

BABYLON BURNING



Children were amongst the injured.

On Saturday 7th July 2001 July police entered Tivoli Gardens in Downtown Kingston, the Jamaican capital, looking for guns that had killed Willy Haggart, the gang leader, or *don*, of nearby Arnett Gardens, an event that had resulted in weeks of intermitant gang violence between supporters of both parties in the West Kingston areas Hannah Town and Denham Town. Finding only one gun during the search of Tivoli, they were asked to leave by residents.

The cops weren't going anywhere. They began shooting up the area and a gun battle ensued. On Sunday They 'locked down' the area, shooting anyone leaving their homes and also shooting into homes, stupidly even doing so in front of TV cameras. 20 residents, one cop and one soldier died. Overnight on Sunday road blocks went up in all the outlying parts of Kingston, protesters shooting at cops trying to dismantle them, killing two, and refusing to free up communications into and out of the city in solidarity with Tivoli residents.

Meanwhile, bodies from the warfare were left rotting on the streets downtown until Tuesday, families and even the Red Cross being prevented from taking them to the morgue by shots from police snipers. Only when a fact-finding mission by 'neutral' Kingston businessmen entered Tivoli, accompanied by TV crews, were the streets safe

enough for people to leave their homes, for the first time in days. Amongst the bodies collected were those of 4 people who, it is emerging, had died from a combination of fear, dehydration, heart-attacks and hunger, as

many had not eaten since the previous Friday when they could last leave their homes. This included children, one of whom was wounded by being shot in her bed, whilst others had spent the nights hungry and terrified under their beds.

On Wednesday another army entered Tivoli - the army of God! Being prepared to "risk their lives" as Kingston's Bishop Blair put it, they held a prayer rally and candle-lit vigil, long after the gunfire had stopped, distributed food and wept ostentatiously for the dead. Where were they on Saturday when similar actions might have actually saved lives?

Police and Thieves in the Street

Jamaican society is notoriously one of the most violent in the world, with 500 people dying by violence between January and July this year. This on an island of only 3 million people. A huge proportion of these are murdered by police; at least 1,400 in the last 10 years. Amongst several outrages this year alone, 7 youth were shot dead in cold blood by 60 cops in Braeton, just outside Kingston, because 2 of them were suspects in a murder case, and because the cops knew they could get away with this treatment of ghetto people.

But the police are not the real root of the problem. Ghetto people say that *gun* is the cause. This is no naive statement of the obvious. It is a euphemism for the widely held opinion that it is

and always has been politicians who lie behind social violence. It was, quite literally, rival politicians who armed the ghettos in the 1970s and '80s.

Politricks

Jamaican party politics emerged from the corrupt and unequal society which was the legacy of both colonial rule and the handing over of power as part of national independence in 1962. The two major parties, the People's National Party (PNP), currently in power, and Jamaican Labour Party (JLP), both have their roots in the island's self-serving trade union movement. Using their supposed working class credentials they gained support in impoverished areas by arming and granting political favours to area *dons* and their *soldiers* (the JLP notoriously using CIA money, given in response to Cuban overtures to the PNP).

By the time of the bloody 1980 election, a situation arose whereby voting, and voting for a particular party depending on where you lived, was mandatory through fear. Nowadays there is even less to choose policy-wise between the parties than there is in the UK, and both are a little cleverer in distancing themselves from direct implication in gang violence. Nonetheless, at Roaring River squatters were told by PNP supporters before a recent bi-election that they would be evicted if there was a significant JLP vote.

In Downtown and West Kingston the *dons* and their *soldiers* fighting it out are among the leading supporters of the two parties. Tivoli Gardens is the home constituency of opposition JLP leader Edward Seaga (known to the Rastas as "CIAga"), ahead in the polls 18 months ahead of the next general election, his party having recently won two important bi-elections. Willy Haggart was a PNP *don*.

Each party hypocritically blames the other for starting the violence. Leading up to the violence of the July 7th, Seaga unashamedly denied safe passage to the local PNP councillor in JLP controlled areas, presumably because of the





unlikely chance that he will talk sense there. Meanwhile a PNP "peace" initiative offers large cash prizes to DJs and songwriters speaking out against the violence, but the offer is only made to those in PNP-friendly areas, the organiser saying "we don't want to go into communities where there are thugs...(and) people aren't as like-minded as us".

