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Latin America Review

4 January 1979

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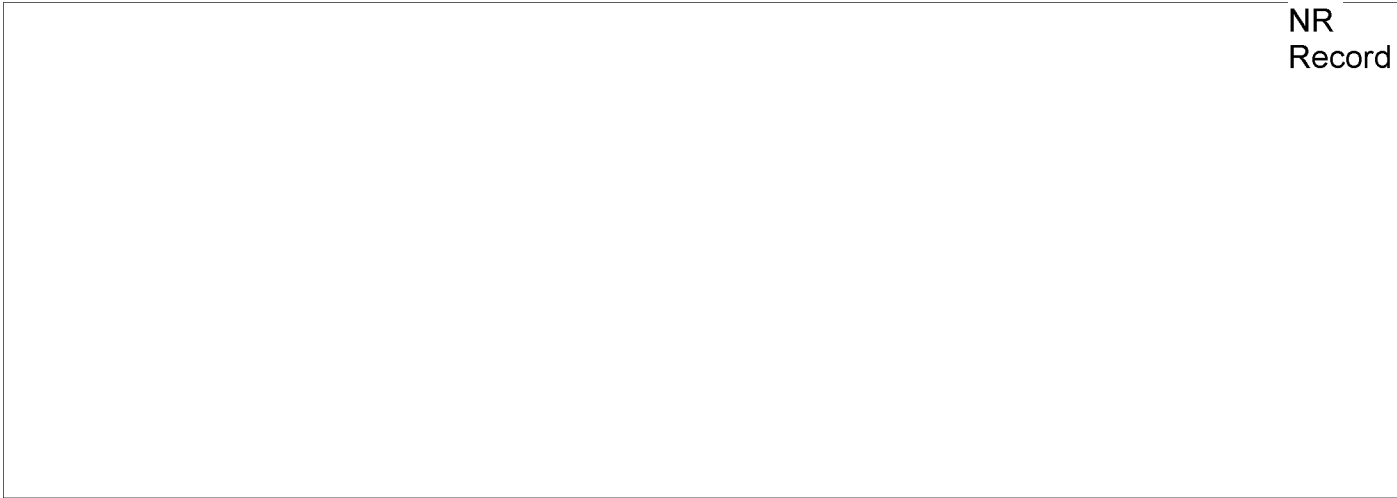


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Jamaica: New Marxist Party (U). 5

The new radical party launched last month will provide a forum for Marxist views that have become increasingly unpopular in the ruling party, but it will not have a significant impact on the political situation. (U)

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(b)(6)Jamaica: New Marxist Party (U)

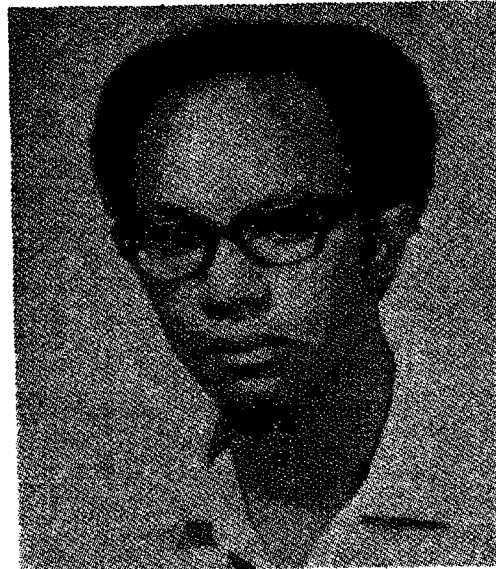
5 A new radical party launched in Jamaica last month will provide a forum for Marxist views that have become decreasingly popular in the ruling People's National Party (PNP) and will offer a refuge for PNP leftists disen-
 5 chanted with Prime Minister Manley's growing political moderation. The new party's ambitious leader, Trevor Munroe, will also try to unify radical groups across the Caribbean and tighten their links with Cuba and the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, the new party will not be able to win a Jamaican election or have a significant impact on government policy for the foreseeable future.



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Background

5 Munroe has initiated his Workers' Party of Jamaica (WPJ) in a period of eclipse for local radicals, who have generally supported Manley during his nearly seven years in office. Munroe would probably prefer to continue the cooperative relationship with Manley while further failures of moderate policies work to the radicals' advantage. The young leftist leader apparently fears, however, that ruling party moderates will force Manley to ease his longstanding ties with the left.



