

tors (and making them compete, which they have seldom done before).

### Political predicament

Following its sweeping victory in 1980, the popularity rating of the ruling JLP experienced a natural decline through to 1983. Buoyed by the approval of half the population for the Grenada invasion of October 1983, and saying he wished to reassure foreign investors and gain support for his numerous plans, Seaga called a snap election for December 1983. The JLP won merely because it was uncontested by the PNP opposition led by Michael Manley. Thus from the beginning of 1984 the JLP had total control of the entire parliamentary machinery and is not required to go to the polls again until 1988. The situation is without precedent in Jamaica, and has everyone guessing. Its by-product is to render the parliamentary system largely irrelevant. Since virtually every reward has already been squeezed from the political pork-barrel, it appears that the predominance of the JLP has rendered numb those who are not guessing about an election. Meanwhile the PNP has organized itself as an extra-parliamentary opposition complete with shadow cabinet and "constitutional representatives" in each of the sixty ridings, and announced detailed criticisms at its monthly Peoples Forum in Kingston. Local wit has it that "Michael would rather not have to deal with the present crisis anyway," so don't look for great pressure for an election. The Jamaicans who understood and were proud of their parliamentary system have found the whole situation embarrassing. Others felt alienated: one young US-bound emigrant said, "Its not my government, man, this Syrian." Edward Seaga comes from the Lebanese community in Jamaica, previously known as Syrian.

### Social impact

The sociological effects of the economic decline have been generating greater and greater anxiety — not among the really poor who already lived in total insecurity, but throughout the middle classes and those who expect to move up into their ranks — the people who voted for Seaga in 1980. Crime, contained somewhat after the lawlessness of the 1980 election year, increased sharply in 1984, particularly violent crime involving guns, including shooting by and of policemen. The man buying jerk pork could have been a special kind of policeman. There is even a lucrative "rent-a-gun" business somewhat cheaper than "rent-a-gunman". There have been military sweeps in both the town and countryside, and reports of capturing large groups of well-armed men have circulated widely. "Politically motivated" killings increased in 1984 over 1983, the police reported.

Life is not all grimness and guns. Jamaicans assert their flare in fashion shows and modelling, cricket and horse racing. There is a beauty contest in every little town. Those thriving under the JLP attend balls and soirees, others have the rhythm of reggae. There is a new play produced every two months. All of these circuses, and the hustling industries which surround them, elevate the players above the grinding routine. Shrewdly recognizing potential revenue, and the potentially nasty side-effects, the

government and a polyglot opposition became locked in a heated debate in 1984 about whether to allow gambling casinos on the island. The decision to do so had apparently already been taken by Seaga but the debate raged on. In this context diversion and style are king, right down to dressing up babies for a malnutrition clinic or a spendid funeral for a poor fisherman. But even in diversion most expressions of colour and class divisions are conserved.

No diversion has altered the desire to emigrate. Current admissions for permanent settlement by desired destination countries simply have not satisfied demand. New visa requirements for visitors to Canada have created long line-ups. The demand is so intense for U.S. entry that fraud and ingenuity are used to bypass regulations. Ironically, Seaga promised to "bring them back" — some came and left again, others shrewdly kept a foot in each country. At age of retirement, however, such people decide to stay. "After all," said one, "who wants to die in the cold?"

Reports of unemployment in the labour force (1.1 million persons over age 14) have been steady at around 27% for the whole period, though at times the labour force contracts and so the real effects are even greater. Meanwhile, sudden strikes and lockouts in both public and private sectors became a regular feature by 1984, even strikes in the Bank of Jamaica which is under the supervision of the Prime Minister. Demands for contraction of the civil service, pressed by the IMF on behalf of many other agencies and resisted successfully for years, finally resulted in the cut of 6,000 positions in 1984; 10,000 had been demanded. This "compression" of the civil service further undermined Seaga's former support base in the middle class, although the effects are heaviest among lower income groups who count upon public sector "casual" and impermanent wage labour.

Food politics became much more serious in mid-1984 when the government finally acquiesced to IMF, World Bank and USAID demands for complete removal of subsidies on cooking oil, rice, corn meal, flour, skim milk, and other basic food. As these items disappeared from the market (for a variety of reasons) street talk and hot-line radio discussions brought the first recollections of the late 1970s back to Jamaicans who would otherwise prefer to forget. The impending food crisis, and the fear of riots like those which occurred in the Dominican Republic two months earlier, caused Seaga to create a food security program, optimistically intended to supply 400,000 people with free food stamps worth .33 a day for three basic food commodities. A program of feeding in school was to be expanded five-fold to supply a nutritious snack to 600,000 students. Few observers believed such targets could be reached, regardless of costs. But the fact that it was necessary to introduce them is the extraordinary thing. "This is a relief situation now, we are not talking about economic development," said a vice-president of one of the country's top food companies, himself upset by a visit to a west Kingston slum. Nevertheless, in the face of all these facts, Seaga reiterated bravely in July 1984 that, "if there was no IMF we would still be carrying out these programs because they are our programs. The only difference is that the IMF wants a faster pace for their implementation."