

Marijuana revenues finance Jamaica's debt

by Mark Sonnenblick

While most of the U.S. press was still celebrating the resounding victory of Edward Seaga in Jamaica's Oct. 30 elections as a triumph of "individualist capitalism" over the "Cuban-linked collectivism" of the incumbent Michael Manley, Seaga announced his intention to legalize vast marijuana exports to the United States.

According to the Kingston newspaper, the *Sunday Gleaner* of Nov. 9, Seaga told an audience of Jamaican and American businessmen that his "economic recovery" program would center on repatriating the \$1.1 billion annual proceeds from Jamaica's marijuana exports. The new prime minister told the businessmen that he had instructed Jamaican banks that when a depositor arrives with a basket of dollars, "Don't ask questions. Don't accept it—grab it!"

Seaga had announced in his inaugural speech on Nov. 1 that the government faced a foreign exchange shortfall of \$155 million for the remainder of this year. He euphemistically described the magical solution to the exchange problem as U.S. dollars brought home by the drug mafia from "the export of a certain commodity." These funds, when laundered through Jamaican banks, could then be tapped to meet debt service obligations, many of which have gone into default.

International Monetary Fund (IMF) experts told *War on Drugs* magazine in July that they had drafted detailed plans for the legalization of the "marijuana dollars." IMF "surveillance" of Jamaica from 1977 to January 1980 was what transformed the island from the "country" it claims to be in tourist commercials, into a voodoo-worshipping hemp plantation. IMF technocrats ran Jamaica's day-to-day economic decisions to ensure that the government "violently" limited the issuance of domestic credit, as one official put it. The IMF said Paul Volcker-style credit scarcity would "fight inflation." But its main effect was to give the island's legitimate industries and agriculture no choice but to become totally dependent on the cannabis traffickers for their working capital and for importing vital spare parts and fertilizer. The only "free enterprises" that flourished were precisely the "black market" drug mafias. They protected their

operations with competing private armies of addicts that caused over 600 deaths during the election period.

Once the IMF's "free market economics" had resulted in "the bad economy driving out the good," (to modernize Gresham's Law of Economics), the Fund unveiled its plan for legalizing the dirty money. An IMF staffer described their plan as the logical way "to end an anomalous black market situation."

Seaga told the *Washington Post* immediately after his election that "the ganja trade" (as marijuana is called in Britain's former colonies) kept Jamaica "alive" during the last several months. "Regardless of whether we want it or not, the industry as such is here to stay. It is just not possible for it to be wiped out, and if it is here to stay, then we have to make up our mind from that point as to how to best deal with it," proclaimed the Harvard-educated reputed "friend of America." Seaga conceded that "the question of legalizing it so as to bring the flow of several hundred million dollars in this parallel market through official channels . . . is complex."

Obstacles to formal legalization do not come from within Seaga's Jamaica Labour Party, which is thoroughly pro-dope. His agriculture and tourism ministers are long-time collaborators of *High Times* and the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws (NORML) campaigns against the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration. Despite former Prime Minister Michael Manley's personal opposition to the drug traffic, his People's National Party is too immersed in it to provide opposition to legalization.

The island's bankers are hardly upset about handling "dirty money." In fact, one of the most vehement opponents of legalization is Ronald Sasso, managing director of the Bank of Nova Scotia in Jamaica and one of Seaga's top economic advisers. The Bank of Nova Scotia has been identified by antidrug investigators as heavily implicated in the laundering of drug money throughout the Caribbean.

In Washington, Carter's Deputy Director of Caribbean Affairs, Dick Howard, justified Seaga's legalization of the marijuana dollar in comments to *EIR* on the basis that "the government just would want to get control over the flows of money. Face it, everyone knows that the marijuana trade has brought in income."

However, if the Reagan administration and the conservative Congress thinks in terms of the antidrug mandate that elected them, they could stop Jamaica from being a Caribbean pirate's lair, the first nation legally dedicated to pumping marijuana into America's youth. The United States is in an excellent position to either tolerate Jamaica's legalization and find countries all over the Third World following the same path, or to stamp Uncle Sam's boot on the International Monetary Fund and other lending institutions which have turned the once-pleasant island into an outlaw country.