

Sir Florizel Glasspole celebrates 15 years of sterling contribution as nation's GG

'It has been absolutely rewarding'

By Garfield Grandison

PATRIOTIC. Dedicated. Devoted. Hard-working. These are all apt descriptions of a man who has served Jamaica in a distinguished post for more than a decade.

The man — His Excellency the Most Hon. Sir Florizel Glasspole — who is highly respected by Jamaicans and foreigners for his charm, integrity and impartiality, has given 15 years of sterling contribution as the island's Governor General.

"Absolutely rewarding," declared Sir Florizel as he reflected upon his service to Jamaica as Governor General, tomorrow, June 27, being the 15th anniversary of his service as Head of State.

It was on June 27, 1973, three months before his 64th birthday, that Sir Florizel took the Oath of Allegiance to the Queen to serve as Jamaica's Head of State.

Walking the chalkline

It took the Wolmer's Boy School past student three-months of hard thinking before he made up his mind to accept the post of Governor General. He was Minister of Education at the time. The island's first native Governor General, Sir Clifford Campbell was scheduled to go on retirement. And Mr. Michael Manley, then Prime Minister, asked him to serve in the high office.

"I told him that I had to think about it," recalled Sir Florizel. "I had wanted to complete my five-year term as Minister of Education and then retire from party politics.

"When I asked Mr. Manley to give me a chance to think it over, I seriously wanted to satisfy myself. I had wanted to see if I would be capable of walking the chalk-line as Governor General, having been engaged in the hurly-burly of politics for many years."

Sir Florizel, recalling how he was influenced to take the post by his family and scores of people islandwide, admitted that it was not an easy decision to make.

"It meant that I had to have the will to walk right down the centre, favouring no political party, but to serve Jamaica as the chief representative in the country," the Governor General said in an interview with the *Gleaner* at the historic King's House, his official residence.

Faith tested

It was not easy sailing for him. His faith was tested. But, he stood his ground and kept his cool.

"Let me tell you this, for the first six months when controversial matters developed outside and in the House of Representatives the pressure was very severe on me to speak. I had to bite my tongue. I had to control myself, considerably," he said. "The temptations were there but I overcame them."

Sir Florizel, who served as a Member of Parliament for many years, said: "As I set out on the course as Governor General, I made a lot of speeches, which I wrote myself. I have copies of all my speeches... I speak on behalf of the Jamaican people and my

(Cont'd on Page 4C)

NATIONAL LIBRARY OF JAMAICA

Daily Gleaner June 26, 1988

GG: It has been absolutely rewarding

Cont'd from page 1C

speeches are neither for nor against any political parties."

National attitude

One of his goals as Governor General is to rekindle a sense of nationalism among Jamaicans... a sense of love for national symbols... a sense of pride... a sense of hope and a sense of dignity.

"We have to develop a powerful national attitude... it is the only way we will ever get a united country," he said, sitting in his office furnished with immaculately carved antique furniture.

Each day, Jamaica's third Governor General, who will be 79 in September, engages in a number of social and other activities. Many Jamaicans feel that, at his age, he is doing far too much.

"I am a man of great energy. I am a dynamic person," said Sir Florizel, who is patron of over 40 organizations. "I want to show people that hard work is necessary if the country is to succeed. I could not sit down, sit down easily, without showing the people the example of hard work."

No plans to reduce amount of work

Despite his age, he has no immediate plans to reduce the amount of work he does or the number of functions he attends.

"My presence at a place means a lot to people," said Sir Florizel, who served in the political arena and the trade union movement for more than 36 years. "Everybody wants me to attend their function and unless there are good and sufficient reasons, I will never say no."

In April this year, for the first time in 15 years, Sir Florizel was unable to deliver the Throne Speech marking the ceremonial opening of the new parliamentary year because he was "seriously ill." He tried. He could not make it.

"I tried out myself the Thursday before the Throne Speech was delivered and I realised that I could not go. I could not do it. I did not have the strength to inspect the Guard of Honour then deliver a speech for over one hour," the Governor General said.

Strength coming back

"I can't attempt right now things that I could do before I took ill. But, the strength is coming back steadily. I am coming back quite well. I am not rushing it because I don't want to have a break down," he said.

But, the Governor General said, "I have never been ill before that in 51 years. I had a slight heart attack in 1986. It wasn't anything much."

Sir Florizel, Chairman of the Jamaica Privy Council, said the work in that area "is heavy and burdensome." He said that "at this time it is too confidential to speak about."

Regional Court of Appeal

Regional leaders plan to set up a Caribbean Court of Appeal to replace the British Privy Council as the Caribbean's highest court, and the Governor General feels that, in the long run, it will be good for countries within the region.

"It will be a gigantic task to establish the regional Court of Appeal but in the long run, in my view, it will be good for Jamaica and good for the region," he said.

"But it is not something that we can just stick our necks out and engage in. We have to go into it very, very carefully. We have to think about expenditure and all the necessary needs."

It was during his tenure of Minister of Education between 1957 and 1962 and 1972 to 1973 that technical high schools and the Common Entrance Examination were introduced.

"When I started technical high schools, people disliked the idea. They did not want their fingers to get dirty. They wanted white collar jobs. I had to go around the country and preach the gospel of technical high schools and it was finally accepted by the people," he recalled.

Could not fail the nation

Sir Florizel feels that more technical schools are needed in Jamaica today "because we are very weak" in the areas of science and technology.

Glancing at several framed certificates of merits and awards which dotted the walls of his office, I asked Sir Florizel how many more years he planned to continue serving as Governor General: "I am not prepared to guess. It depends on my strength and how well I can meet the challenges."

Sir Florizel, a former educator, accountant, politician and trade unionist, said: "My work as Governor General has all been in the interest of the nation. I have set my mind to serve and I could not fail the nation."