



**BUDGET
DEBATE**
MARCH 16, 2021
2:00PM

**ONE
JAMAICA**

**POWERFUL
TOGETHER**

MARK GOLDING, MP

The role of the Opposition

Madame Speaker, I wish to begin this presentation by saying a few words about the role of the Opposition at this time in Jamaica's history.

Some people may be of the view that it is the business of an Opposition to oppose for its own sake. We on this side do not hold that view. A developing country such as Jamaica cannot afford that approach, when so much of the success of our young nation depends on harnessing the national will to achieve our national goals. We must support actions which we agree with, and be willing to assist the Government of the day with proposals and suggestions that we believe can help to make Jamaica stronger. We say, Powerful Together.

On the other hand, it is our responsibility on this side of the House, to be constantly alert for infringements of guaranteed freedoms, or other abuses of power. We must be vigilant and strident in responding to mal-administration and corruption, wherever it is identified. We must be rigorous in criticizing policies and actions which do not contribute to national development. And we must do these things with courage, and with our full commitment.

Our democratic system has brought us this far, without losing the freedoms and openness that Jamaicans hold dear. It depends on the Opposition to strike the right balance between the two aspects of our constitutional role. I trust that, with God's guidance, we will maintain that balance and continue to contribute constructively to Jamaica's development.

Consensus in a time of deep national crisis

Madame Speaker, this budget debate is happening at a time when our country is deep in crisis. The pandemic has been allowed to get out of control, and the health care system is buckling as a result.

Some people may be of the view that it is the business of an Opposition to oppose for its own sake. We on this side do not hold that view. A developing country such as Jamaica cannot afford that approach, when so much of the success of our young nation depends on harnessing the national will to achieve our national goals. We must support actions which we agree with, and be willing to assist the Government of the day with proposals and suggestions that we believe can help to make Jamaica stronger. We say, Powerful Together.

The Government has the responsibility to lead. That is why it has been elected. They have the democratic obligation to marshal the entire society towards building VISION 2030's mission - a Jamaica which is

building VISION 2030's mission - a Jamaica which is "The place of choice to live, work, raise families and do business." This means that the elected Opposition must be meaningfully engaged by the Government, if the country is to secure the great future contemplated in VISION 2030

We therefore regret that the Vale Royal Talks commenced by our predecessors on both sides, have been laid to rest. Those meetings allowed the Government and Opposition to discuss important matters affecting our country, and develop a consensus where possible.

In a similar vein, the removal of Opposition Members from chairing most of the Parliamentary Oversight Committees after the 2020 general election was also a retrograde step. We do not accept it, and civil society does not support it. It has weakened the system of checks and balances on which an accountable and transparent democracy depends.

Prime Minister, I call on you, once again, to reinstate the convention that was established by PM Bruce Golding in 2007, and was maintained by both sides up to September 2020. It is the right thing to do

Madame Speaker, the history of the Government's attempts to implement the National Identification System (NIDS) teaches the importance of working together. Both sides had long recognized the importance of establishing a national identification system for Jamaica. That understanding emerged decades ago, when we started to work together to build a world-class electoral system to secure our democracy.



However, the route taken by the Government in pursuing the NIDS legislation was wrong from the very start. With both Houses making over 200 amendments to the NIDS Bill, it was obvious that something was very wrong with that Bill. We strongly advised them to send it to a Joint Select Committee for a comprehensive review. The Government adamantly refused to do so. Instead, they rushed to pass that Bill.

We had a duty to pursue a legal action in the Constitutional Court to protect Jamaica, and the legislation was duly struck down in its totality. That could and should have been avoided. But because the Government chose to proceed unilaterally, much time and effort has been wasted. Three years later, a completely new Bill is now before a Joint Select Committee being reviewed in detail by both sides, as was always the correct approach.

Mr. Prime Minister, the lack of an effective channel of dialogue between both sides is not good for Jamaica. The Government and Opposition have not had even a single meeting since I became the Leader of the Opposition. We should restart the Vale Royal Talks. The Nation needs us to work together to tackle the current crisis. Mr. Prime Minister, I urge you to do the right thing.



Continuity in Economic Policy

Madame Speaker, Jamaica has benefited from consistency in economic policy for the last eight years.

In this era, so-called “fiscal consolidation” has been the mantra, to achieve debt sustainability. Essentially, Jamaica has been running high primary surpluses and a balanced fiscal budget, to reduce the public debt. This has been buttressed by the legislation of a Fiscal Responsibility Framework, with specific Fiscal Rules.

The motivation of all this is to get the country out of the debt trap, where most of the budget has been consumed by interest payments and public sector wages, instead of social programmes and public investments to drive national development.

This important fiscal discipline has been supported by a series of reforms that were agreed with the IMF, to make the economy more efficient and competitive. Most significantly, the system of tax administration and collection has been modernized and improved. This has yielded tremendous increases in revenues to the Government. Tax revenues have grown significantly more than inflation since 2015.

It was also agreed with the IMF to pursue complementary reforms to the monetary policy framework, through legislation to make price stability the central bank's principal objective. This commitment resulted in the 2020 amendments to the Bank of Jamaica Act.

Madame Speaker, there has been consistent bipartisan cooperation on these efforts, both here in Parliament and behind the scenes. Jamaica has been the better for it. This shows the possibilities for rapid progress in other areas, through the resumption of the Vale Royal talks.

Nevertheless, we must remember that macro-economic stability is not an end in itself. The objective is to provide more options for Government pursue the policy objectives of its choice.



Achieving that objective is the essence of economic independence, which the Rt. Excellent Norman Washington Manley, in his last address to an Annual Party Conference in 1968, recognised as the mission of the next generation.



The Socio-economic impact of the Pandemic on Jamaica

Madame Speaker, with Jamaica's economy shrinking by over 11% during the past fiscal year, the debt-to-GDP ratio has naturally worsened

Our economy was particularly vulnerable. The tourism industry, which directly and indirectly comprises over 30% of our economy, has been substantially impacted. Related sectors, such as entertainment, sports and transportation, have been shut down or hit very hard.

The impact of this crisis on ordinary Jamaicans has been devastating. The impact on women in low-income households has been particularly harsh. The World Food Programme's survey published in September 2020 reported that in Jamaica:

- 7 in 10 Jamaicans were having difficulties eating enough during the crisis;
- 7 in 10 suffered a job loss or reduction in income;
- 1 in 3 were skipping meals or eating less;
- 2 in 10 had no food at home; and
- 1 in 10 were going a full day without food.

Since then, a January 2021 report from the US Department of Agriculture has revealed that over 400,000 persons in Jamaica are currently “food insecure”. This food insecurity is double their pre-Covid projections, and is primarily found in female-headed households with at least one child.

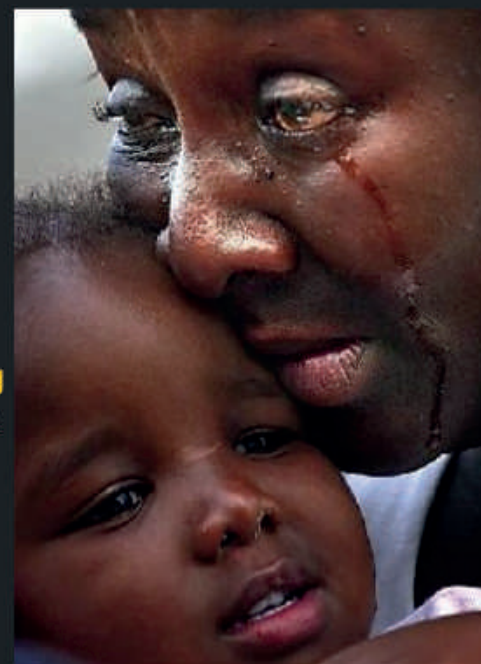
Indeed, households with children have been hit the hardest in the pandemic. The Caribbean Policy Research Institute (CAPRI) found that 45% of households with children in Jamaica now suffer a shortage of food. It is even higher (56%) for female-headed households. These households are coping by eating smaller meals, or eating fewer meals per day.

