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# Hugh Shearer

National Library of Jamaica

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*This article is about the former Jamaican Prime Minister, Hugh Shearer. For information on the Privy Council Member, see Hugh Shearer (Privy Council Member).*

The Right Honourable **Hugh Lawson Shearer** (May 18, 1923 – July 5, 2004) was the fourth Prime Minister of Jamaica, from 1967 to 1972.

Born in Martha Brae, Trelawny Parish, Jamaica, near the sugar and banana growing areas, Shearer attended St Simon's College after winning a parish scholarship to the school.

In 1941 he took a job on the staff of a weekly trade union newspaper, the *Jamaican Worker*. His first political promotion came in 1943, when Sir Alexander Bustamante (founder of the Jamaican Labour Party) took over editorship of the paper and took Shearer under his wing. Shearer continued to get promotion after promotion within the union and acquired a Government Trade Union scholarship in 1947.

He was appointed Island Supervisor of Bustamante's trade union, BITU, and shortly afterwards elected Vice President of the union.

Shearer was elected to the House of Representatives as member for Western Kingston in 1955, an office he retained for the next four years until he was defeated in the 1959 elections.

He was a member of the Senate from 1962 to 1967, at the same time filling the role of Jamaica's chief spokesman on foreign affairs as Deputy Chief of Mission at the United Nations. In 1967 he was elected as member for Southern Clarendon and, after the death of Sir Donald Sangster, appointed Prime Minister on April 11, 1967.

Thanks to his work with the *Jamaican Worker* earlier in his life, Shearer managed to stay on generally good terms with the Jamaican working class, and was generally well liked by the populace. However, he did cause an outcry of anger in October of 1968 when his government banned the prominent intellectual, Walter Rodney from re-entering the country. On October 16 a series of riots, known as the Rodney Riots broke out, first at the University of the West Indies campus at Mona, and then spreading throughout Kingston. Shearer stood by the ban claiming that Rodney was a danger to Jamaica, citing his socialist ties, trips to Cuba and the USSR, as well as his radical Black nationalism.

Shearer was generally uncomfortable with notions of pan-africanism or militant black nationalism. He was also insecure about the stability of newly independent Jamaica in the late 1960s.

His term as Prime Minister was a prosperous one for Jamaica, with three new alumina refineries were built, along with three large tourist resorts. These six buildings formed the basis of Jamaica's mining and tourism industries, the two biggest earners for the country.

Shearer's term was also marked by a great upswing in secondary school enrolment after an intense education campaign on his part. Fifty new schools were constructed.

## The Right. Hon. Hugh Shearer



<b>Term:</b>	1967 to 1972
<b>Predecessor:</b>	Alexander Bustamante
<b>Successors:</b>	Michael Manley
<b>Date of Birth:</b>	May 18, 1923
<b>Place of Birth:</b>	Jamaica
<b>Political Party:</b>	Jamaican Labour Party

It was by pressure from Shearer that the Law of the Sea Authority chose Kingston to house its headquarters.

In the 1972 elections, the JLP was defeated and the People's National Party leader, Michael Manley, became Prime Minister.

He died at his home in Kingston on July 5, 2004, at the age of 81.