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Introduction

This Document

As a political movement, we discuss political issues and we have our own political platform. This document highlights some issues and areas of policy which we would like political parties and candidates to consider in their plans for the country.

We will be watching the 2020 general elections closely. We will be paying attention to the manifestos and promises made by the different parties and candidates.

Some persons have encouraged us to take the step to become one of Jamaica's official registered political parties, but our movement is not yet ready to contest elections. In the future, if we see a need and if we are able, the movement will develop an electoral arm to:

- contest elections
- represent the constituencies where the movement has concentrations of support
- represent the movement's national platform

For the time being, we will continue our work as we are. We will continue to organise, we will continue to meet, we will continue to build more cadres, we will continue to do grassroots projects, and we will engage the state about national politics when the opportunities arise.

Who We Are

LANDS is a movement that was founded in late 2016 to develop a Leftist political platform, based on consensus developed among persons from a broad range of progressive political ideologies including Democratic Socialism, Marxism-Leninism, Pan-Africanism, Black Nationalism, and others. Most of the members of the movement were born in the 1990s and the early 2000s, but we welcome persons of all ages to join our ranks. There are over 160 persons in the movement, with over 100 being consistently active participants in our meetings.

What We Do

We organise people into groups to informally discuss current affairs and to come up with solutions for problems on both the local community level and the wider national level. Persons are tasked with formalising the sentiments and views that are expressed informally. We currently have 7 groups, with plans to create more in the near future. We have held over 80 meetings this year alone. Our responses to problems sometimes involve developing projects, developing policy proposals, directly engaging the government, making presentations to joint-select committees, sensitising our peers to particular issues, and so on.

Issues

Representation of the Cultural Sector

In the same way that the “Jamaica Agricultural Society” (JAS) exists and has an institutional relationship with the Ministry of Agriculture, the government should encourage people in the creative and cultural sectors to form unions, guilds, and/or associations which would have permanent institutional relationships with the Ministry of Culture.

The functions of the Jamaica Cultural Development Commission (JCDC) could be expanded, or something new altogether akin to the Jamaica Agricultural Society could be formed to be a bridge between the associations/guilds and the government.

Our creative and cultural sectors are among the most important parts of our society, and their role in our national pride is often unrewarded. Jamaican music is known worldwide, and other cultural productions should be encouraged. This cannot be done without government policy welcoming inputs from artists and others in the sector.

Removing Taboo from ‘Politics’

Political apathy can partly be blamed on ‘politics’ becoming a dirty word and being discouraged, making it more difficult for ‘political’ entities to collaborate with ‘politically-neutral’ entities on social projects which can benefit communities and people. If we are serious about moving away from our violent political history, we need to be optimistic and look to the future; we need to start engineering the future society that we want to see.

In Jamaica, political engagement with educational institutions is near forbidden or at least taboo, even at our tertiary institutions. In Cuba, there are political organisations that youth can join. In the US, both the Democrats and the Republicans have youth arms which welcome high schoolers and operate in high schools, allowing youth to engage politics, meaningful debates, and organising from a young age. This is not to say that we should do the same, but it is odd that we expect youth to be super enthusiastic about politics after being sheltered from it even in university¹.

There should be some neutral ground established in different areas that will allow persons of all backgrounds to freely engage different social movements and political entities without worrying that it will be seen as political affiliation. Community associations and politically-neutral entities like charities and NGOs also should not need to be shy to collaborate with political movements on projects where they share common goals. Affiliate organisations of the 2 major parties could even work together on some things.

¹ They are sheltered relative to in other countries, not absolutely sheltered.

Food Security

Food security continues to be an issue in Jamaica. The government takes it for granted that we will always have trade-dependent 'supply lines' open. By being dependent on trade to satisfy our food needs, we make ourselves vulnerable to disruption of trade and supply lines.

We need to produce enough food to feed our people, or at least reduce the percentage of our food that needs to be satisfied by imports. This does not mean that people would or should eat only locally, but rather that there will be enough food locally-available if trade is interrupted by any national or international crisis.

One major hindrance to the agriculture sector is the lack of capital available to farmers. Many small farmers find it difficult to access loans or financing for improving or expanding their operations to make them more efficient.

