

# HUGH SHEARER

## — Political Man of the Year — 1967

by... the Political Reporter

There is hardly any person in Jamaica who will be surprised at the selection of the Hon. Hugh Shearer, as Jamaica's political man of 1967. He has towered head and shoulders over every other Jamaican politician this past year in the impact he has had on the political life of Jamaica and in the influence he has had on public affairs.

Indeed, as a public figure he has burst out on the Jamaican scene in such a spectacular fashion, laying his hands on all aspects of the national life, that it made it unnecessary this year for me to balance and weigh one against the other individual contributions to political development in Jamaica made by one claimant or the other for this title.

I must remind you that this column selects every year's end, the man or the woman who has made the greatest impact on the island's public (more specifically political) life for good or bad; and that generally speaking neither Sir Alexander Bustamante nor Mr. Norman Manley, Q.C., the two stalwarts of the Jamaican political scene were considered for selection, since in the very nature of things their outstanding rivalries so controlled and directed the political energies of the Jamaican public, that it would have been well nigh impossible to select any person but one of these two year after year.

The scene has changed. Sir Alexander Bustamante, through age and infirmity, has withdrawn from the political field; and that is what has been responsible for the change in the facts of political life in Jamaica today. Up to the time of his withdrawal, the grand old man of Jamaican politics relished the situation in which the late Sir Donald Sangster found himself. It meant that he could use factions within the JLP and control everyone that way, because everyone was then jostling for succession and Sir Donald didn't know where he would get support if he should make a frontal attack on the citadels of leadership.

It is perhaps a pity that Sir Donald lived only for one month after his assumption of uncircumscribed power, for we have no way of knowing just what kind of Prime Minister Sir Donald would have made without the overriding presence of Sir Alexander and without having to worry about the fact of Mr. Lightbourne and Mr. Tavares looking critically over his shoulders at his every move for a chance to supplant him.

**SIR ALEXANDER'S WITHDRAWAL FROM THE POLITICAL** scene has also changed other things to a great extent. For instance, one result has been a loss in the personal power of Mr. Norman Manley. It seems that people naturally paired Mr. Manley with Sir Alexander, and therefore the withdrawal of one means the gradual eclipse of the other. It is not that Mr. Manley has lost his public standing; it is just that people do not think of him any longer as the man to beat Mr. Shearer, in the same way as he was always considered the man to beat Sir Alexander Bustamante.

In other words, since the elections in February, the Jamaican political scene has taken a new turn and started a new chapter and it fell to Hugh Shearer to be the man to place his stamp on the new period. And he has done a remarkable job.

The irony in the whole thing is that Mr. Shearer did not consciously seek office until the last moment. It is not that Mr. Shearer did not consider himself as ever being Prime Minister of Jamaica, in spite of the fact that he resisted all the pressures brought to bear on him by Sir Alexander and Lady Bustamante to remove Mr. Sangster and take over leadership of the party during the last election. It was more in the nature of Mr. Shearer that he could not see himself, as others could see themselves, actively removing Mr. Sangster from a position he had spent many years in creating simply because Sir Alexander wanted it so. In fact Mr. Shearer placed the whole weight of the BITU behind Mr. Sangster in that fight for leadership. At that time he was prepared to give Mr. Sangster the leadership of the Jamaica Labour Party for as long as he wanted it, while he stayed back and looked on, content in the belief that he could position himself behind Mr. Sangster and assume leadership when Mr. Sangster retired.

But this was not to be; Sir Donald Sangster, as he was then, died, and Mr. Shearer was forced by circumstances and by the prodding of elements within and without the JLP, to consider himself for immediate leadership. There were many who did not relish leadership by either Mr. Tavares or Mr. Lightbourne and these were the only two alternatives, if Mr. Shearer did not choose to stand.

It is an interesting commentary on the strength of Sir Alexander's advocacy that Mr. Shearer was his political heir, that many persons considered him just that, at a time when he held no post of leadership within the Jamaica Labour Party Executive and in fact did not campaign for the post of Prime Minister. He was in Canada with Dr. Herbert Eldemire at Sangster's bedside while Mr. Tavares and Mr.

Lightbourne were carrying out their campaigns among the MPs and the JLP branches. What campaign there was for Mr. Shearer was undertaken unbidden and jointly by Mr. Edward Seaga, Mr. Edwin Allen and Mr. Victor Grant. And so it was that Mr. Shearer went straight from the Palisades Airport on his return from Canada to face the other two candidates in ballots to select a new Prime Minister, something which had only come about because both Mr. Seaga and Mr. Grant had prevented the Governor-General from taking unilateral action in favour of one of the other candidates — Mr. Lightbourne.

