

Edward Seaga



ON JANUARY 22, it will be one year since I retired from the House of Representatives where I took my seat as the representative for West Kingston in 1962. Prior to that, I served in the Legislative Council (now the Senate), from 1959-1962, more than two years, making a total of 45 continuous years in public life.

Since my retirement from political life, I have been at the University of the West Indies (UWI) where I am involved in research and writing. Prior to taking up these duties, I was appointed a Distinguished Fellow by the UWI.

After spending 45 of my 57 years of adult life in Parliament, friends and others knowing of my long service, unfailingly greet me with the questions, "How do you like University life?" and "Do you miss political life?"

As this is the first such transition in our history from politics at my level to academia, I thought that it would be beneficial to share some of my experiences of the past year.

The transition certainly has not been a traumatic move for me. I have, over the years, kept in close touch with research studies and academic thinking. This has assisted me in the political positions I have held. Although there are more such requirements now than before, I find that my previous years prepared me well.

I treasure those moments when I can sit down with books to learn something new or to put my thoughts in writing. I don't really treat this as work, but rather, as a pleasurable way to exercise the mind, although this often is at the expense of exercising the body. Both are necessary.

ROLLER COASTER

Political life on the other hand was very much a roller coaster. Where academic life is mostly upward and positive in prospects, politics takes a zigzag course, often with many reversals before forward movement. When the end result is attained politically, it is always exhilarating, especially when it involves helping people. Of course, political life has its bitter disappointments too, personal and otherwise.

But time spent and measurements of output are not the only ways to make the comparison. I can order my life at the university to my own time, apart from meeting deadlines. No such possibility exists in politics. Your time has to be shared with everyone in political campaigning, or problem solving, on an almost continuous basis; big problems and small ones. But still there is a special joy in finding solutions to fit problems because in many cases there are no acceptable solutions in political life.

SATISFACTION FOR AN ACCOMPLISHMENT

University life is different. For students, the cost of education is a big problem for most. When I launched the Student Revolving Loan Fund (SRLF) in 1970, it was one of those moments of feeling great satisfaction for an accomplishment. I knew what it was to live on a tight student's budget at Harvard, especially because it was an environment where the wealth of students was obvious. I swore that my children would not have to go through that struggle. But they did, because, in the career I chose, I was in a continuous struggle myself.

You can tell that students at the UWI, and I am sure elsewhere, are finding it very difficult to come up with \$100,000-\$150,000 per year, given the background of many. New thinking has to be introduced to ease this problem. The acquisition of knowledge has to be viewed as an asset and every asset has a value which can be mortgaged on a medium to long-term basis, rather than on a short-term loan. What would be necessary is soft long-term money with a reinsurance premium to take care of defaults. Over three decades have passed since the original funding of the SRLF with soft money. It is time to seek another such loan.

A LEARNING EXPERIENCE

The interactions with students have sometimes been a learning experience for me. A young lady pursuing her master's degree wanted me to allow her to do a psychoanalytical brief on me for a class project. I gave her some material to read and she returned for an interview. The first question she asked was: "How did you manage to accomplish so many achievements?" I turned the question on her. "How do you think?" I asked, hoping to

One year after political retirement



WINSTON SILL/FREELANCE PHOTOGRAPHER

Former Prime Minister Edward Seaga (right) has the rapt attention of (from left) Erika Walker; Byron Noble; and Dr. Wesley Hughes of the Planning Institute of Jamaica. The occasion was the organisation's 50th anniversary cocktail reception, held at the Mona Visitors' Lodge, University of the West Indies, Mona Campus on Thursday, November 24, 2005.

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pull out some of her thinking process. A quick response came. "You must have gotten a lot of beatings from your parents because beatings force you to study."

That remark set me on a trail to determine how widely her view was practised. I found from a recent UNICEF report that 62 per cent of all Jamaican households used physical violence on children as a means of discipline. That information became very useful to me in the preparation of my inaugural address.

"Do you miss political life?" That is a regular question. No, I don't. After 45 years, a change is

always welcome. In my case, I have been able to leave politics far enough behind me that I find myself in the role of an ordinary citizen who did not even know when the last Budget debate was commencing and, less so, on what was happening after that. It is one of the shocks that I have experienced when I now realise, from the outside, how little the citizenry regard or are knowledgeable of political happenings in Parliament.

On the inside, politicians have the inflated impression that the people are listening to every word spoken in Gordon House. In reality, 80 per cent of what is

said does not reach the outside or leave an impression. Mostly, budget debates are exercises in which Members of Parliament speak to each other. This is regrettable because many good arguments are raised and vigorously debated without adequate exposure to the outside world.

ACQUIRING KNOWLEDGE

Quality wise, reading and researching is an exercise in acquiring knowledge. It is a sincere effort. Politics lacks that sincerity at all levels and in all countries, some moreso than others. The intent in academic life is to find the truth; in politics it is too often, but not always, to avoid the truth.

My first year in my new role has been very productive, although somewhat off target. I accepted too many invitations to be guest speaker, open conferences, or give keynote addresses. This impacted on the time for book writing. But I was able to make a solid start on the first book, on child development, from birth to age 15.

The addresses which I gave may have titles which could interest members of the public who would be unaware since, unlike political life, not much material from university addresses reach the public.

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H.N. Seaga, Edward



RUDOLPH BROWN/CHIEF PHOTOGRAPHER

Hon. Edward Seaga, Distinguished Fellow at the University of the West Indies.

YEAR

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Copies of my presentation are available through my email address for all but some copies are restricted for publication.

Finally, I must speak to a fundamental experience of the education process. The great majority of Jamaicans obtain their education from the 'university of life', from which they have learned to be street smart and wise.

Those who reach the academic goal of university training and then enter politics often become misfits because their training never prepared them to meet another set of people who are so

different and wiser in different ways. I am grateful for every year I spent in political life. It made me wiser by the year. What I learned from the interactions of political life, I could never have learned in any university.

I feel privileged to have had a full and rounded education because I have had the treasured experience of learning at different levels of the society. For this, I have no regrets about my political life. It was as enlightening as is academic life.

■ *Edward Seaga is a former Prime Minister. He is now a Distinguished Fellow at the University of the West Indies*
Email: odf@uwimona.edu.jm