As a Member of Parliament, I am sure that I am not alone in seeing first-hand the pressure that the people are under. We now receive daily requests for help just to buy food. This did not happen before the pandemic.

I will share with you a message recently sent to me by a young mother, which is typical in its description of the situation faced by so many. She told me:

“I'm still having it very hard and can't even afford the internet for their online classes. I would do great with a lill help please sir ...I'm trying to do a small business so I can find food for my family, but it has been such a struggle to keep going.

Sometimes I can't even buy my goods cuz we have to feed from it, and every time I try to add something else to the table, I fail. Sometimes I feel like just giving up, but I know these kids are depending on me, so I'm seeking help to support them.”



The Government's response last year

Madame Speaker, the CARE programme launched last year was the Government's primary response to this socio-economic crisis. However, it provided less than 1% of GDP in direct assistance to vulnerable Jamaicans and businesses. PATH beneficiaries only received one month's extra benefit. The pre-Covid unemployed received a single payment of \$10,000, and that was over eight months ago.

As regards businesses, the Government chose to make formalisation a condition of accessing assistance. This approach effectively ensured that many micro/small business owners were unable to access any assistance under the CARE programme. This outcome was entirely predictable, given the high level of informality in the Jamaican economy.

What is more, Madame Speaker, many people who qualified and applied for assistance under the CARE programme, are yet to receive it



In the tourism sector, there are hotel workers and craft vendors who have not been paid the assistance for which they applied. Similarly, small hotels have been unable to access the financing that they were told was to be provided for them by the EXIM Bank.

The transport sector is the same story. Last year, owners and operators of public passenger vehicles were promised \$25,000 or \$40,000, depending on their category. They applied for this, from June last year.

To date, however, not a cent has been paid out to many of these taxi and bus operators. They are suffering great economic distress. The pandemic has reduced travel, due to school closures, working from home, and the curfew. Taxis are required to carry one less passenger, which has automatically reduced their revenue. And the price of gasoline has risen every week for the past three months.

I am calling on the Government to fulfil its promises to these hotel workers and transport operators.



The Budget & the Pandemic

Madame Speaker, the annual budget is the Government's opportunity to change priorities and adjust policies.

This is when the Government should alter its direction, if experience and data show that their approach is failing to meet the needs of the people.

At this time of crisis, people must be the priority. People must be at the centre of policy. However, in the face of the deep economic and social crisis, the approach of the Government has been to continue its tight embrace of fiscal conservatism. In the face of this devastating crisis on the people, the response of the Government has been timid and inadequate.

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This budget does not do right by the Jamaican people, especially the poor, those earning low wages, the unemployed, and elders struggling to survive on the meagre NIS pension that has not been increased since 2018.

And it is not just individuals who are struggling. Service industries, especially tourism, entertainment, transport and sports, have been hit badly. In those sectors, businesses both large and small now have their backs to the wall. The loan moratoriums made available to some of them have now come to an end, but their cash flows have not recovered.

These businesses need help from the Government to survive. Jamaica's economic recovery requires their survival. However, the Government has only allocated \$5 billion (0.25% of GDP) for business support in the budget. This will not be nearly sufficient, given the scale and likely duration of the impact on these industries.

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- **\$5 billion Support for individuals and households, with a special allocation for female headed households;**
- **\$5 billion of support for micro and small businesses, with loans and grants supported by business development and financial literacy training;**
- **\$3 billion of support for farmers, including more buy-back programmes for their surplus produce, and small-scale irrigation systems;**
- **\$3.2 billion for a more comprehensive broadband roll-out, prioritizing connecting communities and schools, especially in rural areas and deprived inner city communities;**
- **\$2.3 billion for renewable energy/energy efficiency program for households, and a loan facility for energy saving devices;**
- **\$2 billion for more incentive pay for health care workers; and**
- **\$1 billion for island-wide digital literacy training.**

This additional support and stimulus package of at least 1.0% of GDP would be financed by a reduction of the primary surplus target to from 6% to 5%. We would support a further suspension or adjustment of the fiscal rules to facilitate it. The legislation provides for this, where the economy is impacted by a severe shock, as it clearly is now.

social tensions, which have the potential of manifesting in unpleasant and damaging episodes that we would be wise to try to avoid.

Madame Speaker, the pandemic has shown the importance of building greater resilience. This includes rebalancing our heavy reliance on tourism, which experience has shown to be vulnerable to a variety of factors over which we have no control. Our proposals are not mere band-aids or hand-outs. They are strategic investments in the Jamaican people, and the society as a whole.

Our proposed investments in broadband, agriculture, expanding digital penetration and promoting digital literacy, would help to retool and reposition the Jamaican economy. They would build greater economic resilience, by upgrading and leveraging our tech infrastructure and skills. They would position Jamaica to function at a significantly improved level of economic performance in a post-pandemic world.

Madame Speaker, our approach is consistent with our proven commitment to achieving debt sustainability. It will let us recover faster and stronger, to resume the debt reduction path to which we are all committed.

The BOJ \$33 billion dividend

Madame Speaker, a substantial portion of the funding of the budget for the coming fiscal year is to come in the form of a \$33 billion dividend from the Bank of Jamaica (BOJ), which the Minister of Finance has said will be paid to the Government in the first week of April.

The Minister told us that this \$33 billion dividend is being paid out of the profits made by the BOJ in 2018, 2019 and 2020. He has been ecstatic about this dividend, and proclaims that it is the fruits of sound policy. There is a point I wish to make about this.

When one examines the audited financial statements of the BOJ, one discovers that the profits for those three years from foreign exchange trading and from net gains (in Jamaican dollar terms) on the BOJ's holdings of foreign currency assets, were J\$6.3 billion in 2018, J\$7.3 billion in 2019, and J\$4.3 billion in 2020. This totals J\$17.9 billion.

Therefore, J\$17.9 billion, which is 52% (i.e. more than half) of the BOJ's \$34.7 billion of profits for the three years, came from foreign exchange trading and from net gains (in Jamaican dollar terms) on the BOJ's net holdings of foreign currency assets.

The Minister told us last week Tuesday that only about 20% of the BOJ's profits over the three years 2018-2020 came from realized foreign exchange gains. However, he did not mention that, in addition to that, over 30% of the BOJ's profits over the three years came from unrealized foreign exchange gains.

What is the main source of these unrealized foreign exchange gains? The BOJ's assets are predominantly (66%, or two-thirds) comprised of foreign currency assets, which greatly exceed the value of the BOJ's foreign currency liabilities. This means that the BOJ has a very substantial long position in foreign currency. As the Jamaican Dollar depreciated in value over the three years, the BOJ made a massive foreign currency gain from this long position.

So, in essence, the BOJ has profited from the volatility and devaluation of the Jamaican currency over the three years. That is the same devaluation which has made life harder for the Jamaican people. And that, Mr. Speaker, is the bitterest form of non-prosperity anyone can imagine. How can it be good policy?

The devaluation of the Jamaican Dollar effectively operates as a tax on the purchasing power of the Jamaican people, the majority of whom live off a fixed Jamaican dollar income.

Madame Speaker, rice, flour, cooking oil, mackerel, medicine and other basic necessities of life that are imported into Jamaica have all gone up very substantially over this period, in large part because of this same devaluation that has resulted in these profits for the BOJ. The Shadow Minister of Finance graphically showed the increases since 2016 in his excellent budget speech last Thursday.

