

EDNA MANLEY THE PRIVATE YEARS



Norman Manley (at microphone) speaking to a large crowd at Kingston Race Course in 1937, about Jamaica Welfare.

At right in hat is Sam McBean who wrote Workers of Jamaica and later died in New York. Mrs. Manley smiles

approvingly at left. Picture courtesy of Mrs. Manley.

FOUNDING OF JAMAICA WELFARE AND THE 1938 LABOUR CRISIS

— This is the fourth and final extract from EDNA MANLEY, THE PRIVATE YEARS by Wayne Brown published by Andre Deutsch and available from all bookshops at \$6.50.

In the years following Michael's birth Norman became the leading light of the Jamaican bar. They bought Drumblair and Edna became a well known sculptor not only in Jamaica but also in England where her sculptures in Jamaican hardwoods got critical attention.

In May 1937 while in England, Edna underwent an operation for what was thought to be a bad right kidney. The surgeon found nothing wrong with the kidney, but both her appendix and uterus were found to be "in a dreadful mess" and were removed.

Back in Jamaica Norman was putting together the board of directors for Jamaica Welfare. But he was uneasy. He was dissatisfied with his law practise and felt the "vital need to do something good, something permanent." Above all he was longing for his wife's return).

The Drumblair she returned to at the beginning of November had begun to change. 'The House and I and... E have a private life (which)... people interfere with,' Norman had noted five months earlier; and increasingly now there were people at Drumblair.

It was inevitable. Of three of the more significant events that had taken place in Jamaica in the previous twelve months, two — Edna's Jamaican exhibition and the founding of Jamaica Welfare — involved the Manleys directly; the third — the launching by Fairclough & Jacobs of *Public Opinion*, the nationalist weekly with a cultural bias — soon found a natural forum on the Drumblair verandah, especially since Edna was on the board and its editor, an Englishman named Molesworth, lived next door to the Manleys. In Edna's absence Norman's sphere of acquaintances had widened greatly, a fact that Edna herself proudly remarked on after she returned, while her own January exhibition which confirmed her reputation as the leading Jamaican artist, brought several young and relatively unknown painters to her doorstep. Albert Huie arrived via Molesworth, who had sent the young painter along to Edna's exhibition and later in the year arranged an introduction. Ralph Campbell, encouraged in his turn by Huie, braved the watch dogs — as he later humourously retold it — of upper-middleclass St. Andrew to bring his paintings to Drumblair, and was greatly impressed by Edna's animated discussion of them. Edna met Philip Sherlock, a Jamaican poet in his mid-thirties, one evening at the Foster-Davis' home ('I like Philip Sherlock,' she wrote to Mrs. Foster-Davis soon afterwards), and George Campbell, another younger poet, via her own house-keeper, the long-suffering, much-treasured Miss Boyd, whose nephew he was.

An even younger generation of artistically-minded middleclass Jamaicans was in the making. Louis Simpson (who later emigrated to the United States, where in 1962 he was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for poetry) was a schoolmate of Douglas Manley at Munro College; Michael Smith and Dossie Carberry were both at Jamaica College with Michael.

Henry Daley, the impoverished painter; Frank Hill, the journalist; the writers Vic Reid, Roger Mais and Basil McFarlane — names that, along with several of those mentioned above, a later generation of Jamaicans would take for granted as part of its cultural heritage — all appeared for the first time in print or on canvas during the latter half of the thirties. Artists, writers, journalists, they had this in common: that they had all been born in the twentieth century, many since the war, and had come or were coming to maturity in a political climate that, the world over, increasingly favoured the spread of nationalism. At Drumblair, among other places, they grew used to meeting older, public-spirited men, like Norman in the legal profession, or connected with Jamaica Welfare, as well as (a peculiar and hitherto unremarked

phenomenon) a strange group of young Englishwomen. Marjorie Foster-Davis, Esther Chapman, Cicely Waite-Smith, Margery Stewart, Vera Alabaster; unlike their predecessors, whose main function had been to grace the centres of high fashion and colonial gatherings, these women were journalists, welfare workers, teachers, artists. All, at one time or another, were close acquaintances of Edna's all shared with the passion of converts her involvement in the island's welfare.

