

Shearer — the Prime Minister

REMEMBERING HUGH LAWSON SHEARER: 1923 – 2004

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DONALD SANGSTER became the second Prime Minister of Jamaica in March 1967, succeeding Sir Alexander Bustamante who had retired. Unfortunately, Sangster fell critically ill two weeks after his appointment and spent the following four weeks in a coma in the Montreal Neurological Hospital in Canada.

When the doctors realised he would not live for much longer, the Jamaica Labour Party Members of Parliament met under the chairmanship of E.C.L. Parkinson to vote on which of their colleagues they would support as their new Prime Minister.

The three candidates were Robert Lightbourne, D. Clem Tavares, and at the last moment, a reluctant Hugh Shearer. The result after two ballots was that Hugh Shearer was selected by one vote. Four hours after Sangster died, Shearer was sworn in as the third Prime Minister of Jamaica by the Governor-General, Sir Clifford Campbell.

INHERITANCE

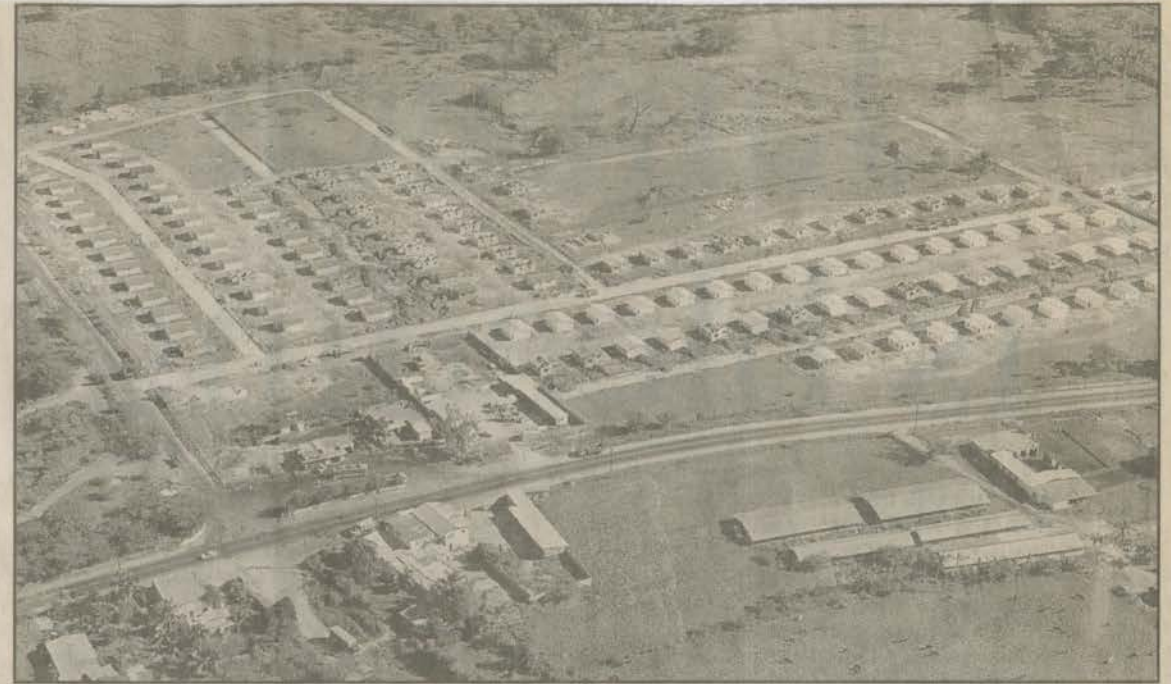
Shearer had inherited a Cabinet chosen by Sangster only five weeks before. He re-appointed them, naming Edward Seaga as Minister of Finance (he had been acting in the post during Sangster's illness), and taking the post of Minister of Defence, which had been Sangster's. He also retained the post of Minister of External Affairs to which he had been appointed by Sangster.

His term of office as Prime Minister (1967-1972) is regarded by many economists as Jamaica's most productive years. His approach to administration was to allow the private sector to manage the productive sector, encourage foreign investment, keep prices low, continuously expanding Jamaican ownership of assets, giving Jamaican workers preference in employment, and goading the trade union movement to search for a range of benefits for workers, especially facilities for training.

For the entire five-year period under his watch, gross domestic product at factor cost constant prices, grew every year between 1967 and 1971, from \$528.9 million in 1967 to \$722 million in 1971. This was real growth of five per cent over the five-year period, which to date is the best ever achieved by the Jamaican economy.

