

for
23/3/73

Hugh Lawson Shearer rose from the obscurity of the small village of Martha Brae in Trelawny to become prime minister of Jamaica.

He was born in 1923, and his early schooling was at the Falmouth Elementary School. He won his first distinction in 1936, when he won the Trelawny Parish scholarship, and went to Kingston to attend St. Simon's College, one of the few privately owned schools at that time. He ~~attended~~ attended St. Simon's until he was 17 years old. He therefore left school in 1940, ready to look for some occupation which would allow his ambition to gain some scope. The 1940's was a time of intense labour activity, and chief agitator was Alexander Bustamante. The young Hugh could claim to be a distant relative of Bustamante, as well as of the Manley family. Hugh chose to throw in his fortune with the Bustamante Trade unions. Early in '40 Busta had been imprisoned for preparing a waterfront strike that would have increased the shortage of consumer essentials at a time (the second world war) when the colony was already experiencing shortages. Hugh therefore found he had to contact Miss Longbridge, Mr. Bustamante's secretary, and through her, he got a job with the organisation. He was assigned to gather the news for union's official weekly newspaper the "Jamaican Worker". At that time he worked for 12/- per week. (It is believed that his relationship with Bustamante started before this however, as he on occasion ran errands for the labour leader).

More.....

The young Shearer, described as a "tall, lanky youth, with the loose lips, and the shrewd cautious eyes," quickly picked up the techniques of newspaper work. "He learned to write ~~in~~ straight copy. He learned to write eye-catching headlines, and he learned the tricky business of getting ^{out} the newspapers early on Friday.

When Bustamante was released from detention in March 1942, collaboration between the B.I.T.U. and the P.N.P abruptly ended. The "Chief" once more resumed full leadership of his union in the rural areas. The young Shearer was loaded with the full responsibility of editing the union's newspaper. He also found himself ^{subtly} drawn into the union organisation itself, ~~and~~ addressing meetings, organising strike picket lines, and taking part in meetings discussing the strategy and negotiations of the strikes.

In 1942, with the P.N.P.'s struggle for Universal Adult Suffrage, ~~and~~ it was known that the colony would have an election in 1944 to make the proposed new constitution a reality. Manley had already formed his party. Mr. Abe Issa, had formed the Democratic Party to fight the P.N.P. Busta hastily made up his Jamaica Labour Party out of the secretaries and union men of the B.I.T.U. Bustamante himself ran ~~for~~ in the election for West Kingston. More political experience was given to young "Hugh" who was his election officer.

The success of Busta and his labour party has become history. Bustamante's own personal popularity and success however, won for Hugh, who by now was Busta's obvious protégé, success as well. In 1947 in the municipal general elections, the J.L.P.

More.....

put him up for one of the divisions in the constituency. He won easily, and for the next four years added municipal responsibility, and valuable experience, to the responsibilities and experience he had been gaining with the trade union movement. He ~~also~~^{also} had the distinction in his municipal career of sitting as chairman of the Public Health Committee.

Meanwhile he was gaining in stature in the trade union movement. He sat beside Busta at all important negotiating meetings, representing the workers. He appeared at union rallies as the most important speaker after Busta. He began to gain a certain eloquent ~~style~~^a in his speeches, and to grow as a political campaigner.

The P.N.P had been badly defeated in the 1944 elections. Their defeat was severest in the corporate area. But Busta and his party began to ~~lose~~ lose ground from about 1946, after the ~~notorious~~^{notorious} mental hospital strike, and after Busta's manslaughter trial in the same year. This swing to the ~~P.N.P.~~ P.N.P. was further reflected in the 1947 municipal elections, and their success was further enhanced by the 1948 bus strike. There was to be general election in 1949. Busta decided that his West Kingston constituency was ~~unsafe~~^{unsafe}. He decided to run in the sugar belt of Southern Clarendon, where the union was strongest. He put Shearer to run in West Kingston against the P.N.P.'s Ken Hill. The J.L.P. won the election, but Hugh was defeated by Mr. Hill.

