



Sterling photos

Sir Florizel at work...practising what he preaches.

By Winsome Smith

The GG's tenure of office:

13 years of hard work...and fun

ON WEDNESDAY, June 27, 1973, on the lawns of Kings House, witnessed by thousands of Jamaicans from all walks of life, a popular, but quiet man took the Oath of Allegiance to the Queen for a very distinguished office.

This man had already contributed over 36 years of work to the pages of Jamaica's trade union and political histories. That very day, he realised, he had to give up the 'rough and tough' of politics and could no longer be part of the political arena.

The man: Jamaica's third Governor General, His Excellency, the Most Hon. Sir Florizel Glasspole — Order of the Nation; Commander of the Order of the Distinction; G.C.V.O., G.C.M.C., E.L.D., Hon.

Sir Florizel was the first recipient of the *Gleaner* Honour Award in 1979. He was knighted by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, Queen of Jamaica, in July, 1981 in a private ceremony at Buckingham Palace. He has received numerous other awards, both local and international.

Childhood

Sir Florizel was born on September 25, 1909 to the late Rev. Theophilous Glasspole and Florence (nee) Baxter. He was the fourth of five children, three of them girls. Two sisters and a brother are now dead. His brother, Dr. Glasspole, his sister, Miss Halsie Glasspole and he maintain a close family circle.

Sir Florizel remembers his childhood as a very joyous but strict upbringing. Discipline was 'right', and he believes the discipline of those formative years is strongly embedded in him.

He attended Central Branch School and one of Jamaica's most outstanding boys' schools: Wolmer's Boys' (1922-26).

Sir Florizel grew-up just like the average child, playing cricket, football and taking part in track and field athletics.

One year, he participated in the Under 16 class of the track and field athletics Championship.

Recalling his days at Wolmer's (Sir Florizel is Chairman of the school's 250th Anniversary Committee) he says: "I enjoyed my time at Wolmer's, as I spent some of the best times there."

He wanted to become a barrister, influenced no doubt by two people for whom he had great personal admiration — Norman Washington Manley and J.A.G. Smith who

were the "top men" in the legal profession then.

In those days one had to go to England to train to become a lawyer. His parents could not afford to send him to London to study law, so he studied accounts for which he could be trained locally. He started accounting lessons with the Scottish School of Accountancy. His first job was at Shoucair's in Port Royal as a junior accountant.

Trade unionism, politics

For the next twelve years, he practised accountancy (1932-44), the profession became the solid background for his trade union and political careers.

14, 1944; the PNP called the caucus together where he was nominated for the East Kingston and Port Royal seat; the well-known Wills Issacs for the Central Kingston seat and Ken Hill for Western Kingston.

There were only 32 seats in the House of Representatives. Elections took place and "the angels in heaven seemed to have kissed" Sir Florizel, as he became not only one of the five PNP members in the House, but the only one (PNP member) in the corporate area to win his seat.

"I almost cried when I heard that N.W. Manley had lost his seat. Manley was an eccentric man, but I understood him quite well," said Sir Florizel.



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GG RAPS WITH VISITOR: Governor General, Sir Florizel Glasspole shares a light moment with Mr. Peter Bangerter, the Swiss Consul General.

In 1937, the young accountant became General Secretary of the United Clerks' Association. He said the association "raised plain hell for any bad treatment or wages problems with any members of the association."

He was elected Secretary General of the three-year-old, Trade Union Congress (TUC) in 1939.

In December 1942, the Chairman of the company he worked for invited Sir Florizel to discuss the future with him in terms of his involvement in trade unionism. The late 1930s and early 1940s was the strike era in Jamaica where almost everyday a strike occurred; the most famous of all the Waterfront Strike of 1938.

The year 1943 found Sir Florizel becoming even more involved in the trade union movement. The Peoples' National Party was founded in 1938 during the labour unrest of that period. He was one of the founding members of the party and was engaged in two areas of activities: trade union and politics.

During this time, Sir Florizel who was becoming firmly established on the trade union front while the labour activities intensified, prepared himself to be a candidate for the PNP in the 1944 elections.

The date for election was set for December.

The young budding and vigorous politician was elected Secretary of the Parliamentary Group for his party. He feels this was the period when he started to win his laurels in parliament.

He was also the leading spokesman for the PNP in the House of Representatives, for the first term under the new constitution. Came the next election in 1949 and the PNP won more seats and the burden of carrying the debates for the Party, once again in the opposition was shared.

But Sir Florizel, who had retained his seat, continued as the Secretary of the Parliamentary Group, a position he held until 1973, when he was appointed Governor General.

But the improved standing in Parliament was not without its problems for the PNP. Internal troubles developed within in the trade union movement and the Trade Union Congress was dissolved. However a group from the TUC stayed on with the PNP and a new trade union movement was founded. It was the National Workers Union of which Sir Florizel became the General Secretary in 1952.

