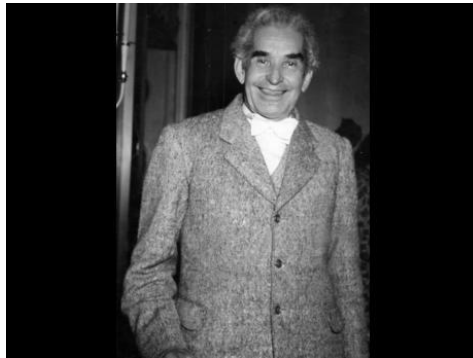


## **THE LIFE AND WORK OF SIR ALEXANDER BUSTAMANTE, NATIONAL HERO OF JAMAICA**

National Hero, the Right Excellent Sir Alexander Bustamante, was born on February 24, 1884 in Blenheim, Hanover. He was from a modest pen-keeping family and was christened William Alexander Clarke. His father, Robert Clarke, was Irish and his mother, Mary Clarke, was a Jamaican of mixed race.

He attended elementary school at Cacoon and Dalmalley and did private studies. In 1904, he gained employment as a Store Clerk at C. E. Johnson & Company on the north coast. Shortly afterwards, he worked at Belmont as a Junior Overseer. In 1905, he commenced a series of travels (mainly to Cuba, Panama, the USA, and his native Jamaica) which lasted for about for 30 years. During this time, he was involved in a variety of sectors, including security, dairy farming, transportation, and beekeeping. He changed his name to Alexander Bustamante, which he formally acquired by deed poll in 1944.



Sir Alexander Bustamante

### **Public Life**

When he returned to Jamaica in 1933, he ventured into several occupations and eventually became a moneylender. He entered public life in his fifties and drew attention by a series of letters he wrote to the newspapers in which he attacked the social and political conditions of colonial Jamaica. Soon afterwards, he began to speak publicly, particularly at meetings at North Parade in Kingston.

In 1937, Bustamante commenced organising the labour force and became popular due to his charismatic personality. He quickly gained a huge mass following, and wherever there were labour problems throughout the island, he stepped forward and championed the cause of the working class. When he heard of the fatal clash between the workers and the police at Frome on May 2, 1938, Bustamante closed his money-lending business for the day and went to Frome. The disturbances at Frome were the breaking point of the islandwide unrest over pay, working conditions, and massive

unemployment. It also triggered a series of strikes and demonstrations through which Bustamante became known as the people's champion.

During the 1938 labour crisis, Bustamante formed the Bustamante Industrial Trade Union (BITU). His role as the spokesman and champion of labour led to his arrest and imprisonment, along with St. William Grant in 1938, on a charge of sedition. He also spent 17 months in detention camp at Up Park camp from 1940–1942 for alleged violation of the Defence of the Realm Act.

### **Entry Into Party Politics**

Notwithstanding, Bustamante entered party politics and became a founding member of the People's National Party (PNP) in 1938. However, he left the PNP and founded the Jamaica Labour Party (JLP) in 1943. Jamaica's first General Election was held under Universal Adult Suffrage in 1944, granted by a new constitution. The JLP won the elections and Bustamante became Jamaica's first Chief Minister. Meanwhile, Jamaica made strides in joining a federation of the British West Indian islands. The JLP ruled the country until 1955, the year in which Bustamante was knighted by the Queen. The JLP returned to power in 1962 and Bustamante was appointed Premier. He then advocated for Jamaica's withdrawal from federation and a move towards independence. On August 6, 1962, Jamaica became an independent nation and Bustamante was appointed the country's first Prime Minister, at the age of 78. One month later, he married Ms. Gladys Longbridge who was his secretary for many years.



Sir Alexander Bustamante and wife Gladys

### **Retirement From Active Politics**

Bustamante retired from active politics in 1967, due to failing health. In 1969, the Order of National Hero was conferred on him for his role in organising labour, his part in furthering the nationalist movement, and his challenge to colonial authority. He was the only living National Hero Jamaica ever had. He died on August 6, 1977 – fifteen years after Jamaica attained independence and his appointment as Prime Minister.

In recognition of the Bustamante's association with the labour movement, Newport West, East, and adjoining port areas were renamed Bustamante Port. The Bustamante Hospital for Children and the Bustamante Bridge (St. Thomas) are also named in his honour. Additionally, a life-sized statue of Bustamante stands at South Parade in downtown Kingston - the scene of many of his dramas as champion of the poor and oppressed. His birthplace at Blenheim, Hanover is a national shrine. There is also a hard Jamaican candy called "Bustamante Backbone" named for him, representing the firmness of his character.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

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## **ACTIVITY**

### **FILL-IN-THE-BLANKS COMPREHENSION TEST**

Read the passage above and the sentences below, then unscramble the words and fill in the blanks with the correct answers.

- hlbemien      Sir Alexander Bustamante was born in \_\_\_\_\_, Hanover.
- drmloenyene      When Bustamante returned to Jamaica in 1933, eventually became a \_\_\_\_\_.
- clsoai      Bustamante attacked the \_\_\_\_\_ and political conditions of colonial Jamaica.
- dapera      Bustamante spoke publicly, particularly at meetings at North \_\_\_\_\_ in Kingston.
- olabur      During the 1938 \_\_\_\_\_ crisis, Bustamante formed the BITU.
- stifr      Bustamante was appointed Jamaica's \_\_\_\_\_ Prime Minister at the age of 78.
- givlni      Bustamante was the only \_\_\_\_\_ National Hero Jamaica ever had.

Correct answers: Blenheim, moneylender, social, Parade, labour, first, living.

**The Words of the Rt. Excellent Marcus Mosiah Garvey**

“Hungry men have no respect for law, authority or human life.”

Source: The Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey. Compiled by Amy Jacques Garvey. Published by Frank Cass and Company Limited (1983), London, England.