

B/N Cooke Howard

FEATURE

GOVERNOR-GENERAL REFLECTS ON HIS YEARS IN PUBLIC LIFE

I would want to be a teacher again, says Sir Howard

AFFECTIONATELY called "Teacher", Sir Howard Cooke, who retires this week as governor-general after 70 years in public life, says if he had to live his life over again "I would only want to be a teacher".

But Sir Howard, in an interview with JIS News, said the past 14 years as governor-general have been extremely interesting and in many ways, rewarding.

"It has given me an opportunity to know Jamaica more than I knew it before. I have learnt to love my people, I have learnt to understand their distresses, their struggles, but more importantly, I have been able to identify the successes of a great people, and so I consider it privileged and rewarding," he said.

"The truth is, I did not set out deliberately and definitely to achieve any special goal. I felt that I was coming into a situation where I had to be pragmatic and treat things as they come. As governor general I had to understand the importance of relationships... relationship between people, relationship between ideas, and finally, to understand that your conclusion might not necessarily be right, so often you must suspend judgment and listen again.

"...One of the difficulties was to show where I agreed or disagreed without making people unhappy. Of necessity, you had to show great skill in social relationships," he said.

Sir Howard said his service to country, which extended long beyond his years as governor-general, were varied, but always interesting and a learning process. "There were all kinds of experiences...sometimes joyous, sometimes you are saddened...as a school teacher, I was very committed to understanding the necessity for our people to rise up. My joy was to see that so many of the people that came through my hands as little boys are great leaders today," he said.

He said he was happy to have helped in some small way to fashion the course of the development of such persons. "So the teaching experience for me was formidable and I found joy and pleasure...being out in the bushes of Portland, where you had to be a community builder and relate to the people from the grass roots...and sometimes the psychology that you learnt at college had to be extended, so that you could handle a situation," he said.

He said that even today, "If I take up a piece of chalk in my hand, I am a different person...I don't know if it is the feel of the chalk and the fact that I am able to transmit knowledge...it's a very rewarding experience".

At the same time, Sir Howard said of particular pride to him as governor-general was the interfacing of the various religions and faiths. "We have been able to get all denominations in an ecumenical way, conjoined in

identifying our problems. It is a fact that when I came here, the churches were not as united in the cause as they are now... I have always felt that there is the possibility of unity in diversity and although we are of diverse origins, diverse approaches to life, diverse even in the food we eat, we live together," he said.

"We are producing some of the greatest people in the world. We are not spending enough time telling the world that. We are telling about murders, violence...those things, let the world know, but let the world know of the great people we have produced, let the world know about our Nettlefords, our Laylors, our Florizel Glasspole, all those and what they did and are doing," he added.

Sir Howard, who retires on February 15, said that as governor-general, he has learnt more definitively that, "anyone living should be a source of help and understanding and helping people to know that we are all bound in the bundle of life, and we have a great responsibility to help each other to enjoy the fullness of life".

He said that he always maintained an open door policy at King's House, allowing persons to learn about their country and

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SIR HOWARD... I would hope that I live long enough to be at ease to get up and go where I want

PTD

B/N Howard Cooke

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their history.

"As governor-general, I think that the most important thing and an imperative, is that we should respect one another, learn about one another, make sure that you dig deep into the resources of other people's way of life and learn about them," he told *JIS News*.

Sir Howard says his advice to all future governors' general is to listen carefully in all matters.

And as he prepares to hand over the baton, the governor-general said he has been "happy in the circumstances in which I have operated".

Saying he was always an educator and a humanitarian, Sir Howard said it has been a remarkable achievement to be able to change communities, particularly rural ones, and help people to educate themselves, not just in the traditional academic sense, but more importantly, teaching them to live amongst each other. This, he said, was the greatest form of education and that more time should be spent on this form of social commitment.

Born in Goodwill, St James, on

November 13, 1915 in one of the free villages established at the end of slavery, Sir Howard's interest in farming was almost inevitable, as his parents David Brown Cooke and Mary Jane Minto were into animal farming and husbandry.

