

EDWIN ALLEN —tribute to a political giant

THE EDITOR, Sir:— The passing of Mr. Edwin Allen on February 16 was a lot more than the loss of a pupil of the "old school." It was also the end of an era in the politics of the Jamaica Labour Party as well as in the parish of Clarendon. For the years that he served as a representative of the people, Edwin Allen literally became a legend in his time: working hard as an M.P. whether his party was in or out of power, serving well in Parliament whether his party was in Government or Opposition, performing creditably as a Government Minister, and fearless and frequent in his approach to many national issues— a lot of which were usually quite controversial.

Edwin Leopold Allen served for a total of exactly 22 years as both M.H.R. Member of Parliament for North-West Clarendon between July 1950 and December 1983, and his name virtually became a household word throughout the constituency as it did throughout the island. At the present time that makes him the ninth longest-serving Member of the House since 1944 — out of a grand total of some 235 people who have been elected to the House at one time or the other. Although a native of the Brandon Hill area of West-rural St. Andrew, Mr. Allen ended up as an adopted son of Clarendon, due mainly to his academic and political careers.

'Politician of Clarendon'

He taught as a school-teacher in primary schools in the constituency and from whence he drew his political base. His service to the people of the area extended passionately into the political arena and he was elected six times for North-West Clarendon over a period of 30 years. He twice tasted the bitterness of defeat — once each at the hands of his two major political rivals Malcolm and Minott, but his 22 years of service still enable him to clinch the title of "Politician of the Parish of Clarendon" — way ahead of Sir Alexander Bustamante who served 17 years and 2 months as M.P. in the parish and the Rt. Hon. Hugh Shearer who served 17 years and 2 months as M.P. in the parish and the Rt. Hon. Hugh Shearer who reached exactly 17 years this month.

Edwin Allen first entered the House via the By-Election route when he defeated the PNP's Wessell H. Williams by 591 votes on July 26, 1950. The By-Election came about when O. Alphanso Malcolm (who had won the seat for the JLP in the 1949 General Election) was convicted of an election offence and the seat declared vacant in court. From the very outset, Allen's result showed promise. He had polled only 74 votes less than Malcolm had polled the year before, but his figure amounted to 52% of the voter-turnout as against Malcolm's 48% with only 6% less people voting than in the General Election. He retained the seat in the 1955 General Election (which, ironically, the JLP lost), defeating the PNP's William D. Linton — the first M.H.R. for the area in 1944 — by 455 votes and 51% of the votes polled. Then in 1959 disaster struck! O.A. Malcolm returned to the scene as his PNP adversary and with only a 48% share of the ballots, Allen bit the dust by 462 votes.

Turning point

Meanwhile, there were certain political events shaping up in the parish of St. Thomas which were almost destined to terminate 'Teacher' Allen's close fellowship with North-West Clarendon. Robert Lightbourne who had been elected the Federal M.P. for St. Thomas in 1958, resigned his Federal seat in 1959 to contest and win back the West St. Thomas seat for the JLP thus creating a vacancy in the Federal Parliament By-Election was Allen. In Port-Of-Spain, Trinidad and the need for a By-Election to fill that vacancy. Having lost his seat in the '59 Election, Bustamante, who the man who was therefore being considered by the JLP to replace Lightbourne and run in the

waged a relentless resentment towards it, seized upon the St. Thomas By-Election issue as a climax to his indignation by announcing that the JLP would not take part because they "had no money" to put up a candidate. Hardly a good reason — even if it was a well disguised one — but Norman Manley took the bait and made the biggest political blunder Jamaica's politics ever saw by calling a Referendum in September 1961 to decide whether or not Jamaica remained in the Federation. The result was resounding "No!" and in the case of Edwin Allen, instead of being bundled off to Port-of-Spain, he was back at "Refuge" in Frankfield to continue the struggle.

Writing on the wall

For Malcolm, the writing was on the wall. The Referendum result was anything but encouraging, as he stood and watched the JLP's "No" returns chalk up a massive majority of 2,261 votes (59%) in his constituency. It would be the JLP's best showing in the area until 1980. In the ensuing 1962 election, Allen got a 55% poll and trounced Malcolm by 1,412, a defeat from whence he never emerged. Allen retained the seat comfortably in 1967 against newcomer Dr. Percival W. Minott (PNP) by a majority of 1,083 (56%) and again in 1972 — but only by 96 votes and 50.2%. In their third encounter, Dr. Minott narrowly took the seat by 34 votes, Allen getting 49.9% of the poll. Then in 1980 Allen came back to seal the issue once and for all, whipping Minott by 2,660 votes (59%) to register the biggest victory of his career, the biggest victory in North-West Clarendon and a fitting climax

to an outstanding career. At 78, he became the second oldest person (after Bustamante) to have been actively engaged in politics at the time of his official exit in December 1983. And had he been re-elected in 1983, he would have equalled the record set by Bustamante himself in 1962 when at the age of 78 he became the oldest elected member since 1944 — in that instance the final time for South Clarendon. Edwin Allen was also one — and the more well-known — of the three Allens ever elected to the House; the other two being Edward V.V. Allen (PNP) who represented Northern St. Elizabeth 1949-59 and Donald Allen (PNP) who was Ernest Peart's successor and Stafford Haughton's predecessor in North-West Manchester.

A favourite with Busta

A personal favourite of Sir Alexander Bustamante, Edwin Allen no doubt achieved this feat as a result of being a performer and one who was loyal, trustworthy and could be relied upon to put out the best of his ability. He served in a number of senior positions in the Executive of the JLP and was someone to whom the younger members of the party looked up to with respect and admiration. He served as Education Minister for more years than anyone else and achieved most in the Entrance Exams which brought more children of the poor to the halls

of the one-time exclusive high schools for the rich, and pioneered the construction of the numerous Junior Secondary Schools as well as the upgrading of various other schools and education institutions.

But despite his achievements in education, Edwin Allen's greatest attribute and the legacy he has left behind was perhaps his sincere dedication to Parliament. In terms of that dedication, Teacher Allen was one of the best Parliamentarians Jamaica ever produced — sort of the Parliamentarians' Parliamentarian. Apart from an insatiable desire for debate, he had an impeccable House Attendance record which Hansard can verify, and was never afraid to applaud a good cause. One remembers, for example, Edwin Allen crossing the floor in Parliament to shake Michael Manley's hand during his 1973 Budget Speech and the announcement to establish "free" education. A deeply religious man, Teacher never separated religion from his politics and this was reflected even in his formal watch word: "God first, Jamaica next."

Edwin Allen belonged to that small but genuine group of political figures that are fast becoming an endangered species in Jamaica. How difficult it will be to fill his shoes will no doubt be discovered a lot sooner than later by his successor, Cliff Stone.

I am etc.,
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March 18, 1984