

# A giant in his time

**Hugh Lawson Shearer was yesterday awarded the Order of Jamaica, at a ceremony at Kings House. Below we publish the full text of the tribute paid to him by Senator Dwight Nelson, Vice President, Bustamante Industrial Trade Union.**

The trade union movement comes here this morning proudly and triumphantly.

We come here with pride and with triumph because the Hugh Lawson Shearer who Jamaica honours today epitomises the spirit, determination, courage, boldness and grit of the working class as they strive towards a better and more fulfilling existence.

We come here, not as mere spectators to the conferring on him the high national honour—the Order of Jamaica, but as members of a family who ourselves feel honoured this morning.

We feel strongly that it was divine intervention almost fifty years that gave to us that young vibrant teenager who first entered the trade union movement as a journalist on the worker's paper the "Jamaica Worker".

On many occasions as we sat at his feet, as it were, he in an effort to inspire us, recalled with nostalgia that his salary at that time was the handsome figure of what today would be 80 cents per week. Indeed, he describes how Sir Alexander Bustamante was so pleased with his performance that one joyous morning he requested Lady Bustamante to grant him an increase in salary and he received a whopping 25 percent increase which moved him from 80 cents, to one dollar per week. He assured us within

the BITU that he earned every cent of that princely sum.

## Senior

Hugh Shearer is affectionately referred to by his fellow trade union leaders as "senior".

We call him "senior", not because of his age, but because his accomplishments in the trade union movement are so many, so fundamental and so pioneering; because his approaches to solving workers' problems have been so imaginative, innovative and satisfying to all parties, that he has become a source of reference for all of us.

Time might not permit me to enumerate or refer in any elaborate way to his many accomplishments as a trade union leader. History, however, will record that

his has not been approaches which simply addressed workplace problems.

Hugh Lawson Shearer has in his time been the prime mover for benefits to workers which have had lasting effects not only on the workers' themselves but on their children, their children's children and consequently on the nation as a whole.

## Involvement in education

Hugh Lawson Shearer was the first trade unionist who astutely persuaded the employer to provide as part of a labour management agreement scholarships to the children of sugar workers paid for by the various sugar estates.

Today hundreds of professionals who are contributing to the building of this country having been trained through this agreement, in agriculture, civil, mechanical, chemical and electrical engineering, business administration, accounting, economics, medicine, teaching, law and land surveying.

When the industrial scene was indescribably turbulent, particularly on the waterfront, Hugh Shearer was instrumental in the creation of the first Joint Industrial Council in Jamaica—a machinery which allowed management and the workers, through their unions, to sit in joint consultation and address their problems meaningfully.

The other members of that first joint industrial council, Mr N.N. Nethersole, Fred Kennedy

and Frank Hill unfortunately are no longer with us today, but we are glad that Shearer is still around for us to express our profound appreciation for this pioneering effort.

When the trade unions solidified their efforts to better educate the workers in Jamaica, Shearer was foremost in the formation of the Joint Trade Unions Research Development Centre, the only one of its kind in the Caribbean.

Today we pay tribute to the foresight of this noble gentleman

Shearer's quest for a better life for the workers of Jamaica has not been confined to national inputs. From the moment he stepped forth with Michael Manley as advisers to the advisers who were advising the colonial delegation to the annual assembly of the ILO in Geneva to today, he has not

spared any effort to generate support from friendly organisations and nations abroad for the masses of the country.

Indeed all Jamaica stood tall when his proposal that the year 1968 be designated Human Rights Year was accepted by the United Nations General Assembly.

## Fighting the workers' cause

There are many who have used the trade union movement as stepping stones to seemingly higher offices, forgetting from whence they came.

It is to Shearer's eternal credit that he has never by words or deeds abandoned the workers of this country, in spite of other duties.

Whether he was a Minister of Government or Prime Minister, he was always available to give priceless advice and counsel not only to the members of his immediate organisation but to every one regardless of colour or creed.

There are so many occasions that he was able to settle disputes and bring dissenting parties to consensus from all facets of industry, be it bauxite, telecommunications, agriculture or manufacturing that again we say it must have been divine intervention that spared his life sometime ago when, what must have been a mad man, struck him in the forehead with a spear.

The workers of this country owe a debt of gratitude to this distinguished statesman.

His contributions remain unparalleled. He is the only trade unionist, the only Jamaican to have served the country as he has.

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He is the only Jamaican living or dead to have been a member of the KSAC, member of the legislative council, member of The Senate, Leader of Government Business, Minister of External Affairs, Minister of Defence, Minister of Foreign Trade, Minister of Trade and Industry, Member of the Privy Council, Leader of the Opposition and Prime Minister of Jamaica.

Today we add the Order of Jamaica.

May God spare his life for many years to come.



**Brothers in the struggle:** Hugh Shearer flanked by some of the distinguished trades unionists who were present at King's House yesterday to witness his investiture with the Order of Jamaica. From l-r: Parnel Charles (BITU), H.O. Thompson (NWU), Reg Ennis (UTAS), Hugh Shearer, O.J., Hopeton Cavern (TUC) and Lascelles Beckford (BITU).