So it was a many-faceted, restless, but as yet uncohering concentration of talent that came and went at Drumblair as 1937 drew to its close. And there was much talk about, for the subject of labour unrest had arrived.

In Jamaica the economic plight of the underprivileged was worsening, and in the Press and in the countryside Bustamante was continuing to agitate. Now too there was *Public Opinion* to lend its voice; and if there was in fact a schism of sorts between the goals of the poor, which were economic, and those of the largely middle-class nationalists behind the weekly paper, which were political, few people seemed to notice it.

Edna, back in Kingston, quickly found herself at the heart of these ongoing discussions. Yet in another, less evident part of herself, she was becoming watchful and wary. Events in the country as a whole were moving towards some sort of denouncement, that much was sure, and the time for concerted political action was yet to arrive; yet the woman who had carved the twin icons of 'Negro Aroused' and the 'Prophet' had also written with sympathetic insight of another, earlier artist, 'strangely alien and uniquely international', whom she saw as 'severed from his people by his own rebellious spirit' — and had shown herself capable only recently of a flash of the direst self-knowledge. Earlier that year, in reply to a suggestion by Marjorie Foster-Davis that she should try to organize the young men who frequented Drumblair into some sort of political unit, Edna had written, in a bantering tone that quickly became serious: 'Oh ho — you say politics — now why on earth Marjorie Foster-Davis don't you rouse those young men yourself my darling. You're the very person to do it and I have no doubt you are doing it — but as for me — I'm going back resolutely into my studio — What little I can give to our beloved Jamaica — can only come that way — that I have seen very clearly for myself — any other way — would only be a heartbreak and a failure....'

On January 4, 1938, Edna and Norman sailed for Cristobal en route for a five-week holiday at the home of Carmen Peterson (nee Gerkhe), Edna's close friend since their time together at London art school, who was now married and living in Guatemala. The reunion proved, in Norman's phrase, 'a fiasco'; the two women did not get on (in his diary Norman blamed this on what he perceived as Mrs. Peterson's sense of her own failure as an artist); and although the *Gleaner* had them looking 'ever so well and much rested from their much-enjoyed holiday' on their return — Norman to find Jamaica Welfare 'in a mess' and Edna to attempt to get back to carving after fifteen months of illness and stress — for both the year had started badly.

As it had, in their absence, for Jamaica. On the morning of January 6, in the arid parish of St. Thomas, the scene of the Morant Bay uprising in 1865, police descended on a band of cane-cutters on strike for better wages, caused 'notable injury' to three and arrested sixty. To the *Gleaner* the strike was a 'mischief... brought about by someone misleading the labourers into thinking that the sugar industry (could) afford payment of two shillings per ton to cane cutters'. The police, the paper went on, were further engaged in 'the two-fold task of rounding up the cane-cutters, some of whom are not cane-cutters, and making investigation into the real cause of the intense dissatisfaction manifested by labourers'. The implication was clear: communism, not material deprivation, lay behind the cane workers' actions.

Such a view was criminally myopic. The wages of the poor in relation to the cost of living had been worsening throughout the decade. Unemployment, as the migrant workers returned home from Panama and Cuba, had risen appallingly. The January incident was only the tip of an iceberg of labour unrest that had been surfacing sporadically during the previous three years all over the Caribbean. Yet the colonial administration and its supporters in the Press continued to gloss, over the situation with veiled references to outside agitation and communism. The iceberg could only rise again. Peter Abrahams, the South-African-born writer, tells the story:

The crisis came in May, 1938. It was sparked, strangely, by the commencement of operations at the Frome Sugar Estate. News that the West Indies Sugar Company was starting work soon spread and the unemployed converged on the great estate. There was work, but only for a handful of the thousands who demanded it. And so, with inverted logic, the unemployed directed their rage against this new source of employment and rioted. The general restlessness that intelligent Jamaicans had noticed spilled over in violence and bloodshed. The police dealt harshly with the rioters. The riots spread.