There has also been a lack of investment in agro-processing. This is not to say that absolutely no agro-processing takes place, but there is much more room to do more. Often, the surplus of one time of crop will lead to low prices or even spoilage, which can be disastrous for farmers as they desperately try to sell off their goods and recoup whatever they spent on a production cycle. If we had more agro-processing, there would be more security for farmers in terms of having a market or entity to sell to. Some crops that spoil in short amounts of time could be processed into goods that last longer on shelves in retail or in the cupboards of consumers' homes.

Rural Development

We need to have serious commitment to rural development. Development is largely still focused on our main urban areas, especially Kingston. For rural areas, our ambitions need to go beyond building more hotels and call centres that thrive on cheap labour.

Low density housing schemes continue to take up large tracts of land in St. Catherine, for the purpose of serving Kingston. There are people who live in Clarendon and even Manchester who commute to Kingston for work. There could be higher-density housing in Portmore, like townhouses and more apartments, rather than small flats that together take up a lot of ground space and leave less space for business, green spaces, or even for breeze to blow. The low-density model contributes to suburban sprawl which further encroaches onto rural land, makes it more difficult for public transport to serve more people, and further extends commute times.

We need to develop rural towns more so that people can do business closer to their homes instead of sitting in traffic to go all the way to big cities. We need an overall balanced approach to planning and development that puts almost as many jobs in places as we put houses.

Housing and Land Development

Housing continues to be a major problem. There is an urgent need for the government to build or contract some sort of public housing that can be afforded by working-class people. Public housing can be something that is leased/rented to people for small portions of their income, given free to pensioners but transferred back to the state instead of being inherited by their families, or even sold to families on payment plans where the total due amount is close to the construction costs.

Rent prices in Kingston are often higher than minimum wage, sometimes being double our minimum wage for a 1-bedroom apartment. In Portmore, where \$30,000 can sometimes afford more than a 1-bedroom flat, that still requires at least 2 persons earning minimum wage to afford to live there, as someone can't be expected to spend the entirety of their income on rent when they have other expenses like utilities, groceries, and transportation, not to mention the many expenses that someone will have if they have children.

Rents are cheaper in rural areas compared to in cities, and it is easier to expand homes to accommodate extended families, but less jobs are available. Many people in both urban and rural areas are 'squatters' on land they don't own. There are self-employed persons who are involved in farming, artisanal labour, or transportation. Most of the wage jobs that are available are also often low-paying like retail or tourism. A lot of persons from rural areas are still flocking to larger cities to access education or find better-paying jobs, and therefore need to find places to live.

Still, even rural areas are seeing major increases in the value of land and therefore the cost of housing, with the North coast being a good example. There are large housing developments which copy the inefficient suburban sprawl pattern that we see in the US. These housing developments are sprawling through St. Catherine and St. Ann, making conditions ripe for long commutes and heavy traffic to become worse problems than they are now.

Many of these houses are being built for millions of dollars that many Jamaican workers will simply never be able to afford. If someone works for minimum wage and does honest labour, they should still deserve to live in dignity. Can someone who earns minimum wage be able to afford a 2-bedroom house? Can someone who earns minimum wage be able to have a house to raise a child or to support someone who needs to attend school?

There is a lot of anxiety among people who were born in the 90s and after, regarding how they will ever be able to afford a home unless they inherit property or end up in the minority of persons who earn high salaries. The solution cannot be tweeting about 2-3 houses being giving to specific individuals when entire communities still live in deplorable conditions. This needs to be solved on a large systemic scale, and not on a symbolic level for PR.

Contract Workers

Many workers lack any forms of labour protections because they work on extremely exploitative contracts that do not guarantee any health benefits or definition of working hours. Many of these workers are not entitled to sick leave, vacation leave, public holidays (or extra compensation if they have to work on public holidays), because they are not even considered “workers” in a real sense and are instead considered to be “contractors” of services, where their labour is the service.

This is a raw form of labour exploitation which moves to undo the decades of struggles that our people have gone through to fight for serious labour rights. It is dehumanisation of workers, as their entire value is reduced to their productivity while their humanity is entirely ignored.

There needs to be a scheme of stronger regulations in place to give contract workers the same or close to the same level of protection that normal workers have, while also allowing persons who prefer short-term employment contracts to retain that flexibility with less protections. People should not be working full-time for months in a row on contracts that do not give them any sort of benefits or even provisions for sick leave.

Minimum Wage

We had submitted 2 documents to the government concerning minimum wage, one in 2018 and the other in 2020. In both submissions, we called on the government to investigate living expenses so that a living wage can be calculated, and so that a minimum wage could be based on that.

