

SEAGA'S MOVE

Mr. Seaga's resignation as leader of the Jamaica Labour Party was apparently as surprising to the Party executive as it was to the country.

By holding on to his position as leader of the Parliamentary Opposition, Mr. Seaga has indicated that his resignation is not absolute, but conditional. He has himself stated the conditions — if the Party wanted him back, he would come back — but only if it put its house in order.

Divisions within the leadership of the JLP, as there have been from time to time within the PNP and within almost all political parties, are not new.

In the JLP's case there has been friction between the radical right wing and the moderates. That this has caused a schism in the Party is not surprising.

Mr. Seaga's decision to opt out rather than deal with it, is surprising.

Since the resignation was announced eyes have been turned to former Prime Minister Hugh Shearer. There is no tangible evidence that Mr. Shearer was opposed to Mr. Seaga's leadership. In fact, Mr. Seaga's statements suggest that there were no personality conflicts.

The BITU's low profile in the JLP-inspired demonstrations between January 8 and 10 has been used by some as an indication of differences between the two men. Hugh Shearer has given no indication of any differences.

Mr. Seaga is obviously hoping that the factions in the Party's leadership could unite and create the conditions he has set for going back to the position of leader. The reaction so far indicates that although the executive might have been divided, the rank and file supporters were united.

Mr. Seaga's move has not been without precedence in recent history. Nasser, in a ploy since copied by Eric Williams, stepped down, only to be asked to return to office by a massive show of popular support. However, in both cases there was a problem of political succession.

Not so in Mr. Seaga's case. It is hardly likely that he would employ this gamble while Mr. Shearer remains a strong force within the party.