Trevor Munroe

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5 Although the Prime Minister has carried out reforms approved by the left and has remained sympathetic to the radicals, the serious deterioration of the

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island's economy--and the USSR's refusal to provide aid--have impelled him in the past year to backtrack on social programs and to impose harsh austerity measures. Nearly all of Manley's once-influential radical advisers have been displaced by moderates committed to a tough three-year agreement with the International Monetary Fund that has saved the government from collapse. [redacted]

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Munroe's party has announced conditional support for Manley, and the Prime Minister has publicly hailed it as a progressive force, but his relations with the left are obviously cooling. [redacted]

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[redacted]
Munroe, for his part, has sternly warned the Prime Minister that the left will desert him if he continues to yield to pressure from the moderates. [redacted]

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The new party is a threat to Manley primarily because it could siphon off the left wing of the PNP--a development that would greatly embarrass the Prime Minister. We have no evidence, however, that any of the prominent radicals still in the ruling party are yet to exchange this job security for the ideological integrity offered by Munroe. [redacted]

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The Founder of the WPJ

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The 33-year-old Munroe is a university professor whose mixing of radical politics with scholarly research has apparently hurt his reputation in both fields. Like most leading Jamaican radicals, Munroe is a child of privilege--the son of a prominent jurist. Jesuit-educated in Jamaica, Munroe won a Rhodes fellowship that enabled him to complete a major study of Jamaica's political system at Oxford in the late 1960s. [redacted]

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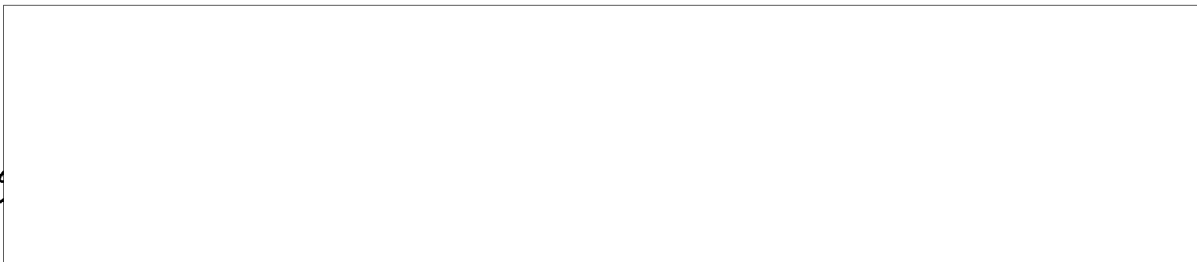
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When he returned home, Munroe turned quickly to leftist politics and gradually allowed Marxist polemics to pervade his published works. Munroe's organizations--a university-based union formed in 1972, and a political association that laid the groundwork for his new radical party--have never mobilized a significant following. Munroe's stature has risen largely because of Manley's protection and not because of any appreciable mass support. [redacted]

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Despite his weak political performance to date, Munroe still has ambitions to replace Manley as the leader of the Jamaican left and to unite Caribbean radical groups. [redacted]

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5 [redacted] Although he has apparently exaggerated his local and international reputation, Munroe has managed to attract Soviet, Cuban, and numerous other Caribbean delegates to the inauguration of his new party. It is clear, moreover, that he will work energetically to increase Cuban and Soviet influence among the disparate radical groups in the region. [redacted]

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Prospects

5 Munroe may well become a nuisance for Manley and the Workers' Party could become a rallying point for Caribbean radicals isolated from political power. He will probably increase his small following among disaffected youth--60 percent of Jamaica's population is under 21 and 50 percent under 16. Nonetheless, the new party will not become a major political force for the foreseeable future. [redacted]

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5 Despite his high profile during Manley's rule, Munroe commands a following probably no larger than 1,000 among a generally conservative electorate of over 800,000. Moreover, the WPJ will make little headway against the two major parties, which are based on unions that control about 98 percent of organized labor and that have excluded all other parties from parliament since its establishment in 1944. Munroe has never contested a Jamaican election and his abortive effort to woo port workers away from the major unions in 1974 resulted in violence in which Munroe himself was seriously injured. [redacted]

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In breaking with Manley, therefore, Munroe would also have much to lose for the sake of Marxist principles. As a political historian, he is aware that minor parties have a record of dismal failure in Jamaica. Twenty-one minor parties--including two previous leftist groups inaugurated with as much early fanfare as the WPJ--have accumulated only about one percent of the total vote in 17 general elections under universal suffrage.



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