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**SHEARER SPEAKS ON**

# Contributions of the young to progress

CONTRIBUTIONS which the young people of Jamaica can make to the progress and development of the country were spoken of by the Leader of the Opposition, the Rt. Hon. Hugh Shearer, in an address to the Catholic Youth Organisation of Holy Rosary Church, Kingston, on Sunday night.

Speaking on the subject, "The Role of Youth in the Jamaica of Today and Tomorrow," the former Prime Minister said this was perhaps the most discussed social subject of the day. This was not a problem confined to Jamaica or to other developing countries, but was a worldwide problem manifesting itself in all countries.

Mr. Shearer noted that the number of persons under age 25 in Jamaica today — the youth of the country — was 1,250,000 out of a population of just under two million. That was some 60 per cent of the population. A smaller percentage applied to the groups 15 years to 25 years.

This is the group, he said, which ordinarily should be able to think for themselves and young enough to be original.

"I say 'ordinarily', because misapplied educational opportunities, indeed the lack of educational facilities, can stunt the imagination that should be inherent in such a group, can stifle individual thought and produce what, for want of apter terms, can be called inanimate automatons to be moved like pieces across the checkerboard of life by evil, misguided or misinformed men," he said.

## Robots

Mr. Shearer said that, if this happened, then the youth of any country merely became "robots" echoing by rote the unoriginal thoughts of their mentors and failing in their duty to provide the country with the dynamism for meaningful change and progress which was their right to give.

It should always be remembered that this group was not a static one. The young people of today became the middle-aged people of tomorrow, and, as such, the teachers and the mentors of the younger people who replaced them.

"If their natural gift for imaginativeness and constructive self-expression is channelled creatively by those who shaped them in their formative years, then it must follow that they will pass on those qualities to those who follow them", he said.

"It is only in this way that we can build a stable self-regenerating and progressive society, and it for this reason that Society as a whole must be responsible for ensuring that the best training, appropriate to all age groups, is available to all for learning never stops".

Mr. Shearer said that the young had the duty to provide new ideas and to stimulate new thinking and new demands. They had the duty also to assimilate all the knowledge that they could in all the fields that were open to them.

## Integral part

At the same time, it was not enough just to study the textbooks or to listen to their teachers. It was necessary for all young Jamaicans to listen to "the voices of the world". In that way, the youth of Jamaica would learn to discard what was harmful to themselves and to the society in which they lived, and to preserve what was good for themselves and for the society of which they were an integral part.

This was not to say that there must not be some measure of ferment and dissatisfaction, he said. A good deal of progress in the world of social justice, in the past and in the present, could be attributed to the active role played by young people in their respective countries.

"We are satisfied not only that Jamaican youth have been given the opportunity to let their voices be heard, but that our youth, properly informed, have the capacity to carry the responsibility of continuing meaningfully to the future", Mr. Shearer said.

One expression of that confidence in the young people of Jamaica was the recent lowering of the voting age to 18 years; but the Jamaica Labour Party would go further than that. It was for that reason that he himself had tabled a Private Member's Bill in the House of Representatives to endow all persons of voting age with the rights and responsibilities of marriage, wills, jury duty, and the disposal of property.

"Our Bill would still safeguard the right of the youths to the fullest possible exposure to all the educational facilities they can make use of. The Bill is still to be discussed and the present Government has promised to

examine the situation in all respects mentioned in the Bill", he said.

## Enduring

Finally, Mr. Shearer told his audience of young people that, in the same way that the older generations owed it to the society to nurture and to accept new ideas from the young, the young owed it to the society not to discard what had been tested and found to be enduring in the society.

"If this should happen, it could only lead to chaos compounded upon chaos as each new generation discards, without thought, the concepts and precepts of older generations who were themselves once young Jamaicans", he said.

"I repeat, such a programme would not be meaningful change; it would be meaningless chaos, as one young generation replaced another".