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Michael N. Manley, the outspoken Jamaican leader who irritated Washington with his anti-imperialist pronouncements a decade ago, is running for prime minister again. Manley says he was too angry and strident then, especially in the latter half of his eight years in power. He regrets having clashed with Washington, and with Jamaican businesspersons. He says he has always been a "profound admirer" of US democracy and "basically warm" to the US.

Opponents exaggerated his positions and he was often misunderstood, he contends. Things will be different a second time around, he has been telling business leaders in Jamaica who finance political campaigns and shape public opinion, as well as US citizens in New York and Washington who influence foreign aid, loans and investment. At his home in Kingston, the 62-year-old leader told reporter James Treaster: "I was wrong to quarrel with the private sector. I will never again get into a quarrel with the United States of America." As for his economic policies, he concedes he "was just trying to do too much."

An independent political poll indicates that Manley, a vice president of the Socialist International, is running 15 points ahead of the incumbent, Edward Seaga, who succeeded him in 1980. The poll stated that Manley is out front largely because the economic repairs imposed after his tenure have been harsh on poor Jamaicans, who are a majority of the island's 2.3 million people. Manley, a graduate of the London School of Economics, is known for his flowing oratory and his easy affability. These contrast with Seaga's stiff, formal manner, and many poor Jamaicans say they believe Manley is more concerned about their well-being.

Elections could be held in the next few months, although a vote is considered more likely after the tourist season ends in April. In Jamaica's parliamentary system, it is the prime minister's prerogative to call elections. A campaign by Manley for early elections was interrupted in April by major intestinal surgery. Seaga is expected to try to undermine confidence in Manley's health and his ability to serve a full 5-year term. Seaga, a Harvard-educated sociologist and financial consultant, says that after seven years of cutting back government payrolls and starving the schools and hospitals of money it is understandable that his popularity would suffer. But he says that all of Jamaica's economic indicators are pointing up now, and that he is confident he can overtake Manley.

For the first time in years, businesses are being expanded and new ones are being started. Electricity and water service are reliable again and the streets of Kingston have been cleaned up. Seaga has begun pouring millions of dollars into health, education and public works projects. In an interview with Treaster at his office, Seaga said, "The main thrust now is the second phase of adjustment, which is social adjustment aimed at a reduction of poverty. We have passed the economic adjustment stage. I'm not saying we don't have some fine tuning to do, but the bulk of it is behind us." Manley's administration spent more than the country earned on a wide range of social
programs. Thousands of middle-class managers and junior executives abandoned Jamaica as the country veered to the left. Foreign lenders tightened their purse strings.

US aid was cut back after Manley backed Castro's decision to send Cuban troops to Angola in 1975. The 1980 victory of Seaga's Jamaica Labor Party over Manley's People's National Party was welcomed by Washington. Seaga was the first foreign head of state to visit the Reagan White House, and Reagan later visited Jamaica. US aid to Jamaica jumped five-fold. It has averaged more than $100 million a year during Seaga's tenure, making Jamaica, proportionate to its size, among the highest recipients of US aid in the world. Money has also flooded in from international banks.

Manley says he has learned from his mistakes and become more pragmatic. But he says that he has not discarded his fundamental democratic socialist beliefs and what he describes as his "instinctive egalitarianism." He says he would reserve the right to criticize US policy in CenAm and elsewhere and would continue to argue for a reordering of international economics to give more favorable terms for underdeveloped countries. Although he would like to restore diplomatic relations with Cuba, he would not pursue "a relationship of the kind that would be deemed provocative by Washington," he said. The State Department has reacted favorably. "He understands us better," said Richard N. Holwill, the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for the Caribbean. "The Reagan administration obviously does not see eye to eye with him on every issue, but I think there is a mutual respect." Jamaican businesspersons say they still prefer Seaga, but they think his chances of beating Manley are slim. With that in mind, they are hoping Manley has really changed. (Basic data from NEW YORK TIMES, 09/21/87)

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