In Kingston workers on a housing scheme were driven from their work by rioters who insisted that there should be work for all. Everywhere on the island people came out and angry bands gathered in the streets of the city and towns and villages. The Kingston dockers came out, and an effective, though leaderless, general strike was on.

It was not leaderless for long. Adolphe Roberts takes up the narrative:

A bizarre personality who had spent much of his life abroad, Alexander Bustamante, sprang to the fore.... He was of all strange things a user who had done some talking about founding labour unions. Now he was accepted by thousands of unskilled working men, largely on account of his platform magnetism...

Bustamante gathered his followers into an omnibus union which he named after himself. He won wage increases, long overdue, through a series of strikes. He staged flamboyant demonstrations, such as marches in Kingston which came close to rioting and caused the shops to pull down their iron shutters.... Bustamante landed in jail.

That martyr-making moment probably stamped success on Bustamante's political future; but its immediate effect was to increase the tension in the island. The riots had begun spontaneously; the rioters had acquired a leader; the leader had been jailed. Anything could happen now.

If there was a Jamaican of sufficient personal stature to have a chance of being accepted as a mediator by both labour and the administration, it was Norman. On 23 May, the day before Bustamante's arrest (the day, too when he created the Bustamante Industrial Trade Union) Norman was in the parish of Westmoreland, attending, on behalf of the West Indies Sugar Company, a government enquiry into the events of three weeks earlier, when the Judge

... looking very grave (Norman wrote in his memoirs) informed us all that he had just received a telegram from Kingston that very severe rioting had broken out and that things were getting worse.

He proposed that we adjourn at once as it was likely that our presence in Kingston would be advisable. All agreed and we then and there adjourned and I set off for Kingston.

That afternoon was spent moving around to see what the City looked like. It was strangely still. Everywhere was shut up. The crowds had seen to that, and soldiers moved around passing at street corners knots of silent sullen people waiting in ugly frame of mind. I did not at all like what I saw. Then I heard there was trouble at the Fire Brigade and set off to go there when I heard that they were to strike that afternoon

and that Bustamante had gone there to address them when he and his faithful friend of those days, St. William Grant, had been arrested. What for, I could not then discover, and I was deeply worried lest they had arrested him on some trumped up charge as I foresaw how that might make things worse.

Near the Fire Brigade I saw a few people I knew very well and paused to talk when Audley Morais rushed up and besought me, almost with tears in his eyes, to go and talk with the men in the Fire Brigade for God knows what would happen if they did go on strike. I was not easy to persuade to join in a situation where I just did not know the facts but eventually I went and met nearly all the men actually at Brigade H.Q. I heard all sorts of complaints and spoke to the men, promising to go and see the Mayor, Dr. Anderson and KSAC officials and to take up the matter till I got a final settlement. My intervention was welcomed by the men who knew me well, at least by name, and I

dashed off to see the Mayor and set up a conference with the Brigade for the next day. I saw nothing that could not be cleared up in one conference and indeed so it turned out.

Then I went home deeply persuaded by all I saw and heard that with Bustamante arrested and all workers in the Corporate Area on strike we were in for a serious time and that violence, disorder and bloodshed would be the final result.

Later that night my wife and I sat under an old yoke tree in the Drumblair Garden and discussed the situation. I felt very strongly that unless somebody intervened and tried to take charge of things in the interest of the workers of Jamaica. (sic) I had a profound feeling that I was going to make an offer that had unforeseeable consequences.

