

Editorial

The disgrace of urban blight

THE CALL from the President of the Montego Bay Chamber of Commerce, Winston Dear, to clean up the city of Montego Bay and other towns across the island must be taken seriously.

We cannot expect structured growth and development of our cities and rural towns if we do not pay attention to the supporting infrastructure to encourage private sector investment.

Thursday's call by Mr. Dear has been made time and time again by concerned citizens in the tourism capital. One such person is the immediate past president of the Chamber, Mark Kerr-Jarrett, who has been very vocal in trying to bring the Government's attention to the city's plight.

The fact is that the dirty roads, the garbage, the traffic congestion, and lack of parking, and the ad hoc transport system have been growing problems for quite sometime in Montego Bay and other parish capitals. Temporary band-aids have been put on the wounds from time to time, but we are yet to see any concrete proposals for a long-term solution. Some attention is being placed on the deteriorating state of the island's capital, Kingston, but what is urgently needed is a plan to deal with the decaying state of all capitals and towns, if we are to halt the drift from these areas to the cities, with the attendant problems.

The current state of many capitals is a disgrace. The lack of focus

here will result in a proliferation of ghost towns across the country, as suggested by Mr. Dear. Let us incorporate all parish capitals into the Prime Minister's Urban Renewal Project, being implemented by the National Housing Trust and the Urban Development Corporation, as a matter of urgency.

There is a lot of development taking place in Montego Bay for example, but with all this the city still lacks a consistent programme of maintenance. A prime example is the new multi-million dollar Civic Centre, which stands in Sam Sharpe Square in all its splendour, surrounded by filthiness. There are businesses in the same vicinity, whose employees have to walk over homeless people almost every day in order to enter the building.

Earlier this year, Government and private sector officials met at the Ritz-Carlton Hotel and identified tourism as the main economic vehicle which will take the country forward. However, if the Government is serious about tourism, then certainly one of its main focuses must be to beautify and maintain the tourism capital, and other resort towns as a start.

It is true that the businesses in these resort towns should play a role in the clean-up of these areas. The Government, however, has a vested interest in sustaining the economic mainstay of the country, and therefore must take the lead in this regard.

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PUBLIC AFFAIRS

What is a republic?

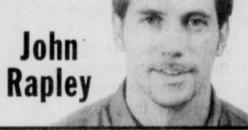
PRIME MINISTER P.J. Patterson's recent announcement that he would propose a change to the constitution, making Jamaica a republic, has started a new political debate in the country.

So what is a republic and what is at stake in making this change? The short - very short - answer is that a republic is any state which is not a monarchy. Republican forms of government have existed for millennia, but in the European tradition, monarchy was the norm. In the modern period, however, most European states have abolished their monarchies and become republics. Only a handful of European monarchies remain.

BRITAIN'S MONARCHY

Of these, by far the most important one is the British. Indeed, it is often said that Britain's monarchy itself now depends on popular consent: when the next unpopular British king or queen comes along, the country's already-substantial republican minority will likely turn into a majority, and the monarchy will then be abolished. Should that ever happen, conventional wisdom is that the other European monarchies - Sweden, Belgium, Norway, Denmark, Spain, the Netherlands and a few small principalities - would soon follow suit.

In the rest of the world, monarchies are also increasingly scarce. There remain perhaps eight absolute monarchies - nine, if one includes the Vatican - in which the king, sultan or prince enjoys more or less complete power. Of these, most are Muslim states. One, Swaziland, is in Africa; the rest are in Asia.



John Rapley

In addition, there are some two dozen constitutional monarchies, a majority of which are in the same category as Jamaica. That is to say, they are former British colonies which have retained the British monarch as head of state (albeit usually while assigning her a separate status as Queen of the country in question). Of these former British colonies, few still have strong monarchical traditions. Even in countries in which a relatively large share of the population is descended from British immigrants, such as Canada or Australia, republican sentiment is rising. Indeed, Australia will in all likelihood soon become a republic.

GLOBAL SCALE

In other words, on a global scale, the modern trend has been away from monarchies and towards republics. Thus, in becoming a republic, Jamaica can plausibly make the argument that it is merely joining the global mainstream. The move is probably less dramatic than either its supporters or detractors say.