Madame Speaker, this disproportionately hurts low-income people. Their wages have not kept pace with the rate of these increases. People with investable income can invest in assets (like real estate and shares) that increase in value as the currency weakens, but low-income Jamaicans have not been able to make those investments. They are suffering the full brunt of these massive price increases on the items they rely on to survive.

In using this \$17.9 billion from BOJ to fund the budget, the Government is essentially treating the devaluation as a form of tax. It is a regressive, indirect form of taxation, paid in particular by less well-off Jamaicans.

The Minister has boasted that this is the result of good policy. That would suggest that it was a deliberate strategy. It has further impoverished those Jamaicans who can least afford it.

And that, Madame Speaker, is the bitterest form of non-prosperity anyone can imagine. How can it be good policy?

The Minister proclaimed with great joy that there will be no new taxes in the coming year. But the Jamaican people have already effectively been taxed to the extent of \$17.9 billion through the devaluation that has driven the BOJ's foreign exchange gains over the past three years. This accounts for over half of the \$33 billion dividend which he is relying on to finance the budget.



Crisis in Health Care

Madame Speaker, I must say something about the state of health care in our country.

It was the polio epidemic of the 1950's that led to my father setting down his roots in Jamaica, and in that sense one could say that the eradication of polio was why I was born and bred here. Jamaica is now confronted by another, more devastating health crisis, this time of unprecedented proportions.

The Government was initially commended for a fine start in responding to Covid-19. Unfortunately, some serious mistakes were then made, which have given deadly impetus to the spread of the virus in Jamaica.

In August, the Prime Minister decided to call an early general election in the middle of a Covid spike, and this resulted in community spread taking hold. Then in December, returning Jamaicans were allowed to come here without first producing a negative Covid test, and the quarantine rules were not effectively enforced.

Due to these bad policy decisions, Covid-19 was allowed to get out of control in Jamaica, and it now

threatens our way of life and very existence. On February 22, 2021 the New York Times reported data showing that in the preceding 28 days Jamaica had recorded the second highest rate of increase in infections in a group of 23 countries around the world

allowed to get out of control in Jamaica, and it now threatens our way of life and very existence. On February 22, 2021 the New York Times reported data showing that in the preceding 28 days Jamaica had recorded the second highest rate of increase in infections in a group of 23 countries around the world.

Irrespective of what the Minister of Health and Wellness says, the reality is that our number of daily confirmed cases has been hitting unprecedented levels, week after week. The health system is now reeling under the pressure. Hospitals are bursting at the seams, and many patients have not been able to find beds.

Reports are that over 200 nurses have contracted Covid, on top of the 271 nurses who left the health system last year and the over 100 more who have already left this year. Critically, oxygen is reportedly in short supply.

The people of Western Jamaica continue to suffer from the debacle at the Cornwall Regional Hospital.

it has been under renovation from 2017 and is still nowhere near complete. There has been no accountability for the lack of proper oversight and project management, bureaucratic bungling and significant cost overruns.

All we get from the Minister is the usual PR about the facility functioning adequately. But this is far from reality. One only has to ask the people Montego Bay, Trelawney, Hanover, Westmorland and St. Elizabeth about the awful challenges they face when they have to go there for treatment. The citizens of Western Jamaica deserve better.

Madame Speaker, I want to express gratitude and appreciation to the doctors, nurses, ancillary staff, community health aides and other health care workers who are in the trenches every day fighting to save the Jamaican people. They are today's heroes, who have been giving service beyond the call of duty, in the most adverse circumstances. We salute them.

We also deeply regret the spate of tragic stories of persons dying because of the weakened and overburdened healthcare system. They shall not be ignored:

- 17-year old Jalisa McGowan died from an asthma attack, after she was reportedly refused treatment at the University Hospital;**
- 32-year-old Shenay Spencer, a nurse at the Jamaica Cancer Society, died at the Kingston Public Hospital in circumstances which have necessitated an investigation. Her cry of “Need help. Get help. My body is weak. My battery is dead”, in a voice mail to her sister, foretold of her untimely passing;**
- 102 year old Eda McKenzie died at St. Ann’s Bay Hospital, after reportedly sitting in a wheelchair for more than 24 hours, before she was assigned a bed only after the family persisted;**
- A female inmate died at the South Camp Adult Correctional Facility, where there has been a Covid outbreak among female prisoners in overcrowded conditions, but no decision has been made to grant early release of inmates who were not convicted of violent offences**

Madame Speaker, the Jamaican people are now tired, frustrated and angry. The Government has run out of ideas. It has been merely tweaking the same old measures, which are clearly not working, in the face of a torrent of positive cases and mounting hospitalizations.

The only hope for getting out of the crisis is through a comprehensive vaccination programme to achieve herd immunity as quickly as possible. This means vaccinating about 70% of the population, or about 2,000,000 adults.

Madame Speaker, the Government was tardy in initiating the process of sourcing vaccines. Nothing was done to seek bilateral arrangements with suppliers until mid-January, after I and others reacted with alarm to the Minister’s announcement that the Government’s target was to vaccinate a mere 16% of the population in the first year.

The only vaccines to come here so far are the 50,000 gifted by India as part of its Vaccine Maitri initiative. This is a shining example of the type of developmental assistance within the global South that our late party leader Michael Manley advocated. We take this opportunity to express our deep gratitude to the Government of India for this assistance, without which we would still be nowhere.

Madame Speaker, while this is a valuable first step, I have called for a high-level task force, with an appropriate mix of expertise and experience, headed by the Prime Minister himself, to guide the procurement of vaccines for the Jamaican people. This call has not even been paid the courtesy of a response.

The nation is confronted by a situation which demands all hands on deck, and that is the way we should respond to it. However, as it stands today, the National Health Fund (NHF) has been left on its own to try to procure the vaccines that the country needs. They are competing against many other countries in the world, without the benefit of this task force to help open doors with suppliers and guide the procurement strategy

Madame Speaker, there is another matter arising. The issue of how vaccines are distributed is fundamental, as it is a matter of life or death for many people, especially the elderly and those with co-morbidities.

The Government must ensure that the rollout of the national vaccination programme is rapid, logical, data driven and, most of all, equitable

In keeping with the principle of equity in distributing Covid vaccines, the guiding objectives disease,

and ensuring fairness in who gets vaccinated and when.

We should not have people “skipping the line”, as occurred in the very first week of the vaccination programme, despite the Prime Minister’s promises to the contrary. Regrettably, this embarrassing breach of protocol is exactly what many Jamaicans expected, in a country that is too often organised around the needs of a few and not of the many. We have called for this breach to be audited, to determine its nature and extent.

More fundamentally, in order to save lives, vulnerable groups should be vaccinated first, and the rest of us should come after. And within the vulnerable groups, the prioritization of any particular group should be based on the relative vulnerability of that group. This how countries with the most rapid and successful Covid vaccination programmes have done it

Given the life or death implications of Covid vaccination, I see no moral justification for splitting the non-vulnerable population into phases 2 and 3, with certain industries getting ahead of everyone else. That approach offends against the principle of equity.

Crisis in Education

Madame Speaker, I must say something about the education system. The education system has been devastated by the pandemic. Hundreds of thousands of students have received very little education since schools closed in March last year. The attempts that have been made to provide alternative channels in the absence of face-to-face classes, have not gone far enough. The result is a damagingly high level of educational exclusion. The structural inequality in education in Jamaica is sometimes described as a system of educational apartheid. It has worsened with the use of virtual platforms to replace face-to-face learning. Children from low-income families have been particularly badly affected. For them, the lack of adequate devices and internet connectivity has been the norm rather than the exception.

In rural areas and low-income urban communities, far too many students have been unable to participate in the online learning, because they have no access to the necessary devices or the internet (or both).