This would require the government to be aware of the average price of rent, the cost of meals, the costs of transportation, and so on. Arbitrarily raising the minimum wage without considering people’s actual expenses will help to some extent but will still leave people suffering.

When the government cites rent prices, cheaper rents which are further from the city centre would also need to account for higher transportation expenses. The figures that are cited would have to make sense, because people would realise that it is difficult or even impossible to find rent below a certain price and to find transportation expenses below a certain amount, for example.

In general, the idea is establishing a recommended budget, a sort of declaration that a minimum wage is enough for an adult to subsist on; if the minimum wage is not enough for an adult to subsist on, then it is literally inadequate. This would force politicians to come to terms with how they expect minimum wage earners to live, and whether or not they really expect people to be able to survive on minimum wage.

Working Hours & Business Days

With all business opening and closing at roughly the same time, the busiest time for some businesses is the lunch hour. Some places get more business from 12pm-1pm than the rest of the day combined. The lunch hour tends to be the peak active hour for many businesses, because it is when most people get free time. Many workers need to use their lunch time to be customers of other businesses, because everywhere will be closed as soon as they leave work.

Paying bills, visiting government offices, going to the bank, or doing similar errands are things that normal working people can't get done outside of their working hours, as these places tend to be open only on weekdays and only during their working hours. It is different for someone who has a bearer to do their business for them.

Investigations could be done into whether we can cut the work week from 40 hours to a shorter number like 32 (four 8-hour workdays) or 30 (five 6-hour workdays). We had held this position that even before the COVID-19 pandemic and the resultant economic crises. To adjust, businesses could have longer business days (with shifts) or have 4-day work weeks so that workers have time to be customers of other businesses.

Having shorter working hours could involve requiring workers to be on distinct shifts (like an early shift or late shift), or a staggered approach with overlapping shifts where a few workers start early and leave early while some workers come slightly later but leave later. This allows workers to have time to do things before or after work. For a business that normally opens from 9am to 5pm:

Usually, some workers would reach before 9am (if the place opens at 9am, workers would arrive shortly before but not exactly at 9am) and would leave after 5pm (if the places closes at 5pm, workers would leave a little after but not exactly at 5pm).

There could be 2 overlapping shifts, with some workers arriving at 8am and leaving at 2pm, while some workers arrive at 12pm and leave at 6pm.

There could be overlapping 3 shifts, with some workers arriving at 8am and leaving at 2pm, some workers arriving at 10am and leaving at 4pm, and the last set of workers arriving at 12pm and leaving at 6pm.

There are many ways to creatively restructure working hours. If it will be done by cutting hours in the workday or days in the work week, the government should ensure that the weekly earnings of a worker aren't lower than before, i.e. they would have to raise workers' wages enough that 30-32 hours of labour are compensated at least as much as 40 hours were compensated before.

Electricity

The infamous Jamaica Public Service continues to prey on the Jamaican people, even attempting to incite conflict among the most vulnerable. When people started seeing their electricity bills increased during the recent lockdowns related to COVID-19, the JPS gave an explanation, replaced it with another explanation, and replaced that second explanation with yet another explanation. None of these explanations were related to each other, and they were all given at different times as pressure on JPS increased; they weren't all given at once as some sort of comprehensive report showing that they were each a factor that had a combined effect.

The first explanation was that people were staying home more, so they should expect to see increases in their electricity bills. This was proven to be a ridiculous explanation, as many people who saw their electricity bills being doubled were essential workers who were still constantly out of their homes, and people who were already working from home before the lockdowns warranted by pandemic.

The second explanation was that the price of LNG increased even though the price of crude oil decreased, but the price of LNG had increased by around only 6%, and LNG is not our only source of electricity generation in the first place. As of June 2019, LNG was supposed to account for about only 45% of energy generation, with 40% being generated by fossil fuels and 15% being generated by renewables². It is difficult for people to believe that a 6% increase in the price of the thing that is used to generate 45% of our energy would outweigh a significantly larger decreases in the price of the thing that is used to generate 40% of our energy, to the extent that their bills would double; the price of oil fell by around 50% in some markets and even by more than 100% in the US³.