I rang the Governor, Sir Edward Denham and told him that I proposed to announce next day that I would put aside legal work for the time being and entertain proposals from any group of workers in Jamaica who had grievances and negotiate on their behalf with their employers or with any Committee which the Government might set up to hear representations that were made on behalf of the workers. He accepted the proposal with eager approval and we arranged a meeting next day to consider what could be done with his collateral. I then told The Gleaner precisely what I proposed to do and asked them for the fullest publicity. Then I returned to my wife Edna and announced what had happened and we sat far into the night both realising that we faced an unforeseeable future. I knew my own temperament and well understood that I had entered on a new road and that I would walk it wherever it led.

The following morning he set out from Drumblair feeling 'like a man in a dream'.

There followed, in quick sequence, talks with his 'first followers — 4 women, cap makers', together with a handful of the striking dock workers, the Chamber of Commerce, wharf owners, shipping agents and government officials. On both the Thursday and the Friday he addressed large meetings of dock workers in the city and at the waterfront, advocating that the strikers should not 'take advantage of the situation to stir up disorder... (nor) upset services which are essential to the well-being of the country', and pledging in return to work in support of their claim for better wages. His audience gave him, according to the Gleaner, 'a significantly splendid reception and cheered at what he said'.

But they wanted Bustamante. Norman's diary entry for 'Friday eve' is terse: '(I) see board of conciliation. They announce offer (of) up to double (pay for) overtime. I advise against publication. I stampede. I say release Bustamante or Kingston will burn.'

The next day, after Norman had twice been to prison to see his cousin and had

received from him 'satisfactory assurances' that he would not use his freedom to incite the strikers further, the Governor, Sir Edward Denham, authorised Bustamante's release. Norman, talking to Basil McFarlane, described what followed:

I told the Commission that there was only one way to do the thing — treat Busta with respect. He had started — the workers adored him, they looked upon him as their leader. I said — 'Now I'm going to bring him to you, and you are to tell him the terms that he has achieved and ask him if he will accept them on behalf of the workers.' And they agreed. And we brought in Busta — a little frightened because he didn't know very much about these things — I discovered that he really had no clear idea about what the workers did want and what they didn't want. They told him of everything that had been accomplished, they explained the details to him and asked him if he would accept them, and he said: 'Thank you gentlemen, yes, on behalf of the workers I accept.' 'And will you then let the workers know that you've accepted what we've achieved?' 'Yes I will let them know.' And on the way down he and I walked down with Edna — no, we met her down at the wharf — and he asked me to explain exactly what had happened, so I explained exactly what had happened. And when we arrived at the wharf a vast gathering — at least fifteen thousand people, the biggest crowd I had ever seen up to then in my life. And I spoke — got a good reception — Busta was out — but I didn't say a word about the settlement because I was playing dead straight with Busta. And when Busta started to speak he said 'My friends' — he thanked them for their devotion to him, and helping him to get out — made no reference to the fact that I had given evidence to get him out and that he'd never have got out but for me... and he said, 'You know, while I was locked up, my cousin Norman did his best for you, and he got a penny a day — a penny an hour a day — I've only been out of jail two hours and I've got everything for you —' And one pandemonium broke out — they cheered — nobody who... (inaudible) could ever understand the utter fantastic devotion that Busta had from the people — there were a thousand men there that would've jumped into the sea and drowned, happily, for that man, and they cheered for — he never said another word — they cheered for ten minutes, fifteen minutes, they raised hell, they dragged him off the truck, they took him away in triumph, and stayed in the truck, Edna & I, for half an hour until there wasn't one soul left there — not even the police. And we walked out... Fairclough was there — one or two of our personal friends, who'd been through it all with me — and I'll never forget as long as I live the echoes of our feet on the boards as we walked through this deserted place. And that was my first experience of the sort of

man that I was going to have to work with. The Gleaner's version differed only slightly. The dockers, it reported, heard and cheered Bustamante: accepted the rates of pay (4 shillings a day) secured for dock labourers, and agreed every man to return to work. The scenes ended with four men being borne from the wharf on the shoulders of the labourers. They were: Alexander Bustamante, Hon. J.A.C. Smith, Mayor Anderson and Mr. Ross Livingston. Mr. Manley was not lifted because he wanted to remain by the side of Mrs. Manley.