Many children are now on the streets romping during school hours. Some have joined the workforce in an effort to help to feed their families. They may never come back into formal schooling, without a targeted intervention. The consequences will be severe for them and for the entire society. Experts are warning that some children deprived of school because of Covid-19 “are going to end up in crime”.

At the tertiary level, our major universities and colleges face severe financial challenges. Their students are also not immune to the economic downturn. The rate of deregistration and dropping out has climbed dramatically.

In this context, there have been calls to repeat the school year starting next September, so that the learning loss can be recovered. There seems to be merit in this, though consequential arrangements would need to be made for those students who are ready to move up, and for the little ones who will be entering the school system.





Inequality

Madame Speaker, I now want to say something about the structure of Jamaican society. Inequality flowed from Jamaica's colonial experience.

The People's National Party, from its very outset in 1938, set out the national agenda in terms of a fairer and better deal for the Jamaican people, especially the majority without the benefit of generational wealth.

In 1971, in his contribution to the budget debate of that year, then Leader of the Opposition Michael Manley said:

“We have got to realise, first of all, that if we genuinely mean the motto ‘Out of many, one people’ we must recognize that that motto is not part of the social experience of the people at large. With all that may have developed in politics, the fact is that, in social terms, Jamaica is a divided society. We must understand that until all the youths in this country find the level at which their oneness is manifest in action, we perpetuate the social divisions that bedevil this country.”

We remain committed to reducing inequality. We see it as an historical duty to build on the legacy of our ancestors, heroes and heroines whose blood, sweat and tears brought our nation out of slavery and colonialism. This is why the PNP led the struggle for adult suffrage, so that all adults in Jamaica have the right to vote, and set the agenda for political independence.

Despite the efforts made, Jamaica is still plagued by high levels of income and wealth inequality. This inequality is manifest in the vast disparity of outcomes in the primary and secondary school systems, in the availability and standard of health care, in access to proper housing and basic amenities such as working sewage systems, street lighting and garbage disposal, and in access to justice.

Madame Speaker, sustainable economic and social development is not possible without deliberately building a more just and fair society. If we ignore the fundamental problem of excessive inequality in income and wealth, whatever social cohesion remains will give way to frustration, bitterness and resentment.

The commitment to reducing inequality offers our society the best platform to unleash the talents and potential of the entire population.

. This is especially true of vulnerable and excluded groups, such as persons living with disabilities, the elderly, people without titles for land, people who live in unplanned communities, and young people struggling for access to higher education.

Excessive inequality is linked with crime and insecurity, lower economic growth, and poor health and other outcomes. It is bad for all of us. Madame Speaker, OXFAM and Development Financial International produce the Commitment to Reduce Inequality (CRI) Index. It ranks countries on performance in three areas - labour rights, taxation policy, and social protection.

This Index in 2020 ranked Jamaica behind other Caribbean countries, and lowly placed in the global community. The 2018 Index ranked Jamaica's commitment to reducing inequality as 96th in the world. Two years on, that ranking significantly worsened. The 2020 index saw Jamaica falling to 124th in the world, and we ranked 21st out of 23 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. The 2020 report urged "government action to radically reduce inequality".

Similarly, the 2017 Jamaica Survey of Living Conditions, the most recent such survey, found “inequality at a level similar to 2008 at the height of the global recession”, and stated that “inequality remains a persistent problem as the data show fairly consistently wide disparities between the richest and the poorest groups in several indicators”.

That Survey pointed out the following manifestations of the very high levels of inequality in Jamaica:

- 4 of every 10 households in the poorest 20% of Jamaica’s population still use pit latrines;
- 7 of 10 households in the poorest 20% had no access to Internet/computers, compared to 3 out of 10 in the wealthiest 20%;
- Only 4 of 100 Jamaicans in the poorest 20% of the population had health insurance, compared to 40 per cent in the wealthiest 20%.
- 6 out of 10 older persons (60 years and over) were not receiving a pension; and of those receiving pensions, about a third received less than \$10,000 per month;
- Over 700,000 Jamaicans were living in overcrowded settlements with no clean water, inadequate -

- sanitization, no access roads, high unemployment and high school dropouts, as well as serious health and environmental problems.

And in terms of work, most Jamaicans are either unemployed or informally employed, and do not benefit from paid leave, maternity leave, sick leave and do not benefit from paid leave, maternity leave, sick leave and NIS or private pension arrangements. The informal sector accounts for approximately 60% of total employment.

The glaring inequality in Jamaica has been worsened by the Covid 19 pandemic. As I highlighted earlier, the pandemic has disproportionately impacted the lower socio-economic segments of the society. Whatever gains have been made in the past are in danger of being permanently reversed.

Madame Speaker, too many of our people are left behind by the current model of development. It entrenches vulnerability and exclusion. Many feel that “a so di ting set”; that the system has nothing for them.

There is precious little in the Government’s discourse, or their approach to economic management, which recognizes this excessive inequality as a serious problem.

The PNP has always rejected the trickle-down approach to national development.

We realize that if Jamaica stays on the path of lopsided, inequitable development, the hopelessness and despair of too many of our people will continue and only get worse.

The time has come to treat the level of inequality in Jamaica as a separate crisis, and to proactively rebalance the scales.



Our vision for Jamaica

Madame Speaker, Jamaica needs a vision which embraces our possibilities as a great people; a clear definition of the kind of country we want to build. With the benefit of definition, we can test every action against a clear picture of what we are trying to do.

There is no doubt that the State is in a stronger financial position due to the fiscal progress since 2013. The successes from the purposeful implementation of the reforms in the 2013-2018 IMF programmes, were built on the sacrifices of the Jamaican people. We must ensure that these are not in vain.

The successes must be used to build a society where all Jamaicans, of every class, colour or creed, have a place, and feel a sense of hope and belonging. Where all Jamaicans enjoy increased opportunities and an improved quality of life.



Madame Speaker, Jamaica needs a different philosophy to guide policy. It must be based on the principled pursuit of social justice and equality of opportunity.

Social justice and equality are not just abstract concepts to be sung about in inspirational songs. They are essential principles in constructing a cohesive society that can flourish and meet the hopes and expectations of all our people; a society that works for all and not just for a few.

We need to build a more inclusive Jamaica, with people at the centre of policy development. We're all in this thing together.

The PNP is committed to a model of development which is balanced and in harmony with the fundamental principles of social justice, equality of opportunity. That is, to building a Jamaica that works for all. We are committed to the fundamental social and economic transformation that is needed to build a stable, caring society; a society in which all Jamaicans are treated as equal citizens. Our goal is to build a system through which sustainable growth and development can become a reality; a system that exists for the empowerment of the people

Unless guided by this philosophy, economic growth will not lead to greater national prosperity. It will merely serve to enrich those who already have capital, while most Jamaicans are left to wonder why they cannot achieve their hopes and dreams in the land of their birth.



Social Transformation

Madame Speaker, some of the priorities of the next PNP administration in pursuing this social and economic transformation, will be as follows:

Land, Housing & Community Reinvestment

The PNP has always been committed to providing land and housing for the majority who were excluded from ownership and access.

It was Norman Manley's administration in the 1950's which offered the first National Land Reform Policy to provide land for shelter and farming to the broad masses of our people. This saw the construction of Harbour View and Mona Heights at very concessional prices in response to the demand for affordable housing units



In the 1970's, housing minister Anthony Spaulding led an unprecedented assault on landlessness and undignified shelter, evidenced by the delivery of over 60,000 houses and parcels of land to the working class and the poor. Prime Minister Michael Manley then created the National Housing Trust to provide low-income mortgages, and it became the most transformational institution in the housing sector.

After 1989, we oversaw the construction of thousands of housing units with the creation of Greater Portmore, financed under the San Jose Accord with Mexico and Venezuela. Between 1995-2002 PJ Patterson's administration advanced the process of land tenure to first-time land owners, with the provision of 30,010 titles and 28,000 letters of possession.

