

A Titan goes: Hugh Shearer calls it a day

by GRACE VIRTUE

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"I CANNOT allow the government to be bullied by any group whether do-gooders, noise-makers, ologists or gatherers," said Prime Minister of Jamaica Hugh Lawson Shearer in 1968.

Later that year, he told a group of dentists planning to migrate that "glory achieved in haste is an empty achievement."

"This is our country. Leaving it means you are depriving it of the talents and service needed for its development and giving it away to others who can see the great vision that is in our future," Mr. Shearer further said.

His utterances said much for his own commitment to the growth and development of this country. Looking back at his sterling contributions over the years, his achievements of personal and career goals both as a politician and trade unionist, one can say that Mr. Shearer lived what he believed.

Productive years

As Prime Minister (1967-1972), he presided over Jamaica's most productive years, according to Opposition Leader Edward Seaga. During this period three new alumina refineries and three large convention hotels were constructed or started. These, Mr. Seaga said, formed the base of today's mining and tourism industries, now the countries two largest foreign exchange earners.

Also, Mr. Shearer is credited with changing the pace of education in Jamaica with his programme to double secondary school enrollment. Fifty new secondary schools were built as a result.

On the international scene, Mr. Shearer in 1963 initiated the movement in the United Nations for the declaration of 1968 as the International Year of Human Rights which was celebrated worldwide.

Mr. Shearer also piloted the move to have Jamaica selected as

the headquarters of the Law of the Sea Authority. Though this is not yet finalised, it is a quest which could have considerable impact on Jamaica in both domestic and foreign affairs.

Indeed Hugh Shearer can claim glory, if he wishes, and not the hasty and empty type of which he warned young Jamaicans to guard against. He has spent nearly all of his 70 years in service to his country and in pursuit of the great future which he envisioned for his island home and the greater world community.

In his lifetime and a career which has taken him to all corners of the earth, he has lived the lives of thousands of men starting with his early involvement in the trade union movement at age 17.

Since then, Hugh Shearer has moved on to serve the country as a member of the Kingston and St. Andrew Corporation (KSAC) in 1947; Island supervisor of the Bustamante Industrial Trade Union (BITU) in 1953; Member of the House of Representatives from 1955-1959; Member of the Legislative Council, Leader of Government Business in the Senate and Minister without Portfolio, Deputy Chief of Mission for Jamaica at the United Nations General Assembly in 1962-1967; Member of Parliament for Southern Clarendon in 1967-1976 and South-eastern Clarendon 1976 - 1993.

Deputy PM

In a later JLP administration, he served as Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade.

Following his election in 1967, Mr. Shearer was appointed Minister of External Affairs.

That he should become Prime Minister of Jamaica that same year, was an event that perhaps he had not foreseen. As fate would have it though, Sir Donald Sangster, who had succeeded Sir Alexander Bustamante, died a few months into his term as Prime Minister. In a

tight race, Mr. Shearer was chosen by his party to succeed the Prime Minister over Robert Lightbourne and Clem Tavares.

Mr. Shearer's success was the realization of a dream for Sir Alexander Bustamante who had long identified him as his son and heir apparent. Rumours say that on one occasion Sir Alexander was upset with his Cabinet on the handling of a particular issue. The old man looked past Donald Sangster, Robert Lightbourne and Tavares, all rivals to succeed him, then at the younger Hugh Shearer.

"One day I am going to put you in this (Prime Minister) seat," he told him. Sir Alex's outburst was followed by an uncomfortable silence and Shearer, ever the diplomat, kept his gaze grounded on the papers before him.

Shearer's entry on the scene as the Prime Minister of Jamaica effectively closed the Norman Manley and Bustamante era in Jamaican politics. It heralded the beginning of a new age.

This new development in Jamaican politics was to be consolidated later with the PNP's election of Michael Manley to lead that party upon the retirement of his father, Norman Washington Manley.

Now, more than 40 years since the start of his career, Mr. Shearer has said goodbye to representative politics. At 70, he is no longer a Member of Parliament, having lost his Southern Clarendon seat to the PNP's Peter Bunting. Journalists, his colleagues on both side of the House, as well as the wider public, will no doubt miss him.

With his announcement last week has come the inevitable retreats into the past of one of Jamaica's best loved public figures and a man who has for so long been an active part of national life.

"Hugh Shearer greets you like a long last friend," said a colleague yesterday.

"He is one of the humblest



Shearer and the children.

men I have ever met," said another.

Still another opined, "he has walked with kings, but he never lost the common touch."

Cliches these utterances may be, but true for those whose lives have been touched by HL.

Among his friends and colleagues, Mr. Shearer is known for his love and loyalty to his country, his sunny disposition, his humility, his forceful direct performance, his blunt outspokenness on public issues, his great compassion for the poor and underprivileged and his benevolence to charitable causes most of which are done quietly and without fanfare.

Among the negative criticisms of Mr. Shearer are his banning of University Lecturer Walter Rodney from the island in 1968, as well as certain literature related to the Black Power Movement.

Others still chafe at what was perceived as Mr. Shearer's putting down of Black Jamaicans in a statement made at the JLP's conference last year.

According to a colleague though:-

"Mr. Shearer has been to the mountain top and for one who has climbed so high, a few slips are allowed.... if slips they were!"



One of the many moods of Hugh Shearer