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Howard Cooke — 'a man of wisdom and experience'

By Sharon Barnes-Wright

WHEN Howard Felix Hanlan Cooke takes up the post of Governor General of Jamaica in August, the nation is assured that its representative of the Queen is a man of wisdom and experience; a man who has seen the evolution of this country and is proud of the many great achievements it has made.

In an interview with the *Sunday*

Gleaner from his American Life Insurance Company (ALICO) office in Montego Bay, where he is branch manager, Mr. Cooke took on a look of serious concentration whenever he referred to Jamaica — which was almost constantly. It was obvious that the love he felt for Jamaica was very deep; a passionate, consuming love which could bring out every conceivable emotion in the man.

"We have come though many struggles and I am extremely pleased to see how far we have come, especially in education," said the former teacher. With that he went on to mention the University of the West Indies; College of Arts Science and Technology (CAST); community colleges; teachers' colleges and other educational institutions which not only evolved over the years, but made much positive impact in the lives of Jamaicans.

Concerned

"Jamaica has influenced the world," declared the man who claims that he was more concerned about his country than many people thought. "Look at Norman, Michael and Edna Manley, Busta-

mante, Shearer, Seaga, Watson, Hule, people in the field of science — any country which can produce so many great people in one generation must be a great country," Mr Cooke said vehemently. He was quick to add that he was "not suggesting complacency," for "in spite of our having produced great people and made remarkable strides there are still some hurdles to cross."

Like his predecessors, Howard Cooke has had the distinction "and pleasure" of serving Jamaica not only in a political capacity, but in education and sports. He is still affectionately called "Teacher Cooke", having served for almost 30 years as teacher at Mico College and Practising School and headmaster at Belle Castle, Port Antonio Upper and Montego Bay Boys' Schools (now Corinaidi Avenue Primary School).

But the Governor General designate has also been a popular politician and prides himself as "one of the architects of Jamaican politics," having been a founder of the People's National Party (PNP) and a

Member of Parliament for 18 years (1962-1980).

It was with great reluctance that Mr Cooke did the interview, making it quite clear at the outset that there were many things he would like to, but could not say until after his appointment. He was, however, able to supply the answers to some questions raised by the public in response to the announcement of his appointment.

Jovial, active

One concerned his age: Mr Cooke is 75 years old and it is felt that he is too old to serve for any extended period. He quelled that with: "I work harder than some 40-year-olds." A very jovial and active person, he is sure that he has many more useful years left in him.

On the topic of constitutional reform and instituting changes that will dispense with the Queen as head of state (and the GG

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as her local representative), "Teacher" was keen to comment: "Before the appointment, I would speak on that, but now I don't think I should comment." However, he felt that as much as the two major political parties supported the change to republican status, "the final decision is with the people."

For him, political processes and a country's direction are determined by its people, so the final decision for this or any other constitutional change, was theirs.

To those who have been closely affiliated to Mr Cooke, it is felt that he will follow the tradition of a former GG, with his constant hugging and kissing of women — both young and old. "I love people, so to hug and kiss them is an expression of that feeling — it really is a part of my whole approach to life. Anything I can do to make people happy, I try my best to do."

In addition, Mr. Cooke believes that a governor general should be one for the people, and in light of

that, hopes to serve his Jamaican people well.

Son of the soil

A son of the soil of St James, this Governor General, when appointed, said he would not desert his parish and intends to "be in Montego Bay and the West on weekends" as much as possible. As a matter of fact, he plans to spend "quite a bit of time" among the rural people "visiting their church services and their little do's." And he intends to do this without neglecting his duties or giving the urban folk their just attention.

In his earlier days Howard Cooke was an avid sportsman. He played football for the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), St. Thomas, Portland and St James, and was captain of many cricket teams. Today, he maintains his membership at the Montego Bay and Kingston Cricket Clubs.

Mr Cooke is now in the process of "tying up loose ends" at ALICO as he prepares to take up residence at Kings House — the official residence of Jamaica's Governor General.

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