Nevertheless, some 700,000 parcels of land in Jamaica still have no registered title, and this undermines the financing of agriculture and rural development. It has contributed to persistent poverty over generations. The impediments are complex, structural and rooted in our history

Our response will have to be innovative, involving profound legislative and administrative changes. Under Dr. Peter Phillips, we developed a far-reaching set of legislative proposals that will, for the first time,

comprehensively tackle the intractable issues of land titling for our people.

In addition to reforms to facilitate easier land titling, we are also committed to programmes for a major thrust in building affordable housing, and for empowering occupants of dilapidated housing stock in inner city and rural communities to upgrade their homes.

As a matter of policy, Jamaica cannot only provide housing for upper income earners. Naturally that is where the greater profit lies, and no one can blame a developer for seeking out that segment of the market. The Government must therefore be the architect of creative and proactive policies that encourage developers to serve the chronically underserved segment of the market.

The Shadow Minister of Finance has outlined what we have in mind for incentivizing developers to invest in building affordable housing for low-income earners. It will take a strategic approach by Government, in collaboration with the private sector.

We will also commence a programme for persons living in deplorable housing conditions. We will empower them to fix their leaking roofs, to restore

walls that are crumbling or floors that are rotten, and to build their own bathrooms if they don't have one. We will do this by assisting them with the purchase of materials, while they make their own arrangements for the tradesmen and labour from within their communities.

This programme will facilitate the upgrading of the dilapidated housing stock in which too many Jamaicans now live. It will create a sense of achievement and progress in their lives, and the comfort of better and more secure living conditions. It will also provide an economic stimulus in these communities, with local tradesmen, labourers and hardware merchants benefiting from the investment that the people will make in upgrading their homes.

Madame Speaker, it really does Jamaica little credit that many depressed areas were once stable communities which ennobled our nation in sports, culture and scholarship. My constituency of South St. Andrew has produced boxing champions such as Bunny Grant and Percy Hayles, the brilliant West Indian batsman Collie Smith, the immortal Wailers comprising international musical icons Bob Marley, Peter Tosh and Bunny Wailer, and the last two Poet Laureates of Jamaica, Professor Mervyn Morris and Lorna Goodison.



We must rediscover that sense of excellence and discipline. It will take vision and commitment to rebuild communities like these, allowing their awesome human talent to flourish.

We are also committed to ensuring that these communities are no longer relegated to second class status when it comes basic amenities like street lighting, garbage disposal and water/sewage infrastructure.

These public investments will be complemented by a Community Reinvestment Act, offering incentives to encourage businesses to set up in marginalized communities, to provide goods and services to these large, underserved markets.

Community renewal must be pursued in a structured and deliberate way. It is by achieving community renewal that we will achieve national renewal

Early Childhood Development



Madame Speaker, we will prioritize Early Childhood Development, supported by a comprehensive policy to address the broader needs of children from birth onwards.

Jamaica needs a system of early childhood development that gets all our children off to the right start. We know they are bright, and the nation will reap rich dividends from investing in them. We need to fill the gaps left by teenage pregnancy, single parent homes, violence and poverty. As we speak, basic schools are struggling to survive, with many closing under the weight of high operating costs.

Jamaica must achieve the outcome that all our children are able to read, write and do basic arithmetic by grade four. Teaching must be supported by proper nutrition, and enhanced by exposure to the social skills and wholesome values that are fundamental to citizenship.

A National Programme for Vulnerable Youths

Madame Speaker, Jamaica has reached a point where there must be a comprehensive national programme to engage and reorient the lives of so-called unattached youths, and set them on the pathway of hope for a better life.

Our youths need mentorship, life skills, the building of self-esteem, and a sense of citizenship. This must involve vocational training, a chance at remedial education, and an opportunity to know what it is like to work in a job.

This programme must be holistic in its approach, and realistic in addressing the needs of the youths so that they stay the course and benefit from full participation.

Financing of Tertiary Education

Madame Speaker, the financing of tertiary education needs to be transformed, especially for young people whose parents just don't have it.

The State, and not the student, must bear the risk of employment creation. The next PNP Government will reconfigure the loan structure used by the Student Loan Bureau (SLB) so as to cap monthly payments at a reasonable percentage of their actual income, to ensure that it is manageable for young graduates. We will ensure that borrowing a student loan to invest in their education is something that students no longer fear.

The Minister of Finance announced last week that only one guarantor will be required by the SLB, going forward. That is a welcome step in the right direction, but it does not go far enough.

When the Public Accounts Committee recently looked at the SLB, we found that the amounts recovered from guarantors are quite small in the scheme of things, which suggests that the retention of this requirement

We know that many potential student loan applicants from low-income homes cannot find an acceptable guarantor. The requirement of finding a guarantor works against children from low-income households. The next PNP government will abolish altogether the requirement of finding a guarantor to access student loans.



STUDENT
FINANCE

Economic Modernization & Efficiency

Madame Speaker, I wish to say something about modernizing and strengthening the Jamaican economy.

We see broadband internet as a 21st century utility. We are committed to ensuring full access to the Jamaican people, as we did in the 1970's for electricity with the Rural Electrification Programme. Our Shadow Finance Minister has spoken to our plans to bring broadband internet to all Jamaicans.

Madame Speaker, we are committed to increasing the efficiency and productivity of our economy by modernizing Jamaica's commercial architecture. Our bureaucratic processes are often arbitrary, frustrating and onerous. This is a major contributor to the high levels of informality in the Jamaican economy.

- The build out of the national digital infrastructure;
- The establishment of a Logistics Council, bringing together the core logistics associations (i.e. the Shipping Association, the Port Authority, freight forwarders and customs brokers) to inform government policies affecting the industry;
- The passage and implementation of the Customs Bill now before Parliament; and
- The implementation of the Logistics Hub Initiative Market Analysis & Master Plan, which was commissioned by the last PNP administration and accepted by this administration, but with very little effort to promote it so far.

Madame Speaker, I also wish to say something about the ganja industry. This industry can assist in the economic recovery of Jamaica, providing much needed foreign exchange and creating employment.

Our 2015 reform to the Dangerous Drugs Act was transformational:

- It decriminalized personal possession and use of ganja, thereby reducing arrests and prosecutions by over 10,000 Jamaicans per year;

- It recognized Rastafari and their sacramental rights to cultivate and use ganja, for the first time in any Jamaican legislation; and \
- It created a platform on which a new medical cannabis industry could be built.

That was back in 2015. It is now time to go further. We will take the law relating to the lawful cannabis industry out of the Dangerous Drugs Act altogether, and enact a Cannabis Industry Development Act to support the inclusive development and growth of this industry

By contrast, since 2016 until now, despite operating in an improved fiscal climate. the record of this

Jamaica: World Bank, Ease of Doing Business Rankings 2010-2020

Year	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Ranking	75	81	88	90	94	58	64	67	70	75	71	Pending
Total # of Countries	183	183	183	185	189	189	189	190	190	190	190	Pending

In doing so, we will overhaul the current system of regulation that has been developed by the Cannabis Licensing Authority:

• We will ensure inclusion of small farmers, who are now effectively excluded from the lawful industry. We will reduce the barriers to entry, and support them by encouraging cooperatives that are linked to well capitalised processors, supplying small farmers with the best inputs and technology to grow and sell back high quality and safe medical ganja at fair prices.

• Since 2015, households have the right to grow up to five ganja plants for medical, therapeutic or horticultural purposes. We will empower householders to monetize this, by allowing them to sell their ganja to licensed processors or retailers, creating an important new economic opportunity to supplement the income of Jamaican households.