'RUM TALK'

In the area of industrialisation, up to the second half of the 20th century, any suggestion that Jamaica could become a manufacturing country would have been regarded as 'rum talk'. By the 1960s, however, this was a reality. During Shearer's administration, a new factory was being opened in Jamaica every month. These ranged from Goodyear's motor vehicle tyre factory in St. Thomas to a bagasse plant for manufacturing board in Spanish Town, a paper mill at Freetown in Clarendon, an asbestos/cement pipe plant at Old Harbour, St. Catherine, a razor blade factory in St. Andrew, and Jamaica Frozen Foods, which started packaging



FILE

Nightingale Grove at Gutters in St. Catherine where Sugar Industry Housing Ltd. built 180 houses for workers at Innswood. The first 50 were handed over to the owners by Hugh Shearer and Carlyle Dunkley at a ceremony where Mr. Shearer announced the allocation of the houses.

frozen meals and vegetables for the local and export markets and relieving Jamaican housewives, who, were then entering the workforce in greater numbers, of the burden of cooking meals when they returned home from work in the evenings. The frozen foods enterprise also provided Jamaican farmers with another outlet for their products. And the construction of these factories all over Jamaica provided employment for masons, carpenters, welders, electricians, painters and other skilled technicians.

At the end of his term of office, 201 factories had been put

into operation, with 127 in rural areas.

MAJOR EXPANSION

The tourist industry also saw major expansion. The Holiday Inn, a 900-bed convention-type hotel in Montego Bay, the Turtle Beach 217-apartment complex and a 350-room Point convention Hotel in Ocho Rios, and the Skyline Hotel in Kingston were started. Plans were also announced for the construction of a new 500-room hotel, known then as Rose Hall Intercontinental in Montego Bay.

A new cruise ship pier was also constructed at Folly in Port Antonio. Complementing the

increase of hotel accommodation was a dramatic rise in the construction by Jamaicans of villas in Montego Bay, Ocho Rios and Port Antonio. Rafting on the Martha Brae was also started.

Jamaica entered the space age with the construction and commissioning of a Satellite Earth Station at Prospect Pen in St. Thomas, which immediately improved the quality of international telephone service and radio and television broadcasts.

The most visible change in Jamaica in that period was the activity by the private sector in the construction industry. There was the start of the development of the Portmore lands in the Hellshire area of St. Catherine.

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PRIME

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By 1971, 1,260 houses were constructed in Independence City, 200 units in Edgewater and 422 in Ensom City in St. Catherine. Other housing developments took place in Allerdycy and Norbrook, Alysham, Queensbury and Hughenden in St. Andrew. Further afield, there were housing developments at Woodlawn in Mandeville, Manchester, Balmoral in Ocho Rios, St. Ann, Paradise Acres in Norbury, St. James, Bayview Estates in eastern St. Andrew, Ironshore in St. James, San San in Portland and Albion Estates in St. Thomas. In addition there was a movement towards apartment development which included Carriage House, Chelsea, Knutsford Manor, Embassy, Worthington Towers, Manor park, Maryfield, and

Oxford Apartments in St. Andrew.

New roads included the highway between Kingston and Spanish Town, the first four-lane highway built in Jamaica; and to provide access to the new suburb in the Portmore area, a causeway was constructed from Kingston via Newport West. Bridges were constructed at Lacovia in St. Elizabeth, and White River at the border of St. Mary and St. Ann.

ARTICULATE OPPONENT

During his term, free tuition at technical high schools was started as well as free tuition at Secondary Grammar School for children of paupers.

Internationally, he was an articulate opponent of the apartheid regimes of South Africa and Rhodesia. And he worked closely with Robert Lightbourne in the months of discussion in Geneva, Switzerland, to obtain an International Sugar Agreement in 1970.

He was the first head of a Jamaican Government to pay official visits to a number of African countries – Ethiopia, Zambia, Uganda, Liberia and Sierra Leone. And he was also the first Caribbean Prime Minister to pay official visits to other Caribbean countries – Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana, Curacao, Aruba, and by extension, Suriname.

At the end of his term, he was asked by the editor of **Tropic** magazine of the **Miami Herald's** Sunday edition, Al Burt, what was the secret for financial stability in Jamaica. Shearer's reply was, "It lies in hard work – not in faith, hope and foreign charity." And in referring to the way that foreign journalists reported on activities in Third World countries like Jamaica, he told Burt that if those writers were reporting on Christ's mission to the world, His whipping of the gamblers in the temple would have been pub-

lished on page one in all the newspapers, while His Sermon on the Mount would have been tucked away somewhere towards the back pages of these publications.

OUTSTANDING PERFORMANCE

He had thrown this challenge of hard work to Jamaicans ever since he took office as Prime Minister in 1967. He believed he had set this example of hard work, and with a record of outstanding performance in the economy – tourism, communications, bauxite and alumina expansion, health, roads and housing – he announced with confidence that the second general elections since Independence would be held in 1972.

Unfortunately, divisions among some of his colleagues in the party led to an ineffective showing by the Jamaica Labour Party in these elections. As a result the People's National Party became the new Government.