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Jamaica: Polls Predict Victory For Manley In Feb. 9 Elections

by John Neagle

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By Feb. 4, eight persons had died and 75 were injured in violence since Jan. 15, when campaigning for the Feb. 9 general elections began. Jamaicans will choose between Prime Minister Edward Seaga of the Jamaica Labor Party (JLP) and Michael Manley of the People's National Party (PNP). Political violence in the 1980 general elections, when Manley was voted out of office, claimed more than 600 lives. On Feb. 3, following the most recent deaths, Seaga said, "The PNP's object in causing such violence is to intimidate JLP backers into not voting." Manley, who served as prime minister for two terms from 1972 to 1980, has dismissed such accusations. By the weekend preceding the election, Seaga was trailing in the polls by 14 points. He has remained 12 to 18 points behind Manley for the past two years. Although the economy in recent years has generally been described as healthy, Seaga cut social services, permanently alienating many Jamaicans. The Jamaican economy grew 2.5% in 1986, 5% in 1987, and an estimated 3% in 1988. Manley is perceived as the more "humane" alternative. The majority of Jamaica's 2.3 million people are poor, and since 1980, their purchasing power has stagnated or diminished. Schools and hospitals are crumbling and lack basic supplies. Today, Jamaica has a foreign debt of slightly more than \$4 billion, one of the largest in the Third World in proportion to population. More than 40% of the country's export revenues are dedicated to debt service. Manley has attempted to convince Washington that he is a different man today. Seaga was perceived as the Reagan administration's closest ally in the Caribbean. During his tenure in office, Manley flaunted his friendship with Fidel Castro, nationalized farms and companies and opposed the US in Africa and Central America. In an interview with the New York Times (02/05/89), Manley said that though he would eventually restore diplomatic relations with Cuba, he would not have an intense relationship with Havana that might make Jamaicans or US officials uneasy. In foreign affairs, said Manley, his first priority would be to go to Washington to meet with President Bush, the State Department, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. Last August, the two political leaders signed a pact calling for joint mediation of any conflicts between their parties' activists. A similar accord before the local elections of 1986 was credited with keeping down the level of violence. On Feb. 3, the island's 10,000 soldiers and police officers voted so they will be free to maintain order during Thursday's elections. On the same day, Seaga signed an order calling into service hundreds of army reservists to assist security forces in maintaining order during the week before balloting. All 60 seats in parliament will be contested in the election. The JLP won all seats in a 1983 election boycotted by the PNP. Manley called for the boycott after learning that only four days were allowed for nomination of candidates. On Feb. 5, a poll published by The Daily Gleaner (Kingston) said Manley's PNP will easily win a 36-seat majority in the parliament. The nationwide sampling of 1,024 voters was carried out Jan. 27-29 by University of the West Indies political scientist Carl Stone. No margin of error was stated. The two rivals are foreign-educated members of Jamaica's elite. Seaga graduated from Harvard, Manley from the London School of Economics. (Basic data from AP, 02/03/89, 02/05/89; AFP, 02/04/89; New York Times, 02/05/89)

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