However, the matter then turns to the more important question, what kind of republic would Jamaica become? On this point, there exists a range of options. The simplest change would be to substitute a ceremonial president for what has become a ceremonial monarch.

In speaking of modern politics,

political scientists normally speak of two distinct leadership functions: head of state and head of government. The head of state is the ceremonial leader who performs all official functions, such as entertaining other heads of state, receiving diplomats, signing legislation or issuing orders. However, the day-to-day business of running the government falls to the head of government.

Some countries fuse the functions. The American president, to cite the best-known case, is both head of state and head of government. In most parliamentary democracies, though, real power lies in the hands of the head of government, who is usually a prime minister. The head of state may issue orders, and indeed is very often the official commander-in-chief of the armed forces, but the decisions he or she implements are always made by the prime minister and his or her Cabinet.

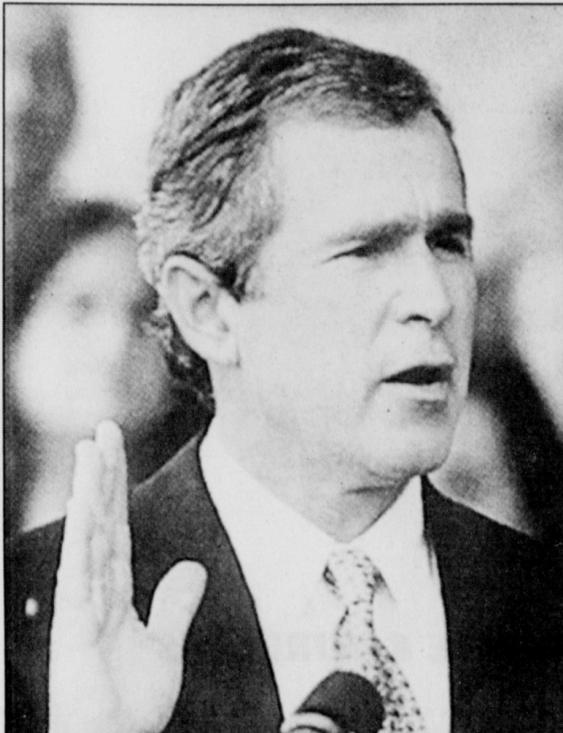
Therefore, in the parliamentary system, as a rule, the head of state possesses real power only in very exceptional circumstances. One of these would be a constitutional crisis. If the prime minister were violating the constitution in an egregious manner, the head of state might intervene and dismiss the Government. This, however, is rare, and some countries go so far as to provide constitutional safeguards to prevent heads of state acting in such a discretionary manner.