We will also promulgate new regulations to enable the Rastafari community to reap economic benefits from the cultivation and use of their sacramental herb. The law already allows the Minister of Justice to make these regulations, but this still has not happened.

The PNP pioneered ganja reform in 2015. We are fully committed, with the necessary knowledge and skills, to make the industry work for the empowerment and enrichment of ordinary Jamaicans.



Our commitments to the workers of Jamaica

Madame Speaker, our Party emerged in 1938 out of the historic labour protests of that year, and has maintained a close relationship with the labour movement ever since. Our first Party President and National Hero, the Right Excellent Norman Washington Manley, founded the National Workers Union, which remains an important affiliate of our Party.

It was Michael Manley who said in this House on July 15, 1970 that:

“It is in the totality of your social security and labour legislation system that you discover the true anatomy of the nation’s conscience.”

Pro-worker legislation passed by PNP Governments include:

- the Labour Relations and Industrial Disputes Act, which established the Industrial Disputes Tribunal to provide greater access to employment justice for workers;
- the Employment Termination and Redundancy Payments Act, which ensured that workers who are unjustifiably terminated or made redundant have clear rights to fair compensation;
- the Employment (Equal Pay for Men and Women) Act, ensuring that women and men earn the same pay for substantially similar work;
- the Maternity Leave Act, so that pregnant mothers get time off work to have their babies, without losing pay and benefits; and
- the Employment (Flexible Work Arrangements) (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, so that workers are not tied in to the traditional “9-to-5” working day, but can negotiate more flexible work arrangements with employers, without losing benefits

with employers, without losing benefits.

We remain committed to advancing the cause of working people in Jamaica, and there remains important work to be done.

In doing so, we will not be harming the interests of owners of capital. Rather, we are promoting a more equitable and mutually beneficial relationship between both capital and labour.

The next PNP Government will pursue a series of reforms to ensure greater fairness at work, improve industrial harmony in the country, and increase productivity and competitiveness in our economy:

- The prevalent use of repeating fixed-term contracts, and the fiction of independent contracting where there is no real independence, have too often become mechanisms to sidestep the basic guaranteed package of worker rights and benefits. This is not fair to workers, it deprives social protection systems such as NIS, NHT and HEART of significant funding, and it costs the State heavily in the long run.

These mechanisms need to be examined by all social partners with a view to having them properly organized, for the benefit of all. The next PNP Government will bring legislation to eliminate abusive contractual devices as a means of circumventing

-employment rights, and ensure the equal treatment of workers regardless of the legal form of their contracts.

- The sugar industry has gone through a severe and wrenching decline since the preferential trade arrangements ended. This has had a devastating effect, in terms of falling living standards and the rise in violent crime and criminal gangs in communities across Jamaica where the sugar industry was once the major employer.

Arrangements for the social and economic transition of these communities have been ad hoc and inadequate. The most recent egregious example was the forced removal of long-term residents of Innswood sugar lands by the Government to facilitate a sale to private developers, without proper relocation arrangements having been put in place for the people affected.

We will establish a Commission to examine the situation faced by communities in former sugar areas, and develop a comprehensive plan for the economic revitalization of those areas. The objective is to provide new employment and entrepreneurial opportunities for the displaced sugar workers, cane farmers and their families to earn an honest living and to live in dignity.

- We would like to see Joint Industrial Councils established in those industries where there are high levels of employment without common standards of working conditions, and which are without union representation.

The security guard industry is a case in point. Security guards comprise the largest group of security workers, larger than the police force and the military combined. But while some security companies have made strides in introducing enlightened employment practices, others lag behind in the areas of pension benefits, medical benefits, vacation leave and maternity leave.

Joint Industrial Councils provide a mechanism for addressing these issues in a cohesive way, for the long-term benefit of the industry and the overall economy.

- Jamaica's approach to setting the minimum wage dates back to 1938, and needs to be reviewed and modernised. As it stands today, the minimum wage bears no meaningful connection to the actual cost of living for a Jamaican household with a single breadwinner. It is time to transition to the concept of a liveable wage as a floor on earning.

The arguments against this usually focus on fears that some employers may cut back on workers, and that the costs to the State through out-sourcing arrangements will increase to accommodate higher wages.

On the other hand, the great benefits to the society from requiring a liveable wage across the board, tend to be ignored. It will improve the standard of living at the base of the society, reduce child poverty, reduce inequality, build social cohesion, stimulate aggregate demand and promote inclusive economic growth.

- We are committed to enacting paternity leave legislation, to encourage responsible fatherhood and stronger Jamaican families. We introduced maternity leave in the 1970's. The time has come to extend it to responsible fathers who want to play a central role in the upbringing of their children.

- We passed legislation in 1993 to provide incentives for the establishment of Employee Share Ownership Plans (ESOPs). A special unit was established within the tax department to facilitate ESOP applications. Several companies made use of the legislation, and in due course this created substantial wealth for their employees at all levels, from the bearer and janitor to the CEO.

Unfortunately, that momentum was not maintained. We are committed to reviewing and simplifying this legislation, and resuming the promotion of employee share ownership as part of a deliberate strategy to broaden ownership in the country.

- The Ministry of Labour has issued a directive that says that, based on its interpretation of a recent Supreme Court decision, the IDT cannot adjudicate on whether or not an employee has been unjustifiably dismissed for redundancy.

We understand that this matter may be appealed. Whatever the outcome in the courts, our position is that no such loophole should be allowed to stand, and the Act must be amended to make it pellucidly clear that the IDT can invigilate any ground of dismissal to determine whether or not it is unjustifiable.



Our Approach to Crime & Violence

Madame Speaker, violent crime has been a major cause of Jamaica's economic underperformance for decades. According to the World Bank, crime results in direct costs to Jamaica of nearly 4% of GDP, which is higher than most other countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. It is therefore surprising that the Minister of Finance had nothing much to say about crime in his budget presentation.

The human toll of violent crime in Jamaica is also severe. Apart from the tragic impact on the victims, their families and friends, it depresses national morale and undermines our hopes and aspirations for the future. Jamaica has been burdened with an exceptionally high violent crime rate for decades. The causes are complex, and include the impact of transnational organized crime, local criminal gangs, poor social conditions in many communities, and dysfunctional aspects of our culture which are sometimes legitimized in the popular culture.

International best practice confirms that a balanced approach, using both crime control as well as crime prevention measures, yields the best long-term results in the sustained reduction of violent crime.

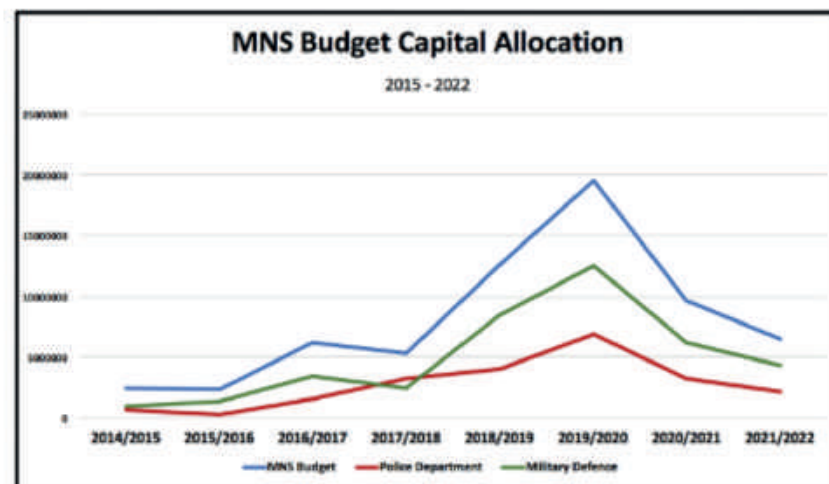
That is why the last PNP administration launched the Unite for Change Initiative in 2013, which involved educating citizens on the root causes of the epidemic of violence, igniting their passion, energies, and commitment to reverse it, and creating pathways to move people from concern to action. The Unite for Change Initiative, along with the CSJP III, sought to institutionalize crime prevention approaches within Jamaica’s national security strategy.

