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APPROVED FOR RELEASE
DATE: JUL 2000

Latin America Review

27 June 1988

~~Secret~~
PA LAR 88-016
27 June 1988



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LATIN AMERICA REVIEW [REDACTED]

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Fall Election [REDACTED] 1

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The moderate opposition is increasing, its lead over Prime Minister Manley's forces, despite ruling-party efforts to promote a US "destabilization" campaign and to provoke political violence. [REDACTED]



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Jamaica: Opposition Gaining for Fall Election [REDACTED]

Summary

The moderate opposition Jamaica Labor Party (JLP) is increasing its seemingly unassailable lead over Prime Minister Manley's People's National Party (PNP), despite efforts by PNP leftists to promote a US "destabilization" campaign and to provoke political violence. The preponderance of evidence suggests that the JLP will win the election, that Manley will have little choice but to step down, and that [REDACTED] assistance from Cuba probably will cushion but not prevent his downfall. Manley--in contrast to his actions in the 1976 election--apparently is not fully backing the radicals' strategy. [REDACTED]

JLP Fortunes

The JLP's strong position has improved in recent months, despite a surge of urban violence. Reliable polls show an increase in the JLP's lead from 12 percent to 15 percent between November and May. A widely respected pollster, who has accurately predicted Jamaican elections since 1972, stated in March that the JLP probably would secure 44 to 48 of the 60 seats in Parliament if the contest is basically fair. [REDACTED]

Fundamental political and economic instability on the island precludes a sanguine prediction of election results. Trends favorable to the JLP appear to be increasing, however, as party leader Edward Seaga [REDACTED]

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lines up what is likely the broadest base of support ever recorded in a Jamaican election campaign. The JLP can count on large majorities of the island's 200,000 union members and of its 7,000 members of the police and Army. Moreover, with the manpower of organized labor, it appears to have the financial backing of virtually the entire private sector. ■

Political Violence

The attempt by some ruling-party leftists to provoke the JLP into violent confrontation reached an early peak in April when 10 to 30 gunmen--at least two bearing sub-machineguns--attacked a JLP dance and killed five people. In the same period, thugs armed with automatic weapons raided a police station in a Kingston ghetto in a calculated effort to intimidate the security forces. ■

The bloodbath widely predicted after these incidents has not materialized, however, although isolated political violence has continued and will likely increase as election approaches. The JLP has so far maintained a discipline that is undercutting the ruling party's strategy. Moreover, the JLP, which has its own thugs in the wings and is now supported by the most powerful union in Jamaica, apparently has the resources to defend its turf and to outmatch Manley's supporters in the streets. ■

The security forces, however, have provided the radicals with their most surprising setback. In late May, Jamaica's influential police union publicly demanded the removal of leftist National Security Minister Dudley Thompson after it accused him and the administration of political interference and of covering up illegal gunrunning. ■

Both the police and Army have since made strong public pledges to guarantee an open and honest election. ■

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Manley, who made an early rousing defense of Thompson, apparently is now caving in to strong pressure from the JLP and a host of Jamaica's most influential professional groups. The Prime Minister [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] intends to replace his increasingly controversial security minister. [REDACTED]

Alleged Rightist Coup

Publicity following the recent arrest of 27 alleged rightist coup plotters will provoke some local sympathy for Manley, but it is unlikely to improve his poor chances for reelection or to provide a pretext for increased security measures against the JLP. [REDACTED]

Seaga has compounded local rumors by charging that the PNP either fabricated or exaggerated the conspiracy to justify a state of emergency. These rumors could have some basis in fact, as additional security measures would increase Manley's leverage against the opposition. [REDACTED]

On the other hand, the largely anti-Manley Army evidently took the lead in the investigation of an incipient and seemingly foredoomed conspiracy mainly concentrated within its own ranks. The accused include three junior Army officers and 23 noncommissioned officers led by a virtually unknown political rightist. Whatever its origins, however, the coup scare is having little impact on the growing fortunes of the JLP. [REDACTED]

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Manley's Role

Manley apparently has refused to join local radicals in exploiting the coup plot as part of an alleged US "destabilization" campaign. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Manley also asserted that Seaga himself was the target of political assassins and that Washington should provide the opposition leader with tight security during his current visit to the United States. [REDACTED]

Manley has done little this year to restrain the anti-US pronouncements of PNP radicals, but he has kept his own rhetoric in check. While the leftists have tried to revive the US "destabilization" campaign of 1976, Manley has stated publicly at least twice since last November that he does not believe that the CIA is trying to destabilize his government--a significant about-face concerning his once favorite whipping boy. [REDACTED]

Manley's influence in the preelection period will continue to be crucial, because he now represents the last obstacle to a radical takeover of the PNP. While he has both projected and protected the leftists during his seven-year administration, he also has channeled their considerable energies away from subversion and toward support for an established political party. Ironically, the moderate forces bent on Manley's defeat now are depending on the Prime Minister to hold the PNP to its commitment to electoral reform and to an early election--a year before the end of Manley's constitutional mandate. [REDACTED]

Prospects

The pace of the enumeration process now underway--about half the island's one million eligible voters have been registered--suggests that Manley's original target of an October election is realistic. The JLP so far is satisfied that the process is establishing the groundwork for a fair election. [REDACTED]

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Local rumor persists that Manley, with Cuba's help, will forestall or fix the election by inciting violence that will lead to a state of emergency and to his entrenchment in power. The attempt to escalate violence undoubtedly will continue to be an important element in the PNP's campaign to stop the JLP, as well as the principal threat to a fair election. [REDACTED] thugs, moreover, might help PNP radicals forcibly to hold some constituencies in an opposition sweep. That any PNP strategy can successfully prevent the advent of a Seaga government, however, appears increasingly doubtful. [REDACTED]

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