Up to this very moment Sir Alexander tried to use his considerable influence in favour of Mr. Shearer. At the balloting, Mr. E. C. L. Parkinson, the then JLP Chairman of the Executive, received from Sir Alexander a letter to be read to the MPs. The letter was a strong recommendation for Shearer, but before the balloting Mr. Parkinson called the three contestants together — Shearer, Tavares and Lightbourne — and after reading the letter to them, proposed that it should not be read as requested by Sir Alexander because

it could be interpreted as a "speech" and it had been decided before Shearer's return to the island that none of the three contestants should address the MPs gathered to choose a new Prime Minister for Jamaica. Although this was a serious disadvantage to Mr. Shearer — he had not yet had a chance to speak to anyone and had been unable to campaign because of his absence from the island — he agreed to Mr. Parkinson's proposal and Bustamante's letter of support for him was not read to the MPs. Undoubtedly this deprived Mr. Shearer of very powerful support from among the MPs who had been subjected to intensive campaign manoeuvres by the other two Ministers, Mr. Lightbourne and Mr. Tavares — over two weeks. This was keeping with the character of the man.

The result of the balloting has not ever been given officially but it is generally known. Mr. Lightbourne was knocked out in the first ballot when the MPs voted 12 for Tavares, 10 for Shearer, 8 for Lightbourne and 1 vote was deliberately spoilt. On the second ballot, Mr. Shearer received 16 votes and Mr. Tavares 15 votes. Later this was upped to 17 votes for Mr. Shearer when the following morning Mr. Wakeford from his bed in the University Hospital voted for Mr. Shearer.

### **AS WILL BE SEEN IT WAS AN EXTRAORDINARILY CLOSE ELECTION,**

and this to my mind, is the main reason why Mr. Shearer has made such an impact on public affairs in Jamaica. He felt it, I am sure, essential to establish himself away from his small margin of victory and he has gone about it with a deliberate policy of positive leadership among his colleagues and creating for himself an image of confidence in the public eye. The result has been a new dynamism in Jamaican politics that has forever changed its course. The accent is now on youthful vigour, not elderly wisdom, and but for the widespread respect in which he is held by his party and by the public, there is little doubt but that Mr. Norman Manley, would have been swept aside as leader of the Opposition, in favour of Mr. Michael Manley or Mr. Vivian Blake (with the issue weighted in favour of Mr. Michael Manley) by the People's National Party, whose members are now quietly arranging new line-ups for succession within the party.

Mr. Shearer's accession to the Prime Minister's office, therefore, has ushered in a new era in Jamaica's politics, effectively and conclusively marking the end of the Bustamante/Manley period, yet still holding the reins of power, so far, firmly in the hands of this remarkable family of first, second and third cousins who are the descendants of the legendary Old Man Shearer.

Since his election as Prime Minister, Mr. Shearer has won more support in the party and strengthened his position among the backbenchers of his Parliamentary Majority and among party delegates at large, as expressed in his unopposed election to be 1st Deputy Leader, under Bustamante, at the party's last annual convention.

In the Cabinet he has taken charge as Mr. Sangster was never permitted to do, and has given it positive leadership. He demands action from his Ministers and he gets it. The result is that the Cabinet is doing more work and the Civil Service is getting Ministerial decisions promptly.

His public pronouncements, particularly on violence, and the need for work and sacrifice, the "no nonsense" sobriquet which he created for himself, all have a touch of the old Bustamante magic, with something added — the forcefulness of a younger man.

The result has been that Mr. Shearer has had great response and cooperation from all sections of the community, even PNP Opposition members attack him much less than they were wont to attack Sir Alexander or Mr. Sangster. There is a general quickening of the Civil Service, and the Police in particular have taken on a new image, in spite of the fact that criminal violence is still high, though now much more subdued than had been the case before Mr. Shearer took office. Probably a clearer indicator of Mr. Shearer's impact on the island's affairs was seen in the movement of stocks and shares. Share values are still moving upwards and the economy which had slowed down considerably is still maintaining momentum. This is an expression of public confidence in the new leadership remarkable for any country which had changed two Prime Ministers in a matter of two months and had just passed through a general election.

Also on the local scene, the friction between the Government and the teachers has lessened to a great extent since Mr. Shearer's assumption of office.

**IN THE INTERNATIONAL FIELD, MR. SHEARER HAS BEGUN TO BUILD** on a credible reputation gained at the United Nations in the years when he was Deputy Chief of Mission at the United Nations, and has projected a good image for himself and Jamaica among European Leaders with whom a Prime Minister of Jamaica was making contact for the first time, and he continued the amicable relationship between the United States presidency and Jamaican leaders.

● **HE HAS ESTABLISHED** a rapport with Mr. Harold Wilson, the British Prime Minister, which has already placed him among the top echelons of Commonwealth Prime Ministers who are privately to be consulted in matters of major Commonwealth interest.