Norman's diary entry is more sombre. 'Back to wharf. Strike called off. Smith and Bustamante rush off in enthusiastic crowd. I go home sadly. The first round is over.'

Years later he would claim not to have known then what the second round would bring, nor even whether there would be a second round. But whether he knew it or not (and surely that contemporary reference to a 'first round' contemplates others to come) his future had arrived: even without his conscious decision, the momentum of that tumultuous week in May would have carried him into public life.

There, two problems faced him at once. His initial goal — quickly to be complicated by his instinctive espousal of the cause of political self-determination — was the economic betterment of the workers; but his credentials could be made to seem dubious. He had, after all, been advocate to the

employers themselves; he himself was a wealthy man; and his standing with the workers can hardly have been enhanced by the support he received in the capitalist press — support that, as the following extract from the Gleaner of 28 May shows, was itself a measure of the fright that the privileged classes in Jamaica had suffered: **Labour has been offered the leadership of the fearless, honest, clever, balanced thinker Mr. Manley; a man who really loves his fellow countrymen; and would sacrifice himself in their interest. A man who would without recourse to mob oratory or lawlessness improve their present lot in life; establish trade unions (which would truly be in the interest of the men), ameliorate and correct all labour injustice. What a pity, even more, what a tragedy it will be if labour refuses this great opportunity and allows licence and lawlessness to render carnage necessary.** But for the time being at least, and so far as his influence with the workers was concerned, Bustamante could make or break him.

And this was his second problem: Bustamante himself.

The yearning for a Messiah can be a powerful hunger in those who, abandoning individual complexities in the name of a common goal, band themselves into a mass. In a sense that hunger, and its fleeting fulfilments, comprise the surface history of modern West Indian politics. And in

Jamaica in 1938 it had found its object: that eccentric traveller with his self-created (and perhaps self-creating, for he was nothing if not an actor) surname and past, Bustamante. Fair-skinned, tall and hawkishly handsome; volatile, charismatic, an 'unreconstructed egoist', as Norman described him, but one with a capacity for registering the subtlest whim and eddy of emotion from the ranks of his audience, a performer, above all, with flair; in depressed and strife-torn Jamaica, the time for such a man had come.

And Bustamante would not let them down. People would tell how, confronted at the head of his followers by a squad of policemen with guns, he had bared his chest and cried, 'Shoot me!' He would be seen in the streets of Kingston wearing on his hips, Wild West style, a pair of revolvers; at times he would fire them into the air. Behind him marched an army starved not only for wages but for catharsis; and vicariously he gave it to them. In return they gave him an allegiance that was total. As Norman recognized, they would have died for him.

And Bustamante was wary of his younger cousin. Self-effacement was not one of his qualities, nor was he by temperament inclined to long-term planning. Instinctual and debonair, he had arrived in the public eye at fifty-four after a lifetime spent in the wings; and he was not prepared to share that position with anyone. Norman's presence struck him not as a chance for cooperation but as competition. By the end of June he was 'delivering broadsides against rivals trying to start up labour unions'. When, in the second week of August, Norman, following the irresistible logic of the situation, called for the formation of a political party, to be 'an expression of... the part of the people... in their own destiny', Bustamante grew even more watchful. Political self-determination was no part of the labour leader's vision. (It could even, he suspected, perhaps rightly, deflect attention away from industrial matters.) The ex-usurer warned his followers to remember 'Mr. Manley's connection with the capitalists'.

