

SEAGA'S CRISIS

MR SEAGA'S so-called resignation has once again revealed the crisis of leadership that has plagued the Jamaica Labour Party since Bustamante.

Indeed, the crisis goes back to the early 60s when illness forced Sir Alexander out of office but Mr. Sangster never really had the mantle. In those days, Mr. Sangster apart, the leadership was actively sought by Mr. Lightbourne, Mr. Shearer, Mr. Tavares and there were even occasions when Mr. Seaga expressed interest in being anointed as successor to the Chief. Eventually, Mr. Sangster became the compromise choice after the 1967 elections.

However, his untimely death re-opened the crisis of leadership even before all the cracks of the original crisis had been papered over.

What followed over the next five years must surely go down in history as the closest approximation of democratic anarchy posing as Cabinet Government.

At Race Course, Mr. Seaga was pursuing a policy of Jamaicaisation of some of the banks and insurance companies as part of a plan to give the emerging middle class a piece of the action that was originally the preserve of the plantation owners and the merchant class.

No match

IN THE MEANTIME, Mr. Lightbourne was pursuing his own strategy of unbridled pursuit of industrialisation by invitation of foreign capital on terms that would negate any gains that Mr. Seaga's

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Jamaicanisation might have achieved.

And at Hagley Park Road Mr. Wilton Hill declared himself a 'Corporation Sole' to free himself of any connection with the Ministry of Finance regarding money for housing.

While these three senior Ministers were operating their little Governments, Mr. Shearer failed to provide any semblance of leadership. In fact, Jamaica House was virtually removed from policy-making except for Mr. Shearer occasionally unleashing his wrath on Black Power, Black Muslims, intellectuals who travelled to Cuba, Walter Rodney and any literature more ideologically radical or thought-provoking than Tarzan comic books.

Naturally, such a crew was no match for

the People's National Party under Michael Manley's new leadership. Naturally also, the JLP went into another crisis of leadership as it sought to pinpoint blame for the defeat.

Mr. Wilton Hill embraced Mr. Michael Manley on television and later took his enormous frame away from politics and Jamaica. Mr. Seaga went on leave to write a book which he has completed with invisible ink and printed on imaginary paper. Mr. Lightbourne formed and abandoned the United Party in two lightning strokes that were hardly separated by time and Mr. Shearer retained the title as Party Leader more as a gesture to parliamentary procedure than a fact of political life.

Eventually Mr. Seaga returned from the leave he never took, stood below the statue of Bustamante intoning that since God himself had asked him to take the job it would be sacrilege to let the cup pass from his lips. Now, the cup is empty, his lips are dry, and before he dies of thirst Mr. Seaga says he's leaving.

We have to look beyond Mr. Seaga's published words to discover the real reasons for his decision. I think there are basically two.

THE FIRST is the problem of succession to Bustamante and the second is the failure to find a strategy to deal with Mr. Michael Manley.

The Bustamante problem stems from the fact that the Party cannot decide how much of what Bustamante represented is

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relevant today. To illustrate: The PNP always invokes N.W. Manley as the origin of the Party's socialist thinking and the man who defined in specific terms the broad economic and social programmes the Party is now pursuing.

On the contrary, the 'new philosophy' of Nationalism can find nothing in Bustamante's philosophy or programme as a basis for establishing historical continuity.

At the same time, however, the JLP can make no credible appeals to the masses without reference to Bustamante and the BITU.

Mr. Seaga represents Nationalism and Mr. Shearer represents Bustamante, at least the union part of the Chief. More importantly, the two of them represent two tendencies in the Party which, so far, cannot be reconciled.

The question of dealing with Mr. Michael Manley is even more problematic for Mr. Seaga because here, his own abilities as a leader are on the line.

This problem can be demonstrated by looking at the recent demonstration and some of the positions afterwards.

It's an open secret that there are two fundamentally different views inside the Party on this question. Pearnell Charles and Winston Spaulding lead the faction that wants to bring the Government to its knees.

Tension

THEIR ARGUMENT is that the JLP should demonstrate, refuse to co-operate on any national issues, keep the society in a state of tension, prevent any economic recovery and virtually make it impossible for the Government to govern.

They argue that if the economy recovers to the point where the two parties enter the 1981-82 elections on a fairly even basis then Mr. Manley will make mince meat of Mr. Seaga.

Mr. Shearer leads the other faction which is worried that demonstrations can get out of hand, they are extremely costly

for the country and, if the JLP captures power by that route it will find it impossible to govern.

In all of this Mr. Seaga has no clear position. He is sitting on the fence always, hoping that the problem would solve itself. On the contrary it has been getting worse and he now finds himself in a position where he has no control over the outcome.

What he is asking the Standing Committee of the Party to do, therefore, is not to express confidence in himself as Leader. He wants the Committee to choose a course of action and then invite him back to direct whatever course is chosen.

Mr. Seaga's resignation therefore is an abdication of his leadership responsibility and a clear signal that he cannot be counted on to be around when the going gets tough. He lacks what the British Conservative Party used to call 'inner steel' which every political leader must have and no amount of vote of confidence can change that fact.