

*by the Political Reporter*

# Shearer: new dominant figure in politics

JAMAICA'S parliament has completed its first session and on Tuesday will begin its first full year as an Independent Legislative body. Looking back on the activities of our legislators during this first phase of our independence, the thing that strikes me is that there has been little change. What change there has been has been almost wholly confined to the Senate, which has replaced the Legislative Council.

The House of Representatives continued along its own rambunctious ways and there was a lot of departure from the truth in debates. The Second Chamber, however, showed a distinct change from what it had been before. It became more political.

The old Legislative Council, as created after the 1944 elections, was essentially a reactionary body, packed with all the spokesmen of vested interests. It was designed, as no other Council had since been designed, to keep the House of Representatives in check. That it actually did not clash on more than a few occasions with the House was due firstly to the ingenuity of the late O. K. Henriques and afterwards to the diplomacy of the late Sir Robert Barker. But those of us who remember that Council remember that it was bent on curbing the natural spirits of the House of Representatives, full of elected members then feeling their way for the first time.

Gradually the character of the Council changed, as its membership changed with the addition here and there of frankly political men. But although there were members who spoke for one or other of the two political parties, there was a hard core of members who spoke for none, and this gave the Council a character which was hard to define but which nevertheless reflected the facts of political and economic reality in the island. But as the island drew nearer to Independence even this had to be done away with, and in the years immediately before the actual assumption of Independence, the Council became the creature of the political parties, with a smaller uncommitted group of members whose only influence on what happened in that chamber was to keep the dignity of the Chamber at a reasonable level.

*To aid this, the political parties, almost as if paying due deference to the fact of colonialism, continued to appoint people to the Council who were on the whole not of the down-to-earth politician class. But with the approach of Independence, all this changed. The two parties vied to make political capital out of their appointments, and when the last Legislative Council became the first Senate in August last year the frankly political Second Chamber threatened to rival the House in the intensity of its political manoeuvrings.*

The Senate has yet to make its full impact on the life and thinking of the people of Jamaica. The fact that it is a nominated extension of the House of Representatives has prevented many persons from thinking of it as a separate entity, or even as a revisionary chamber and much of this has been due to the manner in which the Leader of Government Business in the Senate has handled its proceedings, for in the Senate, unlike the House, the person who controls proceedings is the Leader of the Senate rather than the presiding officer.

**There can be no doubt about it but that Mr. Shearer has been the parliamentarian who has made the greatest impact on the political life of Jamaica in the months since Independence as seen through the proceedings in both Chambers. He has staged-managed that Chamber, pushed, and bent and urged it into the paths he wished it to go. He has used it as a rostrum for making some of the most controversial political announcements made by any politician since Independence. And he has used it to create the image of the new Shearer — a combination of the tough boss of the Bustamante Industrial Trade Union, the regenerated and sober-minded statesman of international stature, the shrewd policy maker of the Government.**

I confess nothing but admiration for the manner in which Mr. Shearer has managed to carry all three roles with the greatest aplomb, for the ease with which he shifts his position from one role to the other with the deft agility of the practised politician, for the personal domination he has imposed on the Senate, so that even redoubtable and penetrating debaters like Mr. Douglas Fletcher and Mr. Michael Manley have been kept relatively in the background and the man in the street knows nothing at all about other Senators and would be hard-pressed to name them all if asked.

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Yes, the Senate is Mr. Shearer's Senate and that is the most important development in the island's parliament since August 6, last year, for it is now clear that a tremendous amount of power is concentrated in the hands of young Mr. Shearer, and it is now very obvious that outside of the two political leaders, Prime Minister Sir Alexander Bustamante and Opposition Leader Mr. Norman Manley, Mr. Shearer is the most dominant political personality in the island.