But the capitalists were themselves watching Norman, and with increasing unease. They had not taken seriously his stated commitment to the cause of labour; doubtless believing his interests to be synonymous with theirs, they had considered it a ploy to buy time for the establishment until order could be restored. But as the weeks after 28 May came and went, with Norman touring the countryside with Bustamante, organizing the workers, and furthermore beginning to talk in terms of a radical departure from the existing political system, they began to take their distance from him. Esther Chapman wrote in the Gleaner:

As you travel throughout the island, you find that two personalities are the universal subject of discussion: Mr. Manley and Mr. Bustamante. People who are looking for sane and courageous leadership and a wise and enlightened attitude towards Jamaica's

problems are puzzled by the juxtaposition of these two names. It seems to them incredible that Mr. Manley should not dissociate himself from some of the actions and utterances of the Labour Leader. His attitude is not understood... distrust is growing in the minds of those more balanced thinkers who, failing to understand the apparent complete identification of the two leaders, feel that there must be underlying and concealed motives for an action which on the surface they feel to be inexplicable.

So he was losing influence with the employer class, at the same time as his influence with the workers was being undermined by Bustamante. Esther Chapman's essay concluded: 'Mr. Manley' has a certain influence with Labour but I prophesy that if the occasion ever arises when Mr. Bustamante openly differs from him that influence will be lost.' And what of Edna in all this?

She had returned in February, it will be remembered, from an unrestful sojourn in Guatemala determined to get back to her carving. By 7 March Norman was noting: 'E is in great form and the chips at last fly again. New work & groping after new intensity. After twenty years this still matters more than anything else.'

The new work, however, was not turning out to be particularly remarkable — 'four or five masks' was how the *Gleaner* critic glossed over them in a notice written later that year — and, sculpting aside, she seemed generally to be keeping a low profile. She turned up once or twice at social gatherings and towards the end of April was spotted by the *Gleaner's* social columnist at the Knutsford Park race meeting, 'happily excited and travell(ing) miles between the stand, ticket grills and paddock'; but only once did she emerge squarely into the public eye. That was at the Jamaica Arts and Craft Exhibition at the St. George's Hall — also in April — for which she was given credit by the *Gleaner* (unfairly to T.E. Sealy and George Bowler, who organized the show) for being among 'those primarily responsible'. She also reviewed the exhibition. Her essay, which appeared in the *Gleaner* of 27 April, yields some interesting clues to her own preoccupations at the time. In it she declared:

.... a bold, free consciousness of individuality shows in a creditable percentage of drawings, paintings and carvings. In a world which is so overwhelmed with mass production the artist needs must drive hard to maintain his individuality.... Tuition and time can correct technical faults (but)... Nothing can recover for the artist a lost sense of individuality which I believe to be the most important phase of Jamaican art to be fostered and developed. Freedom of spirit is growing in the colony....

A tingling paradox lies at the heart of that essay, with its twin emphases of individuality and 'freedom of spirit'. The latter phrase translates too easily into the search for (political) freedom — especially in the context of the pointedly used 'colony' — yet the expression of that search would come through mass industrial and political action — both, but the former in particular, only possible in 'a world... overwhelmed with mass production' and both inimical, in immediate practical terms, to any notion of individuality. Thus with Jamaica's convulsion less than a week away, she was patently unprepared philosophically to deal with it. Just three months after her *Gleaner* article she would be writing to Norman: 'I don't think of myself as a rare creature any more... I know I'm just one of the toiling millions who have no respite but to grin and face up' — sentiments which, but for their pathos, would seem ludicrous, coming from a woman whom Norman's friend, McCulloch, had known in England as 'the cyclone', and who had not changed. But if the abruptness of her metamorphosis from an advocate of individuality into 'one of the toiling millions' represented less a conversion than a measure of her initial bewilderment, the fact remained that the island's political future contained for her just such a paradox, and her ambivalence towards it would surface at odd intervals throughout most of the rest of her life.