● **HIS CONDUCT** of the Anguilla affair, in which he had to use all kinds of diplomatic moves to extricate Jamaica from the untenable position in which Mr. Lightbourne's agreement in Barbados had placed us, will surely rank in the years to come as one of his most notable achievements, for he had to repudiate an agreement, which Mr. Lightbourne had had no right to make, without appearing to repudiate it, and at the same time to resist as diplomatically as possible the strong pressures brought to bear on him by the United Kingdom Government and the Governments of the rest of the Commonwealth Caribbean. It was a commendable performance, and must lead to final acceptance of the proposition that no West Indian affairs has a right to interfere with the internal affairs of other West Indian territories, Mr. Braishaw, Dr. Eric Williams and Mr. Burnham notwithstanding.

ALL IN ALL there are together an admirable performance for a new Prime Minister and particularly when it is considered that in all this period he was faced with the need to establish himself as a political personality in the Jamaican scene, with the necessity to beat down an incipient attack on his leadership from among certain of his own colleagues soon after he was elected by the MPs ballot, and when he had to keep a level head through the rumours and speculations of the Maffessanti issue (now the subject of an official inquiry), the Munroe affair, devaluation and its attendant worries. As I see it, if this trend continues, it's going to take a great deal of organization to beat Mr. Shearer at the polls.

#### BUT WHO IS THIS MAN SHEARER?

Born on May 18, 1923, at Martha Brae, Treelawn, Mr. Shearer went to St. Simon's College as a Parish Scholarship winner. He joined the BITU's staff — a tall gangling lad — in April 1941 attached to the union's weekly paper "Jamaica Worker". His first promotion came in 1943, when Sir Alexander Bustamante newly released from Detention Camp, took over editorship of the paper and took Hugh Shearer under his wings from then. As Bustamante became more and more involved with the Jamaica Labour Party, Mr. Shearer went on to further promotion within the union and acquired a Government Trade Union scholarship under CD&W in 1947-48.

He first moved into the political field when he was elected a Councillor of the KSAC in 1947. He was appointed Island Supervisor of the BITU and elected Vice-President of the union, a post he still holds, at around the same time. He was elected to the House of Representatives as a member for Western Kingston 1955-59, and on being defeated was appointed to the Legislative Council. He was a member of the Senate (and its Leader) from 1962 to 1967, at the same time filling the role of Jamaica's chief spokesman on foreign affairs as Deputy Chief of Mission (under Bustamante) at the United Nations. This year he was elected M. P. for Southern Clarendon and appointed Prime Minister on the death of Sir Donald Sangster.

As a trade unionist he has had a distinguished career, particularly as a negotiator. 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 Jamaica life—the sugar industry, the bauxite industry, the banana industry, the citrus industry, other agricultural industries, shipping, manufacturing, business in general, local government and the problems of workers in Local Government and in the Government subordinate ranks. These are fields which no politician who was not a trade unionist concerned with day by day, year to year negotiations to conduct, could know much about. All good training for a Prime Minister.

**IN THE POLITICAL FIELD HE WAS AT THE SAME TIME PROMINENT** as a JLP representative and shared political activity with the union programme and, after Bustamante, was recognized as the JLP spokesman for the working class sector of the community. Because of Bustamante's increasing involvement with Government, Mr. Shearer took over complete charge of the BITU, one of the powerful unions of Jamaica, and this made him a force to be reckoned with in JLP councils. Although he sought no political office and stood above the cut-throat intra-party political campaigns, he nevertheless held a strong hand backing Mr. Sangster against Mr. Lightbourne and Mr. Lynden Newland against Mr. Tavares. He held a seat in the JLP Executive as the leading representative of the BITU and that was a position of strength.

And all during this time, Sir Alexander Bustamante continued to speak of Mr. Shearer as "his son" and as his "heir apparent". And there is a little known anecdote connected with this. On one occasion in 1963 Bustamante was presiding at a Cabinet meeting in Duke Street, when he appeared to have become vexed with all his Ministers around him on some issue then before the Cabinet for decision. With his usual candour, Bustamante looked around him at his Cabinet Ministers (they were all present, including the three main rivals for leadership Mr. Sangster, Mr. Lightbourne and Mr. Tavares), and then pointing to Shearer he said: "I am going to put you in this seat one day." The story has it that while there was an uncomfortable silence, Mr. Shearer kept his eyes steady on the papers before him.

**I HAVE GIVEN YOU A SHORT DESCRIPTION** of the public life of the man, Shearer. It was the qualities which he exhibited in these varied fields aided and abetted by Sir Alexander Bustamante's unswerving confidence in him which led inevitably to his selection as Prime Minister of Jamaica in April this year.

It was, however, his own confident self-possession and his own forceful and direct performance in this new post, his blunt outspokenness on public issues, which have had such a deep influence on political life in Jamaica, and it is for these reasons that I unhesitatingly select the Prime Minister, the Hon. Hugh Shearer, as the Political Man of the Year, 1967.

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