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A TRIBUTE TO MR. MICHAEL MANLEY

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Michael Manley

His passing, a definitive moment in Caribbean history

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The passing of Michael Manley, the Jamaican patriot and politician, attracted a variety of tributes from all over the world. That he died on the very day Cheddi Jagan, another Caribbean (Guyanese) and political leader died, was regarded as a defining moment in the post-Independence history of the Commonwealth Caribbean.

An editorial in *The Guardian* newspaper of Britain on March 8, 1997 had this to say:

For death to claim Cheddi Jagan and Michael Manley on the very same day is one of those ironic double blows of which history is arbitrarily capable, and is a loss not just to the peoples of the Caribbean. Their passing deprives Guyana and Jamaica of their most inspirational domestic politicians and their most resonant international statesmen of the post-colonial period. It also robs the Caribbean region of two of the most esteemed pro-

gressive voices -- as well as two of the most fanatical cricket-loving leaders -- that this impoverished and often tragic corner of the globe as ever produced.

Each was the target of international contempt and hostility for much of their careers... and each was on more than one occasion brought down by the power of the dollar to enforce its will, often corruptly and sometimes violently, against any country in the region which tried to achieve socialist aspirations in the years following the Cuban revolution. The passing of Jagan and Manley inevitably marks the end of an era, but it was an era of great pride and achievement as well as great disappointment and irresistible compromise.¹

Precisely because history's verdict is likely to be positive thousands flocked to Manley's funeral to celebrate his life. For what has not died is humankind's passion for freedom, for justice, dignity, and personhood especially among the wretched of the earth. Michael Manley spent a lifetime in pursuit of these yet unattainable goods for his people and all kindred souls who tenant Planet Earth. He understood the need for unmitigated fervor in the struggle, even in the face of failure, to rid the world of the persistent obscenities that have plagued the likes of his people for the past half a millennium.

The Right Honorable Michael Norman Manley, former Prime Minister of Jamaica, Third World advocate and international statesman, had many careers — as journalist, trade union negotiator, politician, author, scholar, and patron of the arts. He was born on December 10, 1924 in Kingston, Jamaica, the second son of the Right Excellent Norman Washington Manley (Founder of the People's National Party, Prime Minister of Jamaica from 1955-1962, and National Hero of Jamaica) and his wife, Edna, nee Swithenbank (sculptor and a founder of Jamaica's Modern Art Movement). He was educated at Jamaica College and later at the London School of Economics (1945-49) after serving in the Royal Canadian Air Force during World War II.²

If he owed to his sportsman and nation-building father his love of sports (especially cricket and boxing) and his lifelong commitment to public service, he inherited from both his artist- mother Edna Manley and his sensitive father his devotion to the arts and the conviction that national development must be linked to culture and the common people's collective creativity. He skipped classes at the London School of Economics

(LSE) to visit the National and Tate Galleries as well as the Royal Albert and Wigmore Halls looking at paintings, listening to music and barely resisting strong temptations to study art criticism. He had an ear for both Marley and Mahler and passionately embraced his mother's search, as sculptor, for a Jamaican iconography in artistic expression.³

While at LSE, he became a student activist as a member of the West Indian Students Union Executive Committee and as one of the founders of the Caribbean Labor Congress of London, which campaigned for Jamaican independence and supported West Indian labor movements, progressive West Indian parties, and a federation of the then British West Indies. His activism dated back to his schoolboy days when he voluntarily left Jamaica College after a quarrel with a new English Headmaster concerning the direction of school policy. The students staged a two-week strike in support of the young Manley.

His return to Jamaica in 1952 and to a position as journalist with the *Public Opinion* weekly newspaper (an organ of the People's National Party) was followed by his early election to the leadership of the National Workers Union, one of the two leading trade unions to emerge as supporters for the main political parties. From that base, he launched an illustrious career as a major trade union negotiator and a leading force in the Caribbean Mine and Metalworkers Federation of which he was both founder and the first president.