Yet as to what passed between Norman and herself on the night of 24 May, or in the critical months that followed, there is a fantalizing absence of evidence. Did she advocate caution? Did she urge him to act? And if so, did Norman need such encouragement? How much, in short, if anything, does Jamaica's political evolution since May 1938 owe to conversations between Edna and Norman, such as the one under the yoke tree? Reports are contradictory. Michael was to grow up believing that his mother had played an important part in his father's decision to enter politics; yet Edna would tell a visitor, many years later, that Norman's revelation that he had decided to enter politics came as a 'terrible shock' to her.

Whatever her initial reaction, however, once in action she did not hesitate. Not content with merely lending moral support while Norman addressed the dock workers, she spoke to them herself on the Saturday of Bustamante's release. The day before, along with a woman named Aggie Bernard, she had set up a feed-the-strikers fund, and distributed food herself on the dock, not letting slip the opportunity to advance her husband's cause. Norman's diary entry for that Friday reads in part: 'E comes to the rescue... Fights like a tiger to get me trusted. Great work and did more to help than all I did'.

Her loyalty to him was complete; and hostility towards Bustamante became part of it. As an expression of the instinct for self-reservation it was wholly justified, as time was already showing. But it was complicated by the backwash of another fear: Like Esther Chapman, she sensed that not only Bustamante's people but the island's commercial middle classes would turn against Norman. Ellis Swithenbank, writing on 28 June, commiserated on both counts:

'So Bustamante is Alec Clarke, his poor sisters must be ashamed of all his goings on. A Moneylender is such a rotten thing to be, and I am terribly sorry you and Norman have had to be connected with him in any way. From what — has told us he turned out a downright scoundrel. Now I understand why he addressed me as Auntie Ellie when he wrote me years ago but how did the fool think I would associate somebody signing himself Alex Bustamante as Alec Clarke. Well I am glad I am not living out there, I should hate to own him. I don't wonder Vera Moody is "green with rage". You have had a terrible time little girl and its very hard that after you and Norman have built up a decent reputation in the island and is (sic) so respected and trusted you have to work alongside a creature with so little decency, but you are doing a **great work** for the illiterate peasants, and God will reward you for it even if a few wealth-minded bourgeoisie cuts (sic) you for it. I wonder if it is really Communism that's at the bottom of it? Somehow I don't think so. That's what the Tories over here say of every disturbance...'

Edna's quandary must have been painful. Undoubtedly she too must have wished to break with Bustamante, openly to unleash the full force of her scorn against the upstart who had so easily won the hearts of the island's poor and whom now she saw as a formidable opponent of her husband's

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The Edna Manley story

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rapidly developing vision of the island's future. But throughout June and July Norman continued to tour the hustings with his cousin. The truth was that he could not afford to break with Bustamante; and now, against her own most powerful instincts, this too became a matter for the wife to defend. When, one evening at Drumblair, Ernest Foster-Davis remarked that it was silly of Norman to support a man who in turn was bent only on eroding his own influence, Edna, in the words of Mrs. Foster-Davis, who was present, 'practically threw him off the verandah.'

At the end of July she returned to Arthur's Seat. 'I didn't mean to run away', she wrote to Norman, 'you know that don't you. These little failures get less & less & one day they won't happen any more... But if by slipping away for a week I can help you a little better when I come back I'm prepared to think that you are worth the temporary failure.' The emphases (her own) seem significant. A wife's support, not that of a party worker, was being pledged. And if in the future the two causes might often seem identical, her politicking overt, and at times as strident, as any huckster's, none the less she was clearing her mind. In summer 1938 she needed to declare who she was.

Her letter from Arthur's Seat went on: 'Sleep well at nights & hold to the humour. Remember too that there's a poetry here that you can touch in your speeches ... and its more your style than hot air. It would release your own love of beauty too. Try to find the things that it thrills you to say & whatever thrills you will thrill them. Goodnight darling....'

