

MR. ALLEN'S ACHIEVEMENT

The late Edwin Leopold Allen, B.A., veteran Minister of Education in successive JLP Governments since 1953, died on Thursday, February 16 at the age of 78. Mr. Allen might well be regarded as a phenomenon in that although he belonged to and was an exponent of a party whose policy tended to be centre or right of centre, was revolutionary in his educational concepts; and indeed could be said to have masterminded a revolution in educational development in Jamaica.

Mr. Allen first became Minister of Education and Social Welfare in 1953 when he succeeded Mr. L.L. Simmonds who was the first Minister of Education under the 1953 amendments to the 1944 Constitution. He was Minister for two years, and in that time he began the experiment of senior students in the senior schools doing secondary school subjects, an experiment which was so successful that one such graduate went on to gain a degree at the University of the West Indies and to win a Rhodes Scholarship. Mr. Allen and his party then went into the wilderness in 1955 and in opposition it was often said that he was the most persistent and consistent debater on the Opposition side.

Jamaica is not famous for vigorous oppositions and sometimes it was felt that Mr. Allen was a one-man band. Defeated in 1959, he then almost became a member of the Federal Parliament of the West Indies when in 1960 he was named the candidate for the Democratic Labour Party — the Federal associate of the Jamaica Labour Party — to contest a by-election in St. Thomas — the vacancy having been created by the resignation of Mr. Robert Lightbourne from the Federation Parliament to run for the Jamaican House of Representatives.

It will be remembered that on the morning of the nomination, the Leader of the party, the late Sir Alexander Bustamante pulled Mr. Allen out of the contest which he was most likely to win — an action which led to the then Premier of Jamaica deciding to hold a referendum to determine whether Jamaica should remain in, or secede from, the Federation of the West Indies. Undeterred, Mr. Allen returned in 1962 as a Member of Parliament for North West Clarendon and began his significant revolution in education. It was he who could be said to have persuaded the World Bank of the need to give massive loans in education, as education was the seed bed for productive efforts and the development of the

economy of any country.

It was he also who was the first Minister to lead a Jamaican delegation to a UNESCO general conference and who seemed to have influenced the then UNESCO in directing more effort in the development of primary and secondary education in the developing world. Mr. Allen's advocacy led to the first World Bank loan which was based on a UNESCO report and which led to the establishment of 50 Junior Secondary Schools. Mr. Allen piloted the New Deal for Education which was aimed at making educational opportunity available to every child in Jamaica, and was responsible for the new Education Act of 1965. He was not always the easiest of Ministers to get on with, as far as the teachers' organisation, the Jamaica Teachers Association, was concerned. But it was a testimony to his maturity and love for education that eventually he began to work closely with the JTA.

Mr. Allen believed strongly in improving and increasing opportunities for the less privileged. He believed that education was the best tool for social mobility and he made a daring decision in 1962 when he decreed that 70% of free places should go to children in primary schools with only 30% to those in preparatory schools. He was much criticised for this but he stuck to his guns and successive Governments and successive Ministers have retained the 70-30 proportion. Mr. Allen was an ardent advocate of free education, and as Minister of Education it is an open secret that he urged his Government to declare free education. And indeed it was during his tenure, that the Government led by the Rt. Hon. Hugh Shearer decided to make technical education free; and by 1972 technical education was free, many students were on free places in the secondary high schools, and some 4,500 were on half scholarships or paying full fees.

When therefore in 1973 the then Prime Minister, Mr. Manley, announced that those 4,500 would cease paying fees so that secondary education would be free of tuition fees, Mr. Allen, then in the Opposition, crossed the floor of the House to congratulate Mr. Manley.

A valiant Parliamentarian, a stickler for procedures, a doughty warrior for what he believed in, a man of impeccable honesty and integrity, Mr. Allen's whole career should be an inspiration to the young and an example for his colleagues, in whatever party, to follow. He was indeed a great Jamaican.