

# Peter Espeut | Yearning For True Liberation

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Every nation-state has its national myths, and one of ours is that we "won" our political independence from our colonial masters, such that our political leaders at the time deserve to be declared national heroes. It suits the United Kingdom (UK) for us to believe that lie, for if the real truth were told, they would have had to pay big money for us to cut loose from them.

Once the sugar industry declined, the net flows between Jamaica and the mother country were unfavourable to the UK. After World War II, we were a huge millstone around their necks, and they wanted to be well rid of us.

Two years after the end of World War II, on September 11, 1947, the Rt Hon Arthur Creech Jones, MP, secretary of state for the colonies, convened a meeting of the leaders of all the Antillean British colonies at the Fairfield Country Club in Montego Bay to discuss our Brexit. Called the "Conference on the Closer Association of Caribbean States", it produced a preliminary agreement on federation and dominion status. The winner was the UK, which would have won its political independence from all of us in one fell swoop!

Well, the Federation of the West Indies did not quite work out the way Britain wanted (too much one-upmanship among us), and Jamaica opted for Independence - an idea the British would not have dreamed to put forward as it sounded so unworkable. There we were in 1962: failing agriculture, not much of a manufacturing sector, a fledgling tourism industry, a semi-literate population, an apartheid education system, and two political parties perpetually at war, fighting over scarce benefits and spoils.

## Should Have Paid Reparations

If we had been smart, before we granted the British the perpetual freedom from us that they craved, we would have demanded millions - nay, billions - from them as reparations for our underdevelopment wreaked by centuries of colonialism. To make Independence work to our benefit, we needed at least an equitable education system. At Independence, we had only 41 (quite small) traditional high schools, largely in the hands of churches and trusts; six "senior schools"; and 672 elementary schools (grades 1-9), which was where the vast majority of colonial Jamaicans began and ended their school careers. We should not have accepted Independence without at least 500 more high schools, which would have given us a head start towards a bright future.

Instead, 56 years ago, the British government gave Jamaica the gift of political independence "dry so". Britain could not get rid of us fast enough.

They cut us loose quite cheaply. They left us a national debt of zero, and a few dollars in the bank, but they made no compensation payment to the Jamaican state for the centuries of debilitating colonialism (this is different from the billions owed to the Jamaican people as reparations for the centuries of slavery).

And they allowed us to crow that we had "won" our Independence from them, and we hailed Bustamante and Manley as great heroes for their achievement. Puss and dog would have been able to "win" that Independence from a Britain that shoved it down our throats.

And pretty soon, the inevitable happened. We inherited a constitutional document without the values that underpinned it, and our politicians, aided by a venal private sector, created a corrupt political system, and they have racked up a world-leading national debt, which has constrained our efforts at sustainable development.

In this Emancipation season, we should mute our celebration of Britain's Independence from us and the slave masters' twenty million pounds compensation money, which was largely used to stimulate the British economy. We want real independence and real liberation for our people.

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