Another influence from these early days, which has remained dominant in his life today, is the church, in which as a young boy Sir Howard immersed himself in the holistic approach to ministering. He was also to become a dedicated educator and after elementary and primary schools, he attended Mico College. He later received a government scholarship, which enabled him to pursue studies at London University's Institute of Education.

Although the youngest in his batch, Sir Howard did particularly well at Mico and was elected senior student to liaise with the principal and staff. He soon earned the respect of the student body and by his third year, he was elected senior student for the entire

college. An unusual occurrence for that period, particularly at his age, he was later appointed junior master of Mico College and teacher of the practising school. He was also awarded the Duff Memorial prize for most outstanding student.

For 23 years, he enjoyed a distinguished career in teaching, and was headmaster of Belle Castle All-Age School, Port Antonio Upper School, and Montego Bay Boys' School. He was the second teacher in the island at the time to move rapidly to the highest level of the performance grade administered by the education ministry and was also one of the special group of demonstration teachers chosen by the ministry to raise the performance of teachers islandwide when the government changed the curriculum. Sir Howard also became president of the Jamaica Teachers' Association.

The governor-general entered politics in 1938 as one of the founding members of the People's National

Party (PNP). He was selected as one of 21 persons to form the steering committee to develop the party and was one of seven persons delegated to draft its first Constitution. He has been a member of the executive and the national executive, chairman of the regional executive and chairman of the party. In 1958 he was elected to the West Indies Federal Parliament, as the representative for St James.

He entered the Jamaican Parliament in 1962, and served as senator until early 1967. He served as a Member of the House of Representatives between 1967 and 1980, and was a minister of government between 1972 and 1980. As minister, he held, at different times, the portfolios of, pension and social security; education labour and the public service.

Sir Howard is a life member of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and he, along with Sir James Carlyle, inspired the establishment of the Association of Governors' General and non-executive

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Presidents of CARICOM. This group examines approaches to the general development of the region.

Sir Howard also served as group scoutmaster and secretary for the St Andrew Boys' Scout Association and has captained the County of Cornwall cricket team, and, at various times, was a member of the Mico College, Portland and St James cricket teams. He was also a member of the Mico College, YMCA, Portland, and St James football teams.

He assisted in the establishment of community centres in east Portland and various community organisations in his home parish, while his interests extended to Jamaican culture and served as a judge in JCDC festival competitions. He was also, for many years, a member of the Jamaica Cultural Development Commission (JCDC), and secretary and local chairman of the St James Cultural Commission.

Among his honours and awards are Commander of the Order of Distinction; a special plaque for distinguished service from the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association; Knight Grand Cross of the Most Distinguished Order of St Michael and St George, conferred by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II; Order of the Nation; Degree of Doctor of Education - Western Carolina University; Doctor of

Laws LL.D (honorary) - University of the West Indies; City and Guilds of London Institute Fellowship Award; and Knight of St John (St John's Council).

He is married to Lady Ivy Sylvia Lucille Tal, they have two sons - Howard Fitz-Arthur Cooke, who is a puisne judge, and Richard Washington McDermott Cooke, a hotelier - and a daughter, Audrey Faith Cooke, who is a guidance counsellor.

Sir Howard said he would continue to lead a productive life for as long as possible, contributing to national development. "I came from the village...I am a person

deeply interested in animals, and agriculture...I am greatly interested in community development...in football, cricket, all sorts of things, so I would hope that I live long enough to be at ease to get up and go where I want...I look forward to a happy life," he said with a broad smile.

Sir Howard will be succeeded by pro vice-chancellor and principal of the University of the West Indies, Professor Kenneth Hall, whose appointment was recently announced by Prime Minister P J Patterson.

- Alpea Saunders, JIS News



SIR HOWARD... One of the difficulties was to show where I agreed or disagreed without making people unhappy



Some of the governor-general's medals on display at King's House

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