

Seaga takes leave

□ Emergency party meeting backs decision

By McPherse Thompson
Staff Reporter

OPPPOSITION LEADER and president of the Jamaica Labour Party (JLP) Edward Seaga has taken a three-month leave of absence from the party, effective yesterday, following the party's

decision to contest the upcoming Local Government Elections.

However, JLP General Secretary Edmund Bartlett, said the Leader's decision was based on the need to concentrate his efforts on reforming the electoral system while other officers concentrate on the campaign.

The Central Executive of the JLP decided last month that the party should contest national elections before the completion

of electoral reforms though it would continue to pursue those reforms.

The Standing Committee of the party met in an emergency meeting lasting for more than three hours yesterday evening to consider Mr. Seaga's decision, and according to Mr. Bartlett, in the end they all supported him.

But some members, including Spokesman on Finance Audley Shaw, left the meeting before it

ended, and declined to speak with members of the press who had gathered at the party's Belmont Road headquarters. Other officers of the party were tight-lipped about the party leader's decision.

Last night, Mr. Bartlett said the Standing Committee met in an emergency session to respond to critical information "we had concerning the imminent Local Government Election, to look at our machinery and preparation for the upcoming election and to commence the carrying out of the mandate to participate in the next and other elections."

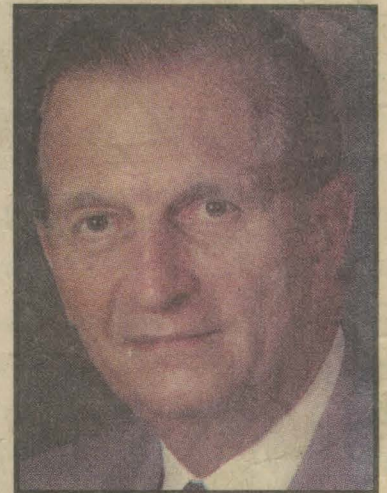
He said Mr. Seaga also advised the Standing Committee he would be taking leave of absence for three months, but he would continue to lead the fight for electoral reform on behalf of the party.

Consequent on that, he said, the party re-activated its campaign teams which were led in 1997 by campaign chairman and Spokesman on Local Government, Pearmel Charles, along with Karl Samuda who has been appointed chairman of the organisation efforts for the Local Government election.

The General Secretary said the four deputy leaders - Mike Henry, Enid Bennett, Derrick Smith and Neville Gallimore - will co-ordinate and work with a wider strategy committee responsible for the full programme of activities and implementation of the party's plans for the election.

"Our candidates in the main are in place, in fact we have more than 80 per cent of the 220 candidates who are required for the upcoming election," he said.

"The party will continue to be guided by the Secretariat and the



Edward Seaga ■

chairman's office under Ryan Peralto," Mr. Bartlett said.

Mr. Bartlett said Mr. Seaga's decision to take leave at this time would not weaken his leadership. "In fact I think his decision will give an opportunity for the strength of the party's leadership team to come to the fore in terms of its appeal and its own campaign ability," he said.

Asked whether Mr. Seaga's move was based on the party defying his decision not to participate in the election, Mr. Bartlett said, "the leader's decision is not contingent on any other decision that was taken by the party, but I think it is out of a genuine commitment that he has to see the reform programme to its conclusion and to be very focused in that effort."

Mr. Bartlett said he did not believe the JLP's chances of winning the election will be impaired by Mr. Seaga's absence from the campaign. "Our strategy will deal with the impact the absence of the leader will have," he said.

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The Gleaner, July 9, 1998, p. A1.