This, however, should not surprise anybody if one just stops to look at the facts. Mr. Shearer is the *de facto* boss of the Bustamante Industrial Trade Union which, since the April elections, has swung back into great strength in the trade union field, to the extent that the PNP-NWU combine now have to call upon Mr. Ken Hill to help. Mr. Shearer is the key figure in Sir Alexander's Cabinet, the only ambitious member of that Cabinet who doesn't have to look over his shoulders to see who is trying to light a fire under him. Mr. Shearer has now demonstrated his control of the Senate and he has also the psychological advantage of being the island's chief spokesman before the United Nations. It would take a nincompoop not to make the best use of such advantages.

As a parliamentarian Mr. Shearer has also shown tact in the way in which he stage-manages the Senate. Very few members, even those on his own side of the Chamber, know that he is stage-managing the Senate. They will know now that I have written this analysis of Mr. Shearer's role in the Senate but I think it is too late for anyone to do anything about it. The only person who can stop this determined march of Mr. Shearer to political dominance is the Prime Minister, and somehow I don't think Sir Alexander would want to do it. After all, many years ago he named Mr. Shearer his heir-apparent and Mr. Shearer is also a relative of sorts. The "royal" outlook in Jamaica's politics is still strong and Mr. Shearer has also shown that when he puts his mind to it he has the ability to be a leader of men and a top politician.

The fact that he occupies a position in Jamaica's politics once held by Mr. Ken Hill and later by Mr. Wills Isaacs — that is one rung below the top leadership of both parties — is no accident. Mr. Shearer is preparing himself for the time when he will seek to become Prime Minister of Jamaica. I think he will make it.

## The House

THERE is very little that can be said of the other Chamber of the Parliament in these first months of Independence before the new session begins. The only outstanding factor is that the House has never been so badly run.

The Speaker, Mr. Tacius Golding has shown himself to be weak, vacillating, and unsure. I repeat here what I have said before. The House will never improve and will never take on the national dignity that it deserves so long as Mr. Golding remains Speaker. He is just not the man for the job. It does not appear that he will ever be the man for the job.

The ruling party would be doing the cause of parliamentary Government in Jamaica a favour if it asked Mr. Golding to step down in favour of his Deputy Mr. Wycliffe Martin who has demonstrated his pos-

session of the qualities that would make for a good Speaker. That should not be too much to ask of a group of men and women who declare over and over again their interest in the preservation of parliamentary democracy for Jamaica. If it is impossible for the Opposition to have confidence in the rulings of Mr. Speaker — and I don't think Mr. Manley and his group will ever have the respect they ought for the Chair so long as he occupies it — then the texture of debates in the House will be less than it ought to be.

The Leaders of the Government ought to remember that one of the basic principles of parliamentary democracy is for dominant groups to restrain themselves, to put checks upon their own inclinations in the interest of all. It is the only way. No member of the Government is now held in check in the way in which Mr. Burnett Coke held Mr. Manley and his colleagues in check during his incumbency as Speaker. It is only natural then that the Opposition should erupt whenever they are unduly needed by Government members under licence from the Chair, whenever obvious facts are twisted.

What happens in such cases is that everybody twists the facts and the public is left confused. In many, many articles since 1945 I have said and I still believe it is true that the Speaker has a most important role to play in the preservation of parliamentary democracy in Jamaica. A speaker in any democratic country has a responsibility in this respect that is second to no one else to protect minority opinions and to see that all points of view are clearly and freely stated. He has a duty to the ordinary citizens of Jamaica that Ministers do not have. Mr. Golding has not shown himself to be aware of that responsibility and of that duty.

Finally, although the first short session of Jamaica's Parliament has not been wholly good, still it has not been wholly bad. It remains for the upcoming full session to give a proper indication of parliamentary trends in independent Jamaica.

## Footnote

A meeting will be held by the citizens of West Rural St. Andrew at Golden Spring at 10 o'clock this morning to name a deputation to meet the Hon. Sir Alexander Bustamante, Prime Minister and leader of the Jamaica Labour Party, to request the reinstatement of Madame Rose Leon and Mr. Arthur Leon, former J.L.P. and M.H.Rs. in the J.L.P.

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