Regrettably, the Unite for Change Initiative was discontinued by the current Government when it assumed office in 2016. Since 2016, social interventions have been minimized or abandoned, in favour of an authoritarian or “tough policing” approach, but without any clear dividends. Under the Holness administration:

1. The force strength of the military (JDF) is growing rapidly, and on its current trajectory could exceed that of the police (JCF) within a few years.

2. The States of Emergency (SOE) were used as a routine crime fighting tool for three years from 2017 to 2020, allowing the military to operate autonomously of the police, and allowing citizens to be detained without charge for indefinite periods. This use of States of Emergency ceased when the Supreme Court ruled that such use is unconstitutional.

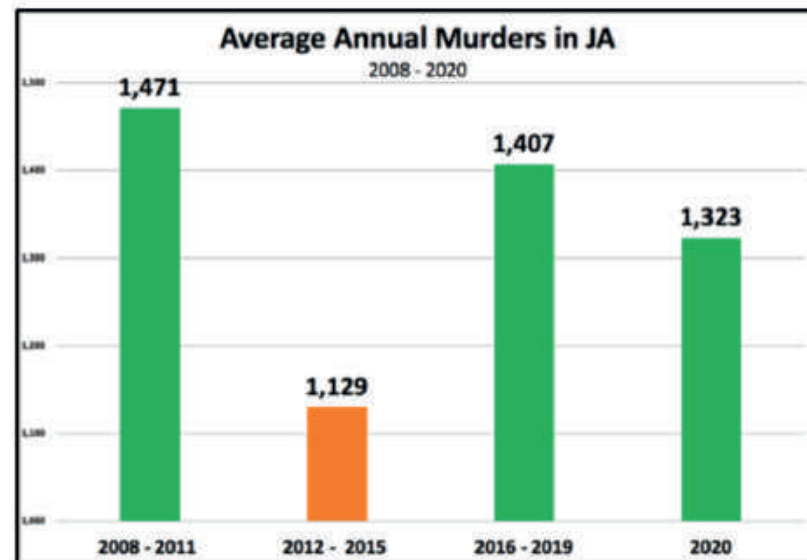
3. The capital budget of the military has far outstripped that of the JCF.



Notwithstanding consistent and well-funded messaging promoting this militarized approach, there is empirical evidence of the failure of these measures. For example:

- In 2020 Jamaica had the highest homicide rate in the Western Hemisphere, at 46.5 per 100,000.
- Statistics up to March 13, 2021 show that murders (294) and shootings (273) continue at an unacceptably high rate, increasing by 6% and 8% respectively relative to the same period in 2020.
- The clear-up rate for murder is very low (32%), showing weaknesses in intelligence and investigative capabilities. This has worsened as a result of over-reliance on the extraordinary detention powers provided by SOEs in the 2017-2020 period. Having detained suspects using the power of the SOE, the State did not build a case against the vast majority of the people who were detained.
- The 2019 Crime Victimization Survey shows that the percentage of persons who feel safe walking at night in their communities has fallen from 81% in 2015, down to 69% in 2018/19.

- The average number of murders each year under this Government has substantially exceeded the average annual figure during the previous PNP administration



This terrible record of performance is remarkable, given the extraordinary powers provided to the security forces by the 2017-2020 SOEs, and the vastly increased resources available to national security due to the success of Jamaica's fiscal programme. Our belief is that adequate resources through social investment for crime prevention are central to any efforts for sustained violence reduction. Jamaica's best hope is to tackle the major root causes of violent crime in a systematic way, while also properly equipping the security forces and the justice system with the tools, technology and human resources to

resources to carry out their work. We cannot be successful doing one without the other.

The PNP is committed to a balanced approach with well-designed preventive measures, such as:

1. Training and deployment of Violence Interrupters under the Peace Management Initiative;
2. Restorative Justice actively promoted by the Ministry of Justice and used extensively in the Justice System;
3. School-wide positive behavioural intervention support through the Ministry of Education;
4. Specific interventions aimed at keeping youth in school, and post-secondary employability training;
5. Positive parenting to mitigate against children adopting criminal behaviour; and
6. Incarceration being used primarily as an opportunity for rehabilitation, rather than only for punishment

There is now an opportunity to reset our approach and to return to a balanced methodology to reducing crime, via the mechanisms of the Crime Consensus Plan and the Crime Management Oversight Committee.

The Opposition was instrumental in the establishment of these mechanisms in 2019, and we are committed to supporting them. However, their success will require honesty and transparency, both between the main political parties and with the broader public.

International Affairs & Foreign Policy

Madame Speaker, I must say something about Jamaica's place in the world.

Jamaica has a long history of advocacy for a more just and equitable world, based on unyielding adherence to principle and the rule of international law. Over the years, this elevated our country to a position of admiration and respect on the world stage. It enhanced our influence with our peers, and we were able to leverage that goodwill to help our country get through times of adversity.

Being a small country, we have always had an internationalist posture, seeing our future as bound up with countries with a similar past and facing common challenges. There are many issues where the fortunes of our people can be enhanced by a progressive foreign policy, or can be undermined by opportunistic manoeuvres that are inconsistent with our tradition of standing by principle at all times.

We have also long recognized the strategic benefits of speaking with a common voice with our Caricom colleagues in dealing with larger players in the international arena.

Madame Speaker, it was therefore with considerable alarm and disappointment that we witnessed this Government departing from these traditions in its dealing with Trump administration. Sadly, Jamaica chose to participate in the fragmentation of Caricom's stance within the OAS in relation to Cuba and Venezuela, rather than standing in principled solidarity with the majority of Caricom states. Cuba and Venezuela are two countries

whose generosity to the Jamaican people is unsurpassed. Prior to this, Jamaica had dealt with them from a position of respect for the principles of self-determination and non-interference in each other's internal affairs.

The Government's departure from the established norms of Jamaica's foreign policy, and from the sure road of Caricom solidarity is highly regrettable. It was also pursued with a lack of transparency and without full disclosure to the Jamaican public.

A PNP administration would never have embarked on that slippery slope. We know that it cannot be prudent in the long run to depart from well-established principles that have served us well over many decades. Those principles had built Jamaica's prestige around the world. That is who we were. A leader within Caricom, and a sovereign, principled and respected state on the global stage.

Many Jamaicans were ashamed to hear Prime Minister Andrew Holness declare openly on an American news channel that – "Jamaica understands the orbit in which we are. We are in the backyard of the United States".

No Sah. What is this? Jamaica is not in anyone's backyard. We are no puppet or stooge to any foreign power. We are not for sale. As Michael Manley once courageously said, we walk the world stage on our feet, not on our knees!

With the advent of a new and more progressive administration in Washington, the Government's unfortunate dance with the Trump administration has been laid bare. Let us hope that Jamaica's prospects



Constitutional Reform

Madame Speaker, our Constitution is a construct of the minds who conceived it in the run up to independence. At that time, Jamaica was just emerging from centuries of colonial rule, and the world was a very different place.

The Constitution should not be made to congeal in its original form. It should be a living document which reflects the stage we have reached on our national journey, and assists us to make further progress with nation building.

Jamaica has produced leaders, like our revered National Heroes who played their part in getting us to where we are now as a nation. Surely, we owe it to these heroes to complete the circle of our independence, so that all our symbols and institutions are legitimately and proudly our own? Surely, the time has come for Jamaica now to cut the link with the English monarchy, and become a republic within the Commonwealth?

