze in some time for the family? "I wouldn't like you to ask that question in

front of my wife" he smiles. "On the assumption that she is not going to read what I say, I would say that I am doing my best... but it is a very sore point. At the pace at which I have been operating, I have had very little time, in short, for family life. I hope that this year will be better. The first year was very hectic. So many things were falling apart that had to be put together, while establishing the new government, while finding funds abroad, while promoting the country, that it was more than a single job. I hope that the second year will not be as hectic."

Statue of Jamaica's foremost National Hero, Marcus Garvey, who died while living in England, is perhaps the symbol of Jamaica's commitment to support of Black Africa and America's Society For The Advancement Of Coloured People and this commitment is honoured by Jamaican Governments of all political persuasions.



ABOVE LEFT: A Gun Court in process of construction in Jamaica. Established during the first term of Michael Manley's PNP, they did not have the expected effect of halting violence which increased at elections before tapering off again. ABOVE RIGHT: Seaga, left, and Manley, right, in reverse positions to each other's politics. BELOW LEFT: British Airways' Pegasus Hotel in Kingston. BELOW RIGHT: Overlooking Montego Bay, Island's main tourist resort area.



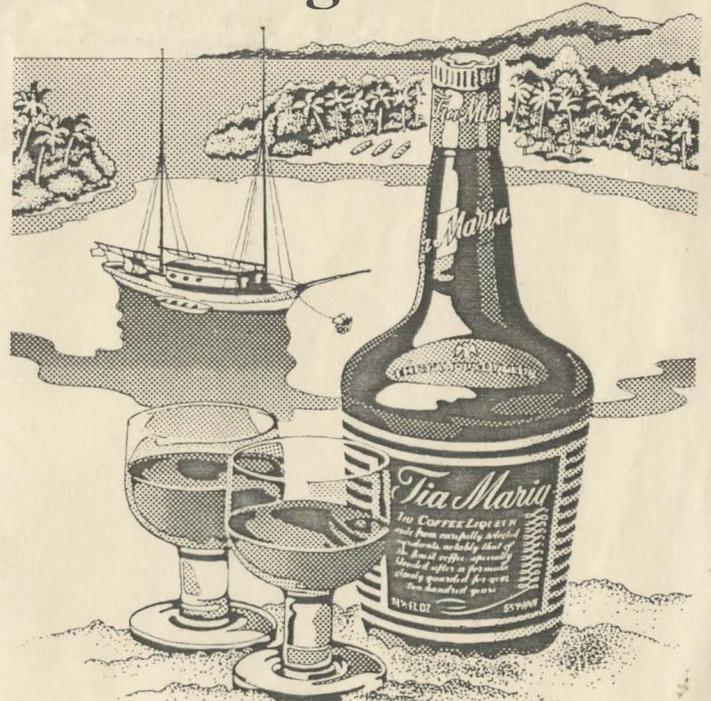
And has he, as some leaders do, set a time-frame for remaining in active politics? "My own life in politics is not something that I can forecast", says he. "I have a five year period, and, logically, would go on for a further term. I am not looking forward to too extensive a period in political life, because I have had 22 years of it already," he admits, "and I think that after a time you want to do other things. But when you take up a responsibility, you cannot measure it in terms of time. You measure it in terms of accomplishments. When I feel I have accomplished what I have set out to do, that's when I will begin to look at the period of time".

Again, as always, the 'head' before the 'heart'.

**RIGHT:** Dunn's Falls is one of Jamaica's top natural beauty spots and has become a favourite haunt of tourists, seen in this picture mixing freely with local people introducing them to the pleasures of the place. The peculiarity of these falls is that the rocks, which the action of the water has sculptured into shapes resembling up-side-down basins, are a mixture of limestone and clay which does not gather moss. Hence the ease with which bathers can clamber over them. **BELOW:** Rafting on the Rio Grande river in Jamaica is another peaceful pastime which it is hoped tourists will once again enjoy after the years of a hostile attitude towards visitors which the socialist rhetoric of the Manley Government seemed to encourage with its anti-American stand.



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