

Prime Ministers of Independent Jamaica

Fourth in a series to mark the 33rd Anniversary of Independence

This week we continue our tribute to Jamaica's leaders of the Post-Independence era.

EDWARD PHILLIP GEORGE SEAGA

"Our greatness as a nation must be in the capacity to do what has to be done, when we know it has to be done. We can in building still create a 'cathedral of spirit' — each of us raising one stone at a time and reaching out to his neighbour helping, caring, doing." (1985)

Elected Prime Minister of Jamaica on October 30, 1980, Edward Phillip George Seaga was sworn in as the island's fifth Leader of Government on November 1, 1980.

Born in Boston, Massachusetts, USA on May 28, 1930 to Jamaican parents the late Phillip George Seaga and Erna (nee Maxwell), he came to Jamaica when he was four months old. He received his secondary education at Wolmer's Boys School, Kingston and went on to Harvard University from which he graduated in 1952, with a B. A. in Social Anthropology.

His exposure to the social sciences at Harvard made him realise that social work was the sphere in which he had his 'calling', because it was "the area in which one interacted with people, with behaviour and with values." This interaction, Mr. Seaga says, helped to frame his own thinking about human society.

In 1959 he joined the Jamaica Labour Party (JLP), Sir Alexander Bustamante, to serve in the Upper House of the Jamaican Legislative (later called the Senate). His political career was thus launched, and at age 29 he was the youngest member in the history of the Legislative Council.

He has been Member of Parliament for Western Kingston since 1962. He has also served as Minister of Development and Welfare (1962-1967), Minister of Finance and Planning (1967-1972), Leader of the Parliamentary Opposition from 1974 to October 30, 1980 and Prime Minister of Jamaica 1980-1983 and 1983-1993. He is currently Leader of the Opposition and Leader of the Jamaica Labour Party (JLP), a position he has held since 1974.

As a member of the Cabinet in the JLP administration between 1962 and 1972, Mr. Seaga was responsible for developing a comprehensive range of financial institutions.

In the 1960's Edward Seaga established the Urban Development Corporation (UDC) which undertook the redevelopment of the waterfront areas of Kingston, Ocho Rios and Montego Bay. He transformed the Kingston slum—"Back-o-Wall"—into a modern low-income residential community known today as Tivoli Gardens.

The initiator of various social projects like HEART, Solidarity, the Self Start Fund and the Food Stamp Programme, Mr. Seaga was also responsible for the establishment of the Golden Age Home for the indigent aged. He introduced the Jamaica Festival as a showcase for the island's talent in music, singing, dance, drama, art and culinary expertise and set up the Craft Development Agency to encourage the expansion of cottage industries.

He also encouraged research work in folk art, promoted indigenous pop music and worked out the initial plans for the Cultural Training Centre which embraces the performing, plastic and graphic arts. Under his direction, Devon House and Things Jamaican were established.

Edward Seaga created the blueprints for the redevelopment of Port Royal, Seville and Spanish Town as historical centres. He also set up Metropolitan Parks and Markets (MPM) to undertake the rehabilitation of the parks and markets in Kingston and to undertake street cleaning and general beautification of the city.

In promoting the search for a national identity Mr. Seaga brought back to Jamaica, the remains of Marcus Garvey, Jamaica's first

National Hero, established the National Heroes Award, introduced National Heritage Week and formulated plans for the development of the Arawak and Seville Museums.

The 100 village community programme was another of Seaga's social projects. This entailed the injection of capital and the garnering of human resources to facilitate development work in the areas of literacy, sports, craft, culture and the establishment of co-operatives at the community level.

A strong believer in the free enterprise system, in 1981 Seaga instituted a "structural adjustment" programme aimed at diversifying the economy.

Mr. Seaga also initiated the programme of Jamaicanisation in which there was an orderly transfer of business from full foreign ownership to majority Jamaican ownership. This was successfully effected in such areas as banking, insurance, utilities and prime agricultural lands.

He has cited the 1980 electoral victory as his greatest political achievement to date and said that the JLP administration used the 1980s as a means to open the society, to liberalise it and to enable both the political and economic systems to flourish. He feels that the results of the victory had been accepted "as the guiding political ideology and philosophy for both parties."

Mr. Seaga proposed the establishment of the International Fund for the Promotion of Culture in 1971. He is a founding member of the administrative council set up by UNESCO to govern this new organisation, which has responsibility for world cultural development.

He spearheaded the establishment of the Caribbean Democratic Union, (an affiliate of the International Democrat Union) of which he is President.

Edward Seaga introduced the concept of a Human Resource Facility or Manpower Bank,

which was later adopted by the UNDP as a means of providing short-term expertise from the private sector.

Mr. Seaga does not feel that his most significant social achievement can be limited to a single project as the goal was a social and economic reconstruction of the society.

"...the underlying philosophy of liberalising the economy breaking away from the dependency on Government, teaching people that they had to rely on themselves, and the whole concept that formed part of the liberalisation programme of privatising, diminishing the role of government, really setting the stage for a society in which personal initiative was rewarded, was a far bigger picture within which framework a number of projects occurred."

Recalling Independence 1962 as a period of great excellence and dynamism where "there was a sense of patriotism and nationalism abounding everywhere", he believes that we should reflect now on

Jamaica's problems and capabilities. He feels that "...something fundamental has to be done to reshape the educational system to keep pace with not just personal ambition but national requirements."

Reflecting on Jamaica's attainment of 33 years of independence, he says:

"...We are the best in the world in the production of four or five indigenous products. We have natural assets in our athletes, creativity and excellence in music. These must

be fully developed for the future. Nothing should prevent us from making full use of them."

Seaga urges Jamaicans to remember that:

"...our destiny offers not the cup of despair but the chalice of opportunity."



RT. HON. EDWARD SEAGA
M.P., P.C., B.A., LL.D

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