

P.8A *Sunday Herald*

LABOUR

September 28-October 4, 2003

X
BIN SHEARER, HUGH

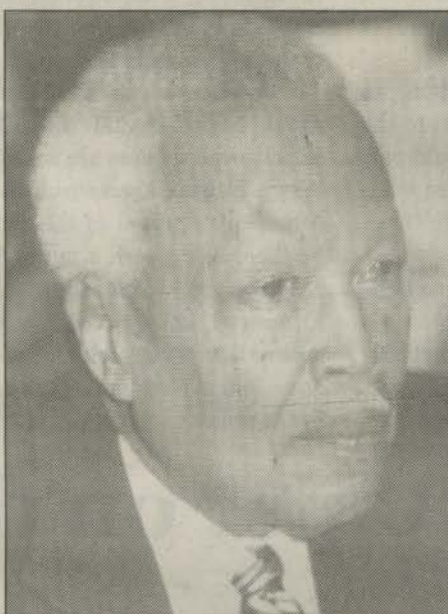
Shearer: Man for the masses

He has been an integral part of the labour movement in Jamaica for decades, championing the cause of the down-trodden workers in their cry for justice, decent wages and working conditions fit for human beings. Yet, Hugh Shearer it seems, is a man who remains in the shadow. A formidable man, his role has constantly evolved through the years to meet the needs of whatever position or challenge he assumes. But what do we know of him and where did his spirit of giving commence?

Born Hugh Lawson Shearer on May 18, 1923 in Martha Brae, Trelawny, he grew up close to the sugar and banana areas of his parish, hence his love of the soil and the people who till it. He attended St Simon's College as a parish scholarship winner and at the age of 18, joined the Bustamante Industrial Trade Union's (BITU) staff in April 1941 attached to the union's weekly paper, *Jamaica Worker*. His first promotion came in 1943, when Sir Alexander Bustamante, just released from Detention Camp, took over editorship of the paper and took Shearer under his wings, forming a lifelong bond between the two. As Bustamante became more involved with the Jamaica Labour Party, Mr Shearer went on to further promotion within the union and acquired a Government Trade Union scholarship tenable for 1947 to 1948.

Political scene

His entry into politics came when he was elected a councillor of the Kingston and St Andrew Corporation (KSAC) in 1947. He was also appointed Island Supervisor of the BITU and elected vice president of the union, at around the same time. By 1955, he was elected to the House of Representatives as a member for Western Kingston and upon being defeated, was appointed to the Legislative Council. A member of the Senate (and its leader) from 1962 to 1967, he invariably filled the



Hugh Lawson Shearer

role of Jamaica's chief spokesman on foreign affairs as deputy chief of mission at the United Nations.

When Sir Alexander Bustamante retired in 1967 the mantle fell on Hugh Shearer to contest the newly-created Clarendon Southern seat which he won by a 2,925 majority. Later, he was appointed Prime Minister on the death of Sir Donald Sangster in 1967. As Prime Minister (1967-1972), he presided over some of Jamaica's most productive years, as during this period three new alumina refineries and three large convention hotels were constructed or started. These formed the base of today's mining and tourism industries, now the countries two largest foreign exchange earners.

Additionally Mr Shearer is credited with changing the pace of education in Jamaica with his programme to double secondary school enrollment, thus 50 new secondary schools were built as a result. Though he was Prime Minister for five years, holding the highest and most powerful position in the land is not what he is and will ultimately be known best for, as it is his work with Jamaica's grassroots masses as a trade unionist that won him great respect.

The year 1938, in fact, was to prove a key year in the development of modern Jamaica. Partly as a result of the battle in Frome, strike-leader Alexander

Bustamante founded the first trade union in the Caribbean, the BITU. The union was the organisation that gave birth to the movement which founded the Jamaica Labour Party (JLP). Throughout the past five decades the BITU has remained committed to upholding the mandate upon which it was formed — that is to facilitate a better standards of living and opportunities for the people of Jamaica. Today the BITU is recognised as the largest labour union in the English-speaking Caribbean. It continues to increase its service to all sections of workers in Jamaica, defending their interests not only in improved wages, but also the welfare of each worker.

Distinguished career

Shearer has had a distinguished career, particularly as a negotiator and was recognised as the JLP spokesman for the working class sector of the community. Due to Bustamante's increasing involvement with government, Mr Shearer took over complete charge of the BITU, and this made him a force to be reckoned with in JLP councils. He held a seat in the JLP executive as the leading representative of the BITU, a position of strength. His trade union activities have served him in good stead, having brought him through the years into contact with a wide cross-section of the community — workers, civil servants, employers, traders, associations — giving him a wide knowledge of social and economic conditions in fields that matter fundamentally to Jamaican life.

On the international scene, Hugh Shearer in 1963 initiated the movement in the United Nations for declaring 1968 as 'The International Year of Human Rights,' which was celebrated worldwide and was also instrumental in piloting the move to have Jamaica selected as headquarters for The Law of the Sea Authority. After a successful Prime Ministership, Shearer relinquished the leadership of the party and was succeeded by Edward Seaga in November 1974. In the 1976 constituencies (Boundaries) realignment, Clarendon Southern was removed from the parish and Clarendon South Eastern restored. Hugh Shearer contested for the JLP and defeated Ronald Powell (PNP), by 2,134



Hugh Lawson Shearer and wife Denise

Though he was Prime Minister for five years, holding the highest and most powerful position in the land is not what he is and will ultimately be known best for, as it is his work with Jamaica's grassroots masses as a trade unionist that won him great respect

votes.

Indeed Hugh Shearer has spent over 50 years in service to his country and in pursuit of the great future he envisioned for his homeland and the greater world community. In December of 2002, it was announced that the award of the Order of the Nation would be conferred on Hugh

Lawson Shearer along with Prime Minister P J Patterson and Opposition Leader Edward Seaga. Representatives of former Prime Ministers Michael Manley and Donald Sangster also receive the instrument of appointment on behalf of these individuals who are being awarded posthumously.