She was not by herself at Arthur's Seat. With her, on vacation from school, were the boys, Douglas and Michael, their housekeeper Miss Boyd — and Miss Boyd's teenage nephew, George Campbell, 'conspicuous', Edna told Norman, 'by a prowling absence.'

George Campbell was a poet in the making, one of the most promising of the group of young writers and artists that had begun to gravitate towards the twin poles of Drumblair and **Public Opinion**. A couple of years earlier he had been in the wracked position of the young man wanting to leave school but finding himself surrounded, as he put it, by 'a world that says "try again, you cannot do without this certificate!"'. In despair he had turned to Edna, who, true to form, had counselled the unconventional. To the artist, she declared, certificates were neither here nor there. On his return to Kingston from Arthur's Seat Campbell had written to her:

'You cannot imagine how much happier I feel now since you have spoken to me Of all people you soothe me ever so much more when you speak to me.... I feel so different now. I did not know you thought of an exam like that and all the time something was just burning up inside me and wearing me down....'

It was thus, indirectly, that she would best help her husband's cause. For by July 1938 the lineaments of the island's future two-party system, its bases of support, could already be discerned. Bustamante controlled the great majority of the workers, and already the commercial middle classes, sensing in his brand of populism a less radical threat to their interests than in the socialist-leaning nationalism of Norman, were moving towards him also, thus placing Bustamante in the curious but powerful position of having the support of both the exploited and exploiting classes. Norman's main political base, on the other hand, would come initially from the professional middle class and its spin-offs — artists, writers, nationalists — people, in other words, who, having the basic necessities of life that so many of Bustamante's supporters lacked, and having no great stake in the promulgation of the existing economic system, were free to focus instead on spiritual concerns, on the dignity of political and cultural self-determination. Even while the cousins, were maintaining a tenuous united front, these bases of support were forming; and in the marshalling of Norman's followers — in the very fact, perhaps, that in those early months he was not crowded completely out of the picture and destroyed — Edna's presence, her personality and her work, must have been powerful factors. Furthermore if in Jamaica the early marriage of political and cultural expression, neatly symbolized by Edna and Norman, would prove to be mutually nourishing over the years, much of the credit for this would be Edna's and due to her joyous rapport with the young.

On 18th September, with Norman presiding and with Bustamante and the visiting British MP Sir Stafford Cripps among others on the platform at the Ward Theatre, the People's National Party was launched. Norman, in his address, stated the new party's rationale when he said:

There is a tremendous difference between living in a place and belonging to it and feeling that your own life and your destiny is irrevocably bound up in the life and destiny of that place... No amount of economic good will make a people a real unity. All effort will be wasted unless the masses of the people are steadily taken along the path in which they will find more and more that this place is their home, that it is their destiny... As I see it today there is one straight choice before Jamaica. Either make up our minds to go back to crown colony government and have nothing to do with our government at all, either be shepherded people, benevolently shepherded in the interests of everybody, with as its highest ideal the contentment of the country; or have your voice and face the hard road of political organisation, facing the hard road of discipline, developing your own capacities, your own powers and leadership and your own people to the stage where they are capable of administering their own affairs.

For Edna life would never be the same

again. She would have to carry on, from now on, through two landscapes whose demands would often be conflicting. In her the schoolgirl rebel, the individualistic artist, would somehow have to come to terms with the politician's wife. That task might be somewhat easier while the politician could himself be cast in the mould of the underdog battler, as indeed he was soon to become; but it was a difficult accommodation to achieve, none the less, and at first she balked from it. 'I have been accused so much of political activities ... in the past few

months, she told the *Gleaner*, in an interview published on 5th October, 'that I feel like reminding people that I am still an artist in that that is my work and occupies all the time and thought I have to spare.' And by then she had new work to prove it: a bronze head of a Negro, fingers pensive on his chin, which she had titled 'Strike.'

Given the tumultuous events of the previous months, it was a strange conception: for what this sculpture depicts is neither militancy or supplication, but a moment of curious refusal, and of pause.