The third explanation was that JPS was billing paying customers for electricity that was being used by persons who do not pay. Firstly, this was not new; JPS had always been charging paying customers for the electricity being used by people and communities that do not have official/legal connections. While some wealthy persons and some big businesses were guilty of stealing electricity, the attention still turned to informal settlements and inner-city communities where complications about land ownership affect whether someone can even get an official legal connection in the first place. Nevertheless, the middle class was riled up and ready to attack poor people for 'stealing' light. Many persons who face high bills from JPS are themselves poor and struggling to make ends meet; JPS wanted to turn them against other poor people.

² JPS to Produce 45 Per Cent of Power From LNG By June 2019 (Jamaica Information Service 2017)

³ Prices of crude oil literally fell from over \$60/barrel to nearly negative \$40/barrel (Tobben 2020)

There is not enough transparency about what is really happening with JPS; many people in our movement and in Jamaica overall still do not believe the explanations that they had given. Even before JPS gave its third explanation where they blamed rising electricity bills on the supposed theft of electricity, we had called for a thorough audit of JPS.

On top of that, we must revisit the question of whether the monopoly on supplying households and businesses with electricity should be in the hands of a privately-owned company in the first place, especially when some of the co-owners and executives of this company are not Jamaican and don't need to live here with the consequences of the company's actions.

The Exchange Rate

We have been told over and over that the exchange rate is now more stable, we have been told fancy things about the technical meanings of the terms volatility and stability, but we still see the exchange rate going up⁴ and many people will reasonably continue to be uneasy about that. We are told that the exchange rate moves in both directions, but what we see is that the lower band/point of fluctuation is always higher, and the higher band keeps breaking new records.

This is an issue. Some economists may disagree that there is even an issue with the exchange rate in the first place, but one of these out of touch economists didn't even think that food security was a real issue until the pandemic this year; he had to take back his words from 2018. Known for his wit on trivial things, he is better suited for a career in comedy than in Economics.

People having anxiety about our survival and our future is an issue. People having less confidence in our currency is an issue, and it won't be fixed by the BOJ making threads on Twitter. Teaching people about technical terms and indicators will not do much when all they see is their expenses going up while their income is not. We do not blame the government directly for this, nor do we even think that the exchange rate issue can be solved by the BOJ or monetary policy.

We need to seriously reorganise our economy to overcome our chronic trade deficit. We need to strengthen the manufacturing sector to complement the agriculture sector and to lessen our demand on imports for household goods. To do this, we cannot rely on hopeful incentives or on the invisible hand of the economy. A laissez-faire model of handling economic issues will always lead to crisis while leaving the government free of blame, because all agency is still left to the private sector whose interests do not necessarily coincide with the rest of the nation. We cannot rely on the profit motive to drive production when Capitalists can simply import things for retail instead of investing in production.

⁴ i.e. the price of USD going up where it costs more JMD to buy 1 USD

Foreign Policy

In general, we want foreign policy that asserts our sovereignty and refuses to bow down to the neo-colonial ambitions of the US, UK, or any other power.

We need to continue to demand reparations from the UK for centuries of slavery as well as the decades of post-slavery colonialism that intentionally left our economy undeveloped while London was industrialised as the metropole. We should be uncompromising in our demand for reparations and unwelcoming of excuses and resistance. Just as our ancestors did not decide to be enslaved, the matter of paying reparations should not be a choice or decision that the UK gets to make; we will get our reparations from them whether they like it or not, and this must be made clear.

We need to chart an independent foreign policy that is not guided by the US or its allies. We expect the leaders of this country to be true leaders, not puppets. Every marionette can expect to be suspended by strings, but we would hope that our leaders have more ambition than this.

China

We appreciate that the government continues to cooperate with China despite the new Cold War being launched against China by the US. The US has put out an intense propaganda campaign to discredit China and its contributions to the world, as well as to make up lies about China's role in the Third World, particularly Africa and the Caribbean.

Israel

The government of Jamaica has also embraced the settler-colonial state of Israel, despite its ongoing campaign of genocide against the Palestinian people. It was embarrassing to see the person who is the Prime Minister of our country standing beside and smiling with a dangerous corrupt thug like Benjamin Netanyahu.

The Americas

Our movement is disgusted with the foreign policy practised by the current government, where it has aligned itself with the international right-wing forces. The government has been far too friendly with the Trump administration and had endorsed sanctions against Venezuela which have significantly hurt the economy of the country and made everyday life harder for Venezuelans.