He remained active in the trade union movement however, and, always eager to improve his education, in 1948, he accepted inclusion in the Colonial Development and Welfare Trade Union Scholarship course that was being held in Barbados.

There, along with history and economics he gained a knowledge of the finer points of organising, bargaining and conciliation for trade unions.

A significant and enduring influence in Mr. Shearer's life came in 1951, when he was selected as one of Jamaica's representatives to the Moral Rearmament Conference in Caux, Switzerland. He had travelled only twice before: to Havana with "Busta" in the middle forties, and to Barbados for the trade union conference. The MRA conference, however, gave him the opportunity to visit the wider world, and take a look at the great cities of New York, London, Paris and Geneva. It was probably in 1951 that Mr. Shearer came to real maturity. From about this time "Busta" marked him as his "heir apparent", though this probably meant only to the B.I.T.U.

The Jamaica Labour Party was ~~xxxxx~~ unsuccessful in the elections of 1955, but Shearer won his seat. He therefore became a back-bencher. But during these next seven years he grew in stature as a trade union leader. He shared the limelight with ~~the~~ young Michael Manley as a fighting trade unionist, but as a rival, and this enhanced his prestige all the more.

When he lost his parliamentary seat in 1959, he therefore did not lose prestige as a trade union leader. While leadership in the labour party belonged to Bustamante, ~~the~~ ^{popularity} ~~leadership~~ in the union belonged to Shearer.

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With the break^up of the federation in 1961, and the defeat of the P.N.P in the election of 1962, more importance came to Mr. Shearer. Mr. Ashenheim left the ~~Senate~~ Senate, to become Jamaica's ambassador in Washington, and Mr. Shearer took over as leader of the Senate. He thus becomes the second most important minister to Busta in the Cabinet. It must be mentioned here that Shearer's activity in the union had built up strong support for him in the sugar belts of rural Jamaica, and this had helped the Labour Party to win the Referendum. (on Federation).

Of his performance in the Senate, the Gleaner's Political Reporter had this to say about him (April 1963).

"Jamaica's parliament has completed its first session and on Tuesday will begin its first full year as an Independent legislative body. Looking back on the activities of our legislators during the first phase of our independence the thing that strikes me is that there has been little change. What change there has been has been almost wholly confined to the Senate, which has replaced the Legislative Council.....There can be no doubt about it but that Mr. Shearer has been the parliamentarian who has made the greatest impact on the political life of Jamaica in the months since independence as seen through the proceedings in both chambers. He has staged-managed that chamber, pushed and bent and managed it into the paths he wished it to go. He has used it as a rostrum for making some of the most controversial political announcements made by any

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POLitician since independence. And he has used it to create the image of the new Shearer - a combination of the boss of the B.I.T.U. , the regenerated and sober-minded statesman of international stature, - the shrewd policy maker of the government."

He was Minister of External Affairs and Deputy Chief of Mission for Jamaica at the United Nations in 1962 , and ~~he~~ was Jamaica's spokesman on ^{foreign} ~~foreign~~ affairs. In his 1962 speech, he backed Secretary General U Thant against the Russian proposal of a troika; called for a nuclear Test Ban Treaty by January 1963, and propossd that an International Year of Human Rights should be observed in the same way that world scientists observe Year of the "Quiet Sun".

Although he was making a tremendous impact in the U.N. and as a Senator, Mr. Shearer "held his patience as far as personal office in his party was concerned". (Gleaner, 16 th April, '67) It was obvious in labour party circles that Busta wanted him to take over from Sangster; but Hugh was stubborn in his unwillingness to become head of the country. ~~Busta retired in 1967.~~ , At a Cabinet Meeting Busta is reported on occasion to have said - " I will put you here one day" - meaning in his chair as Prime Minister.

Busta retired in 1967. Sangster became Prime Minister, then did under tragic circumstances. The irony of fate then decreed that Shearer should become Prime Minister of Jamaica.