COMMON CIRCUMSTANCE

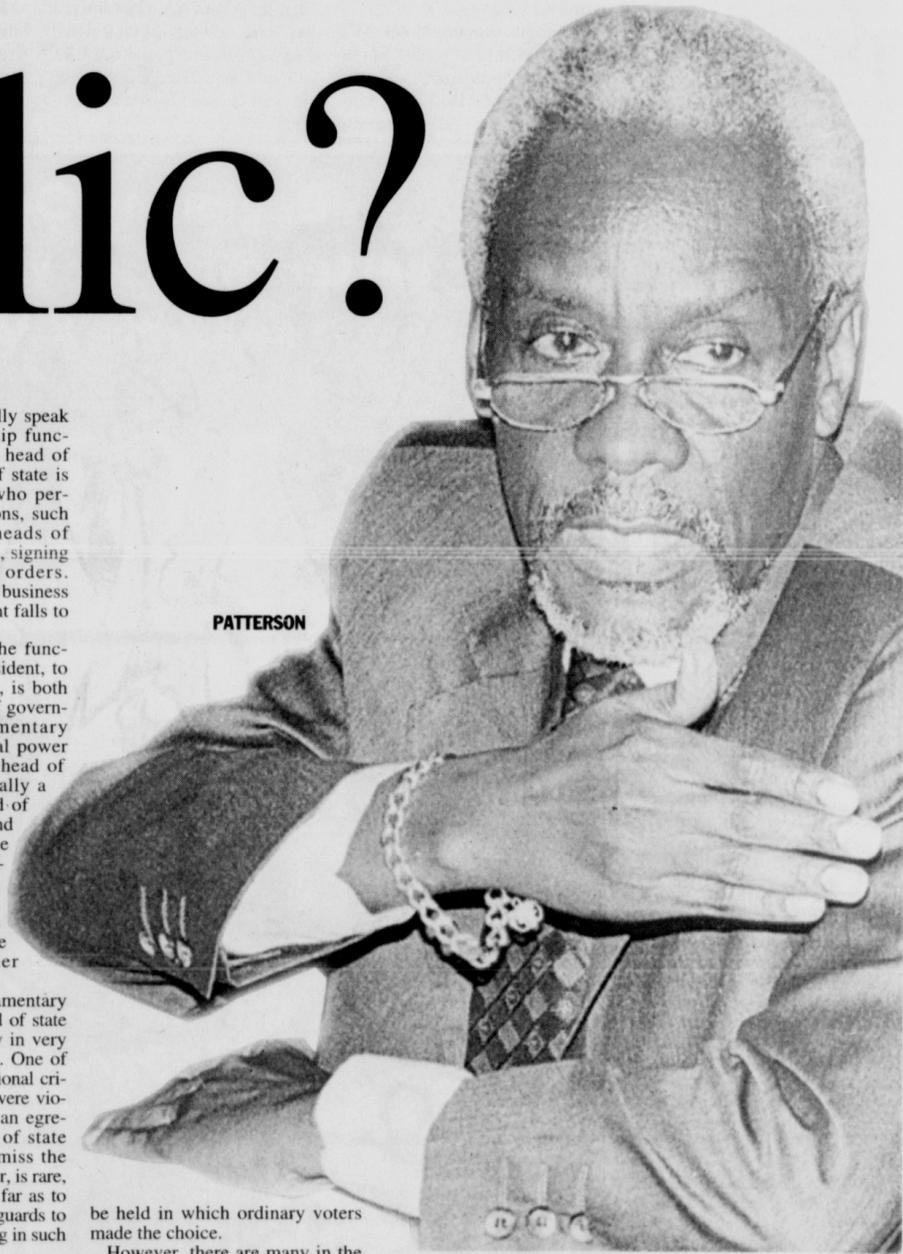
The other, more common circumstance that vests real power in the hands of the head of state occurs when elections fail to produce a clear winner. Usually, in a parliamentary system, it is the head of state who chooses who will lead the government. This is usually a formality, since the head of state is always expected to choose the leader of the party most likely to be able to form a stable government. In all but the most fragmented legislatures, this is almost always the party that won the most seats in the previous election. But when a situation emerges where there is no clear election-winner, the head of state sometimes must fall back on judgment.

Once again, some systems prevent even this limited role from emerging. Japan's emperor, for example, never involves himself in the formation of governments. Israel's president no longer chooses governments, as the Israelis have opted for an awkward arrangement in which the people vote directly for the prime minister.

Assuming Jamaica were to leave all the other elements of the existing constitution in place, a republic would thus be one in which a ceremonial president took the place of a ceremonial governor-general. All that would change would be the title, and the fact that, officially, the president would no longer be appointed by the Queen. Either a constitutional process could be established whereby, say, parliament chose the president, or elections could



United States President George W. Bush head of state and Government.



PATTERSON

be held in which ordinary voters made the choice.

However, there are many in the current parliament who would like to see changes to the Jamaican constitution. The establishment of a Jamaican republic might give them a window of opportunity to put broader reform on the agenda. One option that has already come up would be the creation of an executive presidency along American lines.

That, of course, would amount to a much deeper change of the political system, and would have profound repercussions for the country's political future. Nor would discussions likely be confined to the issue of the president's role. It is entirely possible that the whole constitution would be reopened for examination. Indeed, the Jamaica Labour Party's gambit, of making support for a republic conditional on a referendum on a Caribbean Court of Justice, may represent such an attempt to use the republican topic to widen a narrow opening.

To many, that would be a long-overdue and welcome opportunity. But it would also necessitate a much deeper and longer review of the constitution. It would be unlikely to be resolved in the sort of time frame the prime minister has in mind. On the other hand, given the legal requirements for constitutional change, the prime minister will need the backing of the JLP. We are surely going to see an interesting debate.

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QUEEN ELIZABETH II

NEWSPAPERARCHIVE