Sanctions on Venezuela have also directly impacted Cuba. Venezuela is Cuba's closest ally. It is very hypocritical of the government to endorse sanctions against Venezuela while pretending to be opposed to the US blockade against Cuba. Recent incidents which caused fuel shortages in Cuba were caused by the US blocking ships from transporting Venezuelan oil which Cuba relies on in the same way that Jamaica is reliant on imports for fuel.

The Jamaican government's claimed reasoning for the actions that it has taken against Venezuela are that Venezuela's elections and current government are not legitimate, so this would lead to us expecting that they would take similar actions regarding Haiti, Honduras, or Bolivia, but they have refused to. In Haiti, Honduras, and Bolivia, the people have been denied free and fair elections, and illegitimate governments continue to repress the people. Where is the consistency? Why is the government so vocal about Venezuela but so silent about the situations in these other countries that are also in the OAS?

Why hasn't the government directly condemned the role of the OAS in the coup and the ongoing political crisis in Bolivia? Why hasn't the government condemned Luis Almagro for his meeting with Luis Camacho, a Bolivian fascist who calls for violence against indigenous peoples? The government of Jamaica has also been silent on the human rights abuses ongoing in Chile, a country who Jamaica has been befriending lately.

Awful things also continue to be done by the governments of Ecuador and Brazil, governments which continue to brutalise indigenous peoples but get little or even no critique because they are friendly with the US just like our current government.

Andrew Holness claimed that he admired the fact that Michael Manley had said that as long as he was Prime Minister, we would walk around the world on our feet and not on our knees. Manley said that in the context of refusing to bow down to the will of the US; it was therefore disappointing to see Andrew Holness doing the opposite. The way that Andrew Holness had welcomed Rex Tillerson and Mike Pompeo into our country to shake their dirty hands is a disgrace. Mike Pompeo admitted himself to be a liar and a thief⁵, and brags about the atrocities that the CIA commits.

⁵ "We lied, we cheated, we stole." (Pompeo 2019)

Policies

Customs Reform

We need an overhaul of our Customs policies. Apart from simply generating revenue, we appreciate that Customs has served to limit the outflow of capital and wealth from the country, but it could also improve the way that it does this. The constant demand for foreign goods and the constant need to buy things from abroad is a result of the lack of locally-available options that people can afford.

When it comes to consumer goods, many people are left to choose between buying things online or paying retailers who imported the same things to resell them locally. This is not exactly giving any incentive for domestic production. Furthermore, many finished goods are forms of capital or equipment themselves that can be used for domestic production, and the high costs of buying them end up discouraging some persons from pursuing entrepreneurial goals.

Computers are used by students to further their studies, as well as by many different fields of professionals to do their business. Some entities get funding from abroad to do certain forms of research, many persons in the arts/media sector use computers for design and editing, some persons in the architecture/engineering sector use computers for mapping out plans or models.

Apart from computers, there are also other forms of equipment which will inevitably be more expensive than 50 USD or 100 USD, leading to extremely high Customs charges where the final cost of buying something and bringing it into the country ends up being 2-3 times the original sale price because of Customs charges.

This hinders multiple sectors. It hinders persons who do music, graphic designing, photography, video editing, and other cultural production. It also hinders persons who want to do things that are more related to material production like agro-processing. There should not be such big hurdles to buying things that are evidently machinery to be used for commercial/productive use.

The creative and cultural sector do things that are known worldwide; culture is one of our biggest exports. On the more material side, increasing our capacity to produce things domestically would either allow us to export more commodities (to earn more foreign currency) or consume less imported goods (to have a lower local demand for foreign currency).

We need our Customs policies to revolve around national goals, rather than just being a way of taxing people to generate revenue. The policies should incentivise things that we want to promote or encourage and disincentivise things that we want to discourage.

We could place higher charges on things that are less energy efficient and place lower charges on things that are more energy efficient. We could place higher charges on things that are finished goods for resale or consumption, and lower charges on things like machinery/equipment that can be used for production.

Overall, as we said before in a document submitted to the government in September 2018, the policies implemented by Customs should just be more sensible. There is an arbitrary 50 USD threshold which is very lower, where everything lower than 50 USD is duty-free and anything above 50 USD attracts ridiculously-high Customs charges that are often close to, the same as, or sometimes even more than the price of the item. As these charges are almost punitive, they discourage persons from doing things the proper/legal way and give them incentives to find ways to 'go around' the system by bribing Customs officials, editing invoices to reflect false prices, splitting invoices, simply waiting for someone to travel, or other means. When doing something right is more difficult than doing something wrong, it is only sensible to expect people to choose the latter.