The outrage amongst ordinary people in Jamaica at the above events is indescribable. It has produced an anger that will not subside. It is made worse by the political nature of what occurred. The government used the link between Tivoli and Haggart's murder as an excuse to send in legalised terrorists to teach Seaga a lesson, and to make it seem that he was a "man of violence" in control of a violent political gang. The PNP, in contrast, has two gangs of gunmen, those it has armed illegally and the cops, more ruthless on Saturday in Tivoli than they have been known to be in PNP areas. But the violence served the JLP too.

The cops and soldiers were totally terrified themselves and lost control (lacking even the training and discipline that capitalism usually likes to give its hired thugs). Seaga could have called off the gunmen in Tivoli whenever he wanted and it seems likely that the cops might have left if he had; their chief, the inarticulate and paranoid ego maniac Renato Adams, claims that Seaga told him he could “get him out”, but he didn’t take him up on this, fearing a trap. Whilst many people on the road blocks may have acted spontaneously - such protests are a regular form of direct action in Jamaica - it seems likely that the JLP orchestrated much of what followed, just as they played the World’s media, Seaga emerging as a pro-democ-

racist leader in waiting in a dictatorship which is murdering his 'pro-democracy' supporters.

"One Love"?

The role of Christianity too is central to the problem. This is a profoundly religious society and many defend the churches as being the most consistently critical of political violence and corruption whilst being almost the only bodies involved in any form of social welfare or charity. However the age-old criticism of the church as stifling resistance with its "pie in the sky when you die" mentality is nowhere more appropriate.

Religion in Jamaica is of a profoundly fatalistic nature. Many have been fooled into believing either that their suffering is the result of their sin, or that "bad things happen to good people" because God is testing them and will reward them for their stoicism when confronted with injustice. The mother of one of the Braeton youths stated that she didn't expect anything to come from a coroner's enquiry: "The Lord...will be my judge and jury...If I get no justice from man, I will get it from God". The churches' solution is to attempt to win over individual gunmen to the Lord and to feed and clothe the poor, concerned as ever to keep working class people virtuous rather than fighting back against the system that bleeds them.

"Jamaica, No Problem"?

This is of course also the government agenda. In an attempt to keep people down they play the 'nationalist' card, so beloved of the rulers of countries made poor by colonialism and then cast adrift when the free market offered a more lucrative option to both "First World" capitalists and the new ruling classes of the "Third".

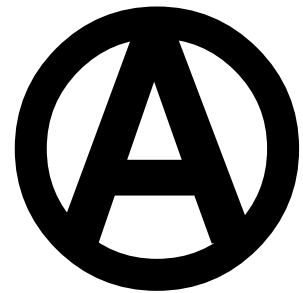
Peddling the national myth "Out Of Many, One People" to cover up great social inequality, the ruling class attempts to foster cross-class collaboration and conceal social division, subsidising the tourist industry to the hilt so as to promote a lucrative trade from which only the "Jamerican" owners of "all inclusive" resorts really benefit. In response to the latest violence, tourist industry leaders announced that they would be blocking local TV and Radio channels in such resorts in order to keep dollar-spending tourists from finding out what was happening!

"Burn dem Down"

This leaflet is written in part to inform about what is happening in a country made independent from direct British rule in 1962. Its intent is to point out that in Jamaica as elsewhere, because there is no social equality and personal freedom, national self-determination can be seen to have been an ultimately reactionary cause; the cause of a ruling class in waiting, supported by external 'post-colonial powers' like the US government and international capitalism, and by a quasi-military and largely unaccountable security force within.

Furthermore, the British government still has great influence there, but less formally. The Jamaican government has been attempting to purchase handguns for its police force from the Devon-based company Dince Hill. Due to the island's appalling human rights record, the UK government initially refused the export licence.

Following a visit to Jamaica earlier this year by Mo Mowlam, however, the deal is now to go ahead. Apparently under the influence of one of Jamaica's most famous exports, having "seen the situation for herself", Mowlam declared that things were much improved and said the legalised gun-running could go ahead. ★



*This leaflet was produced by Anarchists
in Nottingham and Jamaica.*