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On the question of who should become Prime Minister when Mr. Sangster died, it~~x~~ should be noted that Mr. Shearer did not consciously seek office until the very last moment. We can ~~hear~~^{here} recall how he resisted the pressures brought to bear on him by Sir Alexander, and Lady Bustamante to be Prime Minister. When Mr. Sangster died, Mr. Shearer, as Minister of External Affairs^{affairs}, ~~and~~ was in the United States at the time.

What campaign was undertaken for Mr. Shearer, was done unbidden, and~~x~~ jointly by Mr. Edward Seaga, Mr. Edwin Allen and Mr. Victor Grant. (Sunday Gleaner, 31. Dec. 1967).

In fact Mr. Shearer came straight from Palisadoes to face his rivals for the premiership. Sir Alexander had strongly recommended in letters to the Members of Parliament, that Shearer should be elected. Mr. E.L Parkinson was to read the letter, but decided against it. Mr. Robert Lightbourne and Mr. Clement Tavares were Shearer's chief rivals. In the final analysis, it was an extraordinary close election. The final count was

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15 to 16, and only upped to 17 for Mr. Shearer when Wakeland from his sick bed in the University Hospital voted for him. Thus Hugh ~~Lawson~~ Lawson Shearer became Jamaica's youngest Prime Minister, and also the youngest Prime Minister of the British Commonwealth. (Hugh Shearer was only 43 when he became Prime Minister).

The Political Reporter of the Sunday Gleaner, 31st. Dec, '67, had this to say of him.

" Mr, ~~Shearer~~'s accession to the P.M.'s office, has ushered in a new era in Jamaica's politics, effectively and conclusively marking the end of the Bustamante/Manley period.....Since his election as P.M. Mr. Shearer has won more support in the party and strengthened his position among the backbenchers of his Parliamentary majority, as expressed in his unopposed election to be first Deputy Leader, under Busta at the Party's last annual convention. In the Cabinet he has taken charge as Mr. Sangster was never permitted to do. He has given it positive leadership.....His public announce-

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ments, particularly on violence, and the need for work and sacrifice, and the "no nonsense" sobriquet which he created for himself all have a touch of the old Bustamante image, with something added - the forcefulness of a younger man. "

In his early days as Prime Minister, it was not only at home that Mr. Shearer made himself popular. In the international field he built up a reputation, based on his performance at the United Nations when he was Deputy Chief of Mission. There he projected a good image of himself and Jamaica among European leaders, and this ~~has~~ stood him in good stead as Jamaica's young Prime Minister.

He established good relations with Harold Wilson the British (Labour) Prime Minister, who placed him among the foremost of the commonwealth Prime Ministers who ^{were} ~~are~~ privately consulted in matters of major commonwealth interest.

In international affairs in the Caribbean, he stood out (all in keeping with his views on Human Rights) as the champion of the oppressed Anguillans. ~~xxxxxxx~~ On

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On the Anguillan affair it was said of him.....

" He had to use all kinds of diplomatic moves to extricate Jamaica from the untenable position in which Mr. Lightbourne's agreement had placed Jamaica. He had to repudiate an agreement which Mr. Lightbourne had no right to make, without appearing to repudiate it; and at the same time to resist as diplomatically as possible the strong pressures brought to bear on him by the United Kingdom government." The stand Mr. Shearer took was commendable for it must lead to a final acceptance of the proposition that no West Indian territory has the right to interfere with the internal affairs of other West Indian territories. This stand he took in direct opposition to the views of Mr. Barrow, (Barbados), Dr. Eric Williams, (Trinidad) and Mr. Burnam (Guyana). — A notable achievement.

Mr. Shearer remained Prime Minister from 1967, until 1972. In the general elections of 1972, Young Michael Manley, gave a new image and impetus to the P.N.P.,

More.....

SHEARER...B/N...11

and ousted Shearer and the Labour Party from power. At
the present time Mr. Shearer is leader of the Opposition
and still leader of the Labour Party, howbeit, a party
which seems slowly disintegrating through dis^usession and
personal rivalry.

March 23, 1973 NATIONAL LIBRARY OF JAMAICA