Invoice Delay Penalty

Self-employed persons who do services for businesses like photography, graphic design, or other work in the arts/media and marketing fields have complained about some businesses being slow to pay for services.

In the UK, there is a law which allows a contractor to charge interest on an invoice that is paid more than 30 days late⁶. Unless a specific date of payment was agreed on, a payment is deemed late if it is not done within 30 days after the client receives the invoice or 30 days after the goods or services are provided (whichever is later).

Jamaica could consider having a similar law or policy, and also make a business liable for the expenses or inconvenience incurred if someone takes the matter to be resolved by whatever court of tribunal would be responsible for arbitration.

⁶ Late commercial payments: charging interest and debt recovery (GOV.UK n.d.)

Constitutional Reform

Becoming a Republic

We would be pleased if steps were taken for Jamaica to become a republic so that we can have someone who is a Jamaican national as our official and functional head of state, regardless of whatever political system we would use thereafter.

In becoming a republic, we would likely need to do a referendum, and we should therefore take the opportunity to look at other areas of constitutional reform in general, or at least other areas of our political system in particular, and get them addressed at the same time. It would be a waste of time and money to have a referendum to become a republic without doing any sort of reform to the political system that we got from the British.

Trinidad & Tobago is a republic and they have a political system that is more like ours than the political system used by St. Kitts and Nevis. In Trinidad & Tobago, the president plays a ceremonial role much like our Governor-General does.

We should have serious discussions about what role the head of state would play if we become a republic, whether the head of state would be:

- an apolitical ceremonial figurehead (Germany, Israel, Italy, Trinidad & Tobago)
- an executive position merged with head of government (South Africa, USA, Venezuela)
- a national leader who is separate from the head of government (Cuba, France, Russia)

If we have a President as head of state and a Prime Minister as head of government, their responsibilities and their relationship to each other would need to be clearly defined. Would the President be an executive figure that rules over the Prime Minister, a ceremonial figure who lets the Prime Minister handle most affairs, or a representative who simply represents the people and holds the government accountable on their behalf?

We would need to decide how the head of state would be elected (whether directly-elected by voters or instead elected by the legislature). We would need to decide whether the head of state is a member of a legislative body (like in Botswana) or is separate from any other state institutions.

If the head of state and head of government are separate, we also need to decide how the cabinet is appointed. Would we directly-elect the Prime Minister? Would cabinet members just be Members of Parliament who belong to the larger party like in the system we have now? Would cabinet members be persons who are not in the parliament but are accountable to the President and the parliament?

Fixed Election Dates

There have been suggestions for Jamaica to adopt a fixed election date; this is also something that should be considered thoroughly and not rushed into. Without certain provisions, a fixed election date can result in a constitutional crisis.

We do not need to go with one extreme or the other, i.e. the options available to us are not just between having a fixed election date and having the Prime Minister being able to call an election at any time. The authority of calling an early election could exist but be held by the parliament on a whole (where a vote is required) as opposed to just being held by the Prime Minister. This way, a parliamentary gridlock can be resolved, a motion of no confidence can have a sensible outcome, and the people can pressure a government to resign without worrying about unelected leaders taking power.

General Political Reform

There are other ideas and considerations in general about what alterations could be done to our political system.

We could explore different voting methods for elections. We use a first-past-the-post voting method where someone can win a seat with less than 50% of the votes. We could very well keep the first-past-the-post system but require the top 2 candidates to do a run-off vote if nobody got more than 50%. We could also replace first-past-the-post with an approval voting system, where someone votes “Yes” or “No” on each candidate, and the candidate with the highest approval wins the seat; this could allow people to vote “No” on all candidates to indicate rejection of all, or to vote “Yes” for 2 candidates that they like the most if there are 3-5 candidates. Either of these things would give more encouragement for independents and 3rd parties to participate in elections and would make less people feel alienated from the political system.

As for the Senate, we could consider having proportional representation being used to elect it separately from electing MPs for constituencies. The Senate could be expanded to have 25 seats, where a minimum of 4% of votes is required to win at least 1 seat. This is, again, something that could encourage a 3rd party to participate in elections even if they do not have their support base concentrated in a particular constituency.