I understand that the two sides have been at one with this, but what is important is to deal with it. It cannot be right for this country, with its history of struggle against oppression, nor can it be consistent with our national self-image and pride, for Jamaicans to continue to pay allegiance to such an important symbol that does not, and cannot by definition, reflect and have meaning to the vast majority of our people.

This is a fundamental matter of national identity and self-belief. It really has nothing to do with the respect that is due to the reigning monarch in England, who is respected and held in esteem all across the world.

The important process of repatriating our sovereignty, which began in 1962, has stalled, and there is important unfinished business. The time has come for Jamaica to become a republic within the Commonwealth, with a Jamaican head of state, and for us to swear allegiance to the Constitution and People of Jamaica.

Let us proceed with the legal steps required to achieve this, since there is consensus that this is where we need to go. Let this House debate MP Mikael Phillips' Private Members Motion, reaffirm our joint commitment to replacing the monarchy, and then move the process forward.

Let us also enshrine in the Constitution another home-grown institution of democracy of which we can all be proud, and that has served the country well, the Electoral Commission of Jamaica (ECJ). We did it for Local Government in 2014, and we should do it for the ECJ now.

We also believe strongly in the importance of providing greater access to the highest level of justice for the Jamaican people, by moving from Her Majesty's Privy Council to the Caribbean Court of Justice as our final court of appeal. However, the consciousness of the other side is not there yet, so we should begin with the things that we already agree on.

Conclusion

Madame Speaker, there is a fundamental difference between the policies and approaches of our Party and the other. It is reflected in our history, our traditions, our orientation and our objectives.

We are the Party which opened up secondary education to thousands by introducing the common entrance exam. Before that, secondary education had been the domain of the privileged few.

We are the Party which made Jamaica the first country in the Western Hemisphere to introduce sanctions against the racist apartheid regime in South Africa.

We are the Party that achieved rates of economic growth among the top three countries in the world in that era.

We are the Party which eliminated the vile notion of bastardy and ensured that all Jamaican children have equal status and rights under the law

We strengthened the rights of workers by supporting collective bargaining and establishing the Industrial Disputes Tribunal. We gave women the right to equal pay for equal work. We gave women the right to paid maternity leave.

We are the Party which built the East-West Highway and the North Coast Highway from Negril in the West all the way to Port Antonio in the East, and which commenced and ensured the

completion of the North-South Highway. We expanded our airports and our sea ports. We transformed

telecommunications and internet services. We took Jamaica's infrastructure to a whole new level of development.

We are the Party which rescued Jamaica from the brink of financial ruin and restored the public finances to a sustainable path, successfully assuring the economic future of Jamaica. We did this without any social dislocation or unrest, itself an amazing achievement.

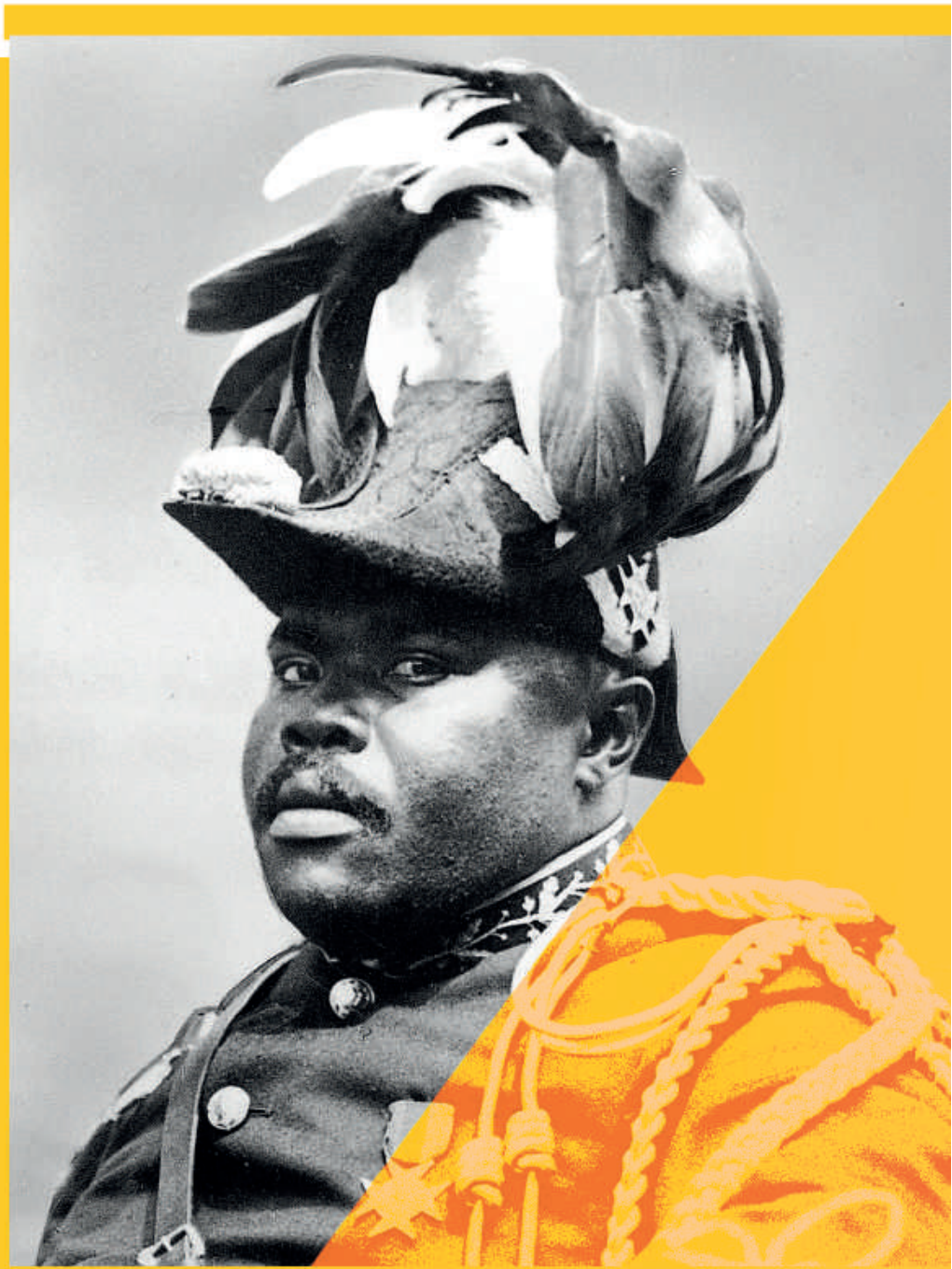
Conclusion cont'd

WE ARE THE PARTY WHICH DECRIMINALIZED THE PERSONAL USE OF GANJA, SO THAT MANY THOUSANDS OF YOUTHS NO LONGER HAVE A CRIMINAL RECORD AND CANNOT BE THROWN IN JAIL FOR SMOKING A SPLIFF.

THROWN IN JAIL FOR SMOKING A SPLIFF. WE HAVE A PROUD HISTORY OF EMPOWERING THE JAMAICAN PEOPLE, AND WE ARE COMMITTED TO CONTINUING THAT JOURNEY FOR THE BETTERMENT OF ALL. I CONCLUDE BY RECITING THE IMMORTAL WORDS OF OUR NATIONAL HERO, MARCUS MOSIAH GARVEY, WHEN HE SAID:

“The ends you serve that are selfish will take you no further than yourself, but the ends you serve for all in common will take you even into Eternity.”

**GOD BLESS
JAMAICA
LAND WE LOVE.**



A large, stylized letter 'P' in a light beige color, set against a dark yellow background. The 'P' is partially enclosed by a white, curved shape that resembles a thick arc or a partial circle. The background is a gradient of yellow, with a darker shade on the right side.

P

**POWERFUL
TOGETHER**