When the PNP won the general elections of 1955, Sir Florizel became Leader of the House and Minister of Labour. He held that portfolio for two years after which he became Minister of Education. There was a rule which stated that no one who held ministerial positions could hold any other position: this led to his resignation of the post of General Secretary of the NWU.

The Peoples' National Party also won the 1959 elections by a large majority, continuing Sir Florizel's stint as Minister of Education until 1962. During his time as the Minister of Education, Sir Florizel boasts with pride, that he played great roles in the following: the introduction of the Common Entrance Examinations, the development of the technical colleges' programme, the expansion of provision for schools and the development of teacher education.

Sir Florizel was one of the team that went to England to draft the Constitution for Independence in 1962. He describes his period as Minister of Education as one of the most rewarding periods of his political life.

Sir Florizel's political career after 1962, followed the same pattern. For the next ten years (1962-72) as the PNP remained in Opposition, he became the Leader of the Opposition Business in the House for his party. His party was victorious again in 1972 and he again became the Minister of Education for just one year.

In 1973, the curtains came down on Sir Florizel's political life, as Mr. Manley asked him to become Governor General. Now he was in a neutral position, above party politics and no longer a part of the political arena.

Mental torture

For the veteran politician, "the first six months were mental torture" as he could no longer join political debates. He said he always speaks out when he sees something that was not in the best interest of the country, even if politics was involved as he tries to maintain an even keel.

had to bite my lips at times, he said, especially in the first five years when there were contentious issues that were happening. He said proudly that he has always maintained a good working relationship with the both political leadership.

Looking at Jamaica's progress for the next 20 years, Sir Florizel said it was very difficult to anticipate the country's progress as one of the things Jamaica needs more than anything else was discipline. He said Jamaicans also needed to develop the ability to work hard.

He said he was not afraid of hard work as this was what made the country progress. Jamaica having lost bauxite have now to concentrate on tourism, agriculture and the commercial export trade; all three of which are filled with tremendous problems of one kind or another. We have to shape ourselves in such a way that we can get the maximum benefit of tourism — a great deal will depend on the attitude of our people.

"For agriculture, a great deal will rest upon

the technological advancements and in the export business, once it was promising and now it has a lot of difficulties attached to it. For export, it is not an easy time ahead... a great fight"

"We will have to build a fully internal activity of feeding ourselves and providing all the things we can do for ourselves. I have a strong view that the development of education will affect the development of the country. We have to have a fair amount of selective educational training to meet the needs of our country. Anyone who attempts to prophesy what was going to happen the next 20 years is not a very wise man," the Governor General said.

Saddest time

For His Excellency, the saddest time for him as Governor General was the death of his mother and his two sisters. His happiest moments are: the annual gathering of their Excellencies' relatives on Boxing Day at Kings House, on an average there are 40 to 45 people present.

This is a happy moment for His Excellency as this occasion has a touch of simplicity and without any fanfare or protocol involvement. Another memorable occasion, was when he visited the Guild Hall in London and addressed a meeting of the International Round-Table Association: English leaders of the association came to Jamaica, on hearing him address the local chapter and asked him to address the International meeting. He is patron of the Jamaica Round-Table Association.

I asked Sir Florizel: if you could turn back the hands of time, what would you do with your life? He responded, quite sure of himself, that he would follow the same pathway. He said he has developed all his talents in terms of service. He said he has had no ambition of becoming Prime Minister of Jamaica.

Sir Florizel's dreams are that he will stay until the appropriate time to leave and go to his private residence where he will engage in gardening and lead a quiet life. He is compiling his memoirs on a career that spans half a century.

Standing always beside the Governor General dedicated wife Lady Josephine (nee) Kinlocke. Sir Florizel describes her as being a great help mate, standing by him "through thick and thin."

He said they met while travelling on a train to Annotto Bay. He was travelling with Mr. Eric Coverley. Sir Florizel and Mr. Coverley were going to Annotto Bay to perform at a fund-raising concert at the Methodist Church and Lady Glasspole was spending the Easter holidays with her aunt. When they returned to Kingston, their friendship blossomed into romance.

Enjoys the work

Sir Florizel says, after looking back at the past 13 years, that it seems all so short. He has made a lot of sacrifices but the years have been fun. He says for sure he has no plans to retire for now. He reminisces that he has enjoyed the hard work.

He practices what he preaches about hard work, as his work day commences very early in the morning and ends in the wee hours of the morning as he has to keep abreast of his work. Sir Florizel said he was aware that Jamaicans do not know the amount of work he does, so they can not assess his work.

"All in all it has been a powerful gain. I am proud of all my accomplishments."

Come September, Sir Florizel reaches two milestones in his life. One, he celebrates 50 years in public office and the other is a celebration of his 77th birthday on Sept. 25.