There are many things we can discuss in reforming our political system; it should take some time rather than being rushed. We should consider the benefits and the drawbacks of any proposal rather than having knee-jerk acceptance or rejection. Some nice-sounding things aren't great, and some things may not sound great at first but turn out to make sense.

Right to Recall

We believe that we should have the right to recall MPs. If a significant portion⁷ of the registered voters of a constituency sign a petition or joint declaration to do so, the constituency should be subject to a by-election where the incumbent MP may choose to either stand as a candidate or immediately resign. If the MP stands as a candidate, the MP would keep his/her seat unless he/she loses the election.

The petition or joint declaration should not immediately make the seat vacant, or else the right to recall could be misused by a significant minority as a tool to unseat an MP who still has majority support in the constituency. That could complicate things if the MP is a cabinet minister, especially if the MP is the Prime Minister or the Minister of Finance.

Mandatory Voting

Some persons outside of our movement have been talking about whether mandatory voting would be a good idea. While some persons who don't vote may have a preference but just not see a need or be motivated to turn out to vote, some persons genuinely don't support any candidates in their constituencies or any major political party. Forcing them to turn up to vote could lead to spoiled ballots or them choosing a random candidate who doesn't represent them. Such a measure would give symbolic but false legitimacy to unpopular candidates and parties.

Mandatory voting would only make sense if we have an Approval Voting system, or if ballots included a "No Confidence" or a "Reject All" option where voters can choose to reject all candidates in their constituency. If we use an Approval Voting system and there is a constituency where no candidate gets above a certain threshold⁸ of approval, or if we allow a "No Confidence" or a "Reject All" option that receives more votes than any candidate in a particular constituency, the seat would be declared vacant. If a seat is declared vacant, it could be filled by holding a fresh election or by being appointed by a higher office (the Prime Minister, or an elected President).

Our current political system is very limiting, on top of the lack of difference between the modern iterations of our 2 main political parties. These things should be investigated and addressed if we want to improve voter turnout, rather than knee-jerk reactions like suggesting mandatory voting.

Mandatory voting would also require the electoral authority to actively enumerate everyone, as addresses will need to be verified and IDs used and confirmed before someone can vote in a constituency anyways.

⁷ This would need to be discussed and decided; it could be 35%, something lower, or something higher.

⁸ An approval threshold could be set to 40% or 50%.

The Election

Parties

Our movement will not be endorsing any political party for this election cycle. Members of the movement are free to vote for whoever they please, for whatever reasons they see fit. There have been suggestions for us to field our own party of candidates for the election cycle, but we do not believe that we are prepared to do so at this time. We will continue to build the movement, we will continue to engage national politics, and we may enter electoral politics at a later point in time when we decide that it is both necessary and sensible to do so.

Jamaica Labour Party

The JLP presided over some time of economic growth which should obviously be recognised, and they have shown that they are generally competent in governing the country. However, their job has not been flawless. We remain critical of JLP for both domestic issues and foreign policy. We are often vocal about the foreign policy aspect, but we have taken the time to address our areas of concern on domestic policy since we are headed for a general election.

We are deeply concerned with the levels of corruption that we have seen. We are happy to see that longstanding corruption has been uncovered, but some of the instances of corruption were related to current JLP officials, not merely longstanding issues that happened across different past administrations. Apart from Ruel Reid, other members of the JLP have been protected when they were revealed to be involved in corruption or questionable practices. A recurring joke that has emerged is that the penalty for corruption or incompetence is simply being moved to the Office of the Prime Minister, instead of outright being sacked and denounced by the government.

We did not like the way that the government treated workers during the wage disputes in 2017, despite eventually resolving the crisis when Nigel Clarke became the Finance Minister. We are also very concerned with the way that Christopher Tufton treats complaints coming from within the health sector; the government did well in handling the COVID-19 crisis in the early days but we do not believe that Tufton has been fully transparent about our issues and the state of our health sector in more recent times.

We are also disappointed that the JLP and its supporters repeatedly politicised the exchange rate when they were in opposition but, now that they are in government, use the same explanations for why the dollar is sliding. It offers the people no comfort, and it is simply blatant hypocrisy.

Many of the JLP's positive moves in the 2016-2020 parliamentary period were only enabled by the rigid years of austerity that we suffered under the 2007-2011 (JLP) and the 2012-2016 (PNP) governments that preceded it. This is seldom mentioned.

While we appreciate the government for aiming to eliminate fees to allow for free education and free healthcare, we are constantly worried by the underfunding of schools and hospitals, and we do not see the sense in the government's decision to agree to a cap on public sector salaries which was set to 9% of our GDP. Putting a cap on the government's spending on public sector salaries will inevitably limit the human resources that are available for the health and education sectors. We already pay teachers and medical staff so little to work such long hours in inconvenient working environments, and they can easily leave the country to find better-paying employers abroad. It does not make sense to want to provide free education and free healthcare while putting such a rough constraint on the education and healthcare sectors which face shortages of resources and staff. We need the party to be more careful about embracing austerity measures in the future, and to ensure that its policies are consistent with each other.

People's National Party

The PNP's performance has been disappointing, to say the least. For over 4 years, they have been an ineffective opposition; you would not remember that the JLP only won the last general election with a 1-seat majority or that it only had a 3-seat majority after some by-elections were held.

The PNP has drifted from its Democratic Socialist base that it established in the 1970s. Its current leader, Peter Phillips, is the face of the party's embrace of the rigid neoliberal austerity measures that alienated its support base in the 2012-2016 term. He says things that appeal to our movement and to the working-class masses of Jamaica, but his track record during the last PNP government leaves him with little credibility.

Peter Bunting, who hopes to become the next party leader, leads an even more Capitalist wing of the PNP alongside Mark Golding. Despite being younger than Phillips, he failed to win over the support of the PNP Youth Organisation (PNPYO). Though Bunting and Golding often defend human rights, we don't see what significant difference there would be between them and the JLP.

The PNP has made historic contributions to Jamaica but has drifted onto an unfortunate path; regardless of the outcome of the election, it should do some introspection to rediscover its values and gather its base. It cannot continue to dig Michael Manley out of his grave to harp on the 70s, especially when its modern political character does not reflect its platform in the 70s. The PNP has the potential to be a progressive party and remain the leading voice of the Left in the country, but only if it holds onto its principles and avoids drifting to the right.

Jamaica Progressive Party

The JPP has a platform of progressive but unrealistic economic policies like making Jamaican wages near to the level of wages in the US. People who care for socio-economic justice could find some common ground with them in terms of what they aim for but be confused about how we could really get there. The most worrying thing about the JPP is that their leader is a wealthy man who lived in the US for a long time.

Unfortunately, their well-intentioned economic policies are accompanied by ideas that many people will reasonably find absurd. It does not help that they have not properly elaborated on their policies or exactly how they would work. They claim that their leader is extremely wealthy and that his personal wealth would largely help with the policies that they hope to implement, including paying off Jamaica's debt which is around 14-15 billion US dollars.

The JPP hopes that cutting taxes would lead to a more prosperous economy by virtue of ensuring that everyone has more disposable income. At the same time, they want to nationalise and take control of key industries including sugar and bauxite. With this, they expect the state to have the necessary resources to usher monumental infrastructure projects like millions of homes and over 60 hospitals. They are also focused on law and order, wanting harsh penalties for stealing and even wanting to use the death penalty for violent crimes.

United Independents Congress

The UIC has been around for a long time but many people still do not know much about them or what they stand for. They make a noticeably big deal about the biography and the image of their leader, Joseph Patterson, and they hope to enact constitutional reform to eliminate political parties and completely reshape Jamaica's political system.

It is rare to hear anything from them outside of election times, and they may end up meeting the same fate as the NDM if they focus more on talking about reforming Jamaica's political system than on current everyday issues affecting people. The UIC strongly opposes the death penalty, and their understanding of rights focuses heavily on the individual and civil liberty.

The UIC's economic platform still revolves around a Capitalist market economy. They want to eliminate a lot of taxes, including property taxes, and simply have a low flat income tax rate and a lower GCT. They are hostile to what they call "UN agendas" including mandatory vaccinations and policies being used to mitigate the effects of climate change⁹.

⁹ The UIC Manifesto (United Independents' Congress 2020)

Candidates

We will not be endorsing any candidates for any constituency in this election cycle. In the future, when our different localised groups establish relations with political party organisations in their respective areas, we will decide who to throw our weight behind in each constituency, rather than endorsing candidates based on party affiliation.

In the future, it may be possible to see us endorsing a particular political party's national platform or manifesto while endorsing specific candidates from different political parties as candidates for their respective constituencies.

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