His gift of persuasion and advocacy at the bargaining table coupled with his mesmerizing oratory at the podium in addressing workers, further prepared him for the Presidency of the powerful PNP, in succession to his father and for a long haul in domestic and Third World politics from the late 1960s until the 1990s when he voluntarily retired as Prime Minister and party president because of ill-health and to make way for a new generation of leaders. Legend has it that his mother often referred to the fact that he did not start talking until the age of two after which she could not silence him.

Michael Manley is arguably the best known and most effective Commonwealth Caribbean politician to have had an impact on the world scene in the latter half of the twentieth century. As Sir Shridath Ramphal, former Commonwealth Secretary General and current Chancellor of the University of the West Indies recently wrote in tribute:

He was respected and admired by his peers among world leaders -- men and women as widely different as Willy Brandt, Olaf

Palme, Indira Gandhi, Julius Nyerere, George Bush, and both Pierre Trudeau and Brian Mulroney. He became, at the height of his political powers, one of the always small group of world leaders with influence beyond country or region -- a player on the global stage whose role always mattered to the quality of the play.⁴

Solidarity was indeed for him a special virtue as he demonstrated in his relations with Carlos Andres Perez of Venezuela and Fidel Castro of Cuba, both of whom proved steadfast friends of Jamaica and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM).

He is widely acknowledged for the positive role he played in facilitating the attainment of African majority rule in Zimbabwe and the liberation of South Africa from apartheid. He is equally well known for his North-South advocacy of a more rational approach to technical assistance on the part of multilateral institutions in dealing with the developing world and of the rehabilitation of Cuba in a more peaceful hemispheric geopolitics. He will also be remembered for his pivotal role in his efforts to ease the debt crisis, in the review of commodity prices on the world market to reflect fairness and justice - especially in the case of bauxite - and in the on-going discourse in the quest for solutions to the problems of democratic governance especially in circumstances where the human capital remained threatened with marginalization in the social order.

He embraced democratic socialism as a guiding principle in his vision and programs. While it won him fame and recognition worldwide among members of the Non-Aligned Movement, the Group of 77, and the Socialist International of which he was an Honorary President, he faced stiff opposition from Right-wing and right of center opponents at home. He was to suffer a massive landslide defeat in 1980 ceding power to the Jamaica Labor Party led by Edward Seaga who charged the Manley regime with mismanagement and suspect Leftist and pro-Castro leanings. Yet, he was able to return to power with a massive landslide victory in 1980 as he had done in 1972 and 1976 in vigorously contested elections. It was his deep regret that the two-party system so carefully nurtured by his father and bequeathed to his generation was to be transformed into guerilla warfare by persons who preferred to win power by the bullet rather than the ballot; thus, introducing violence into electoral politics and paving the way for later drug-related violence and a debilitating gang warfare in Jamaica's urban ghettos.⁶

The decade of the Seventies over which he presided remains the most controversial period of Jamaican post-Independence politics. His critics blame him to this day for causing economic decline by squandering the gains from the bauxite levy on public spending at the expense of high productivity, by scaring away foreign investment with inflammatory rhetoric felt to be appropriate to leftwing ideology, and by plunging the country into enormous debt, dependency on the International Monetary Fund, and unrelieved negative growth.⁷ He is yet to be forgiven by Jamaica's affluent middle class for "*Betraying his class.*"

His defenders, on the other hand, insist on the rightness of his vision in seeking a "third path" independent of Washington and Moscow. They also lay strong claims to the huge strides he made in social justice and educational opportunities, giving to the mass of the population a sense of place and purpose as creative participants in the development process. This was done in part via a strong legislative program that addressed bread and butter issues, workers' rights, maternity leave with pay, compulsory severance pay, worker ownership in companies that employed them, and child protection by abolishing the status of "bastard" which demeaned nearly 70 percent of the Jamaican population born out of wedlock.⁸ In the 1989-92 period, as Prime Minister, he spearheaded the Macro Development Investment Agency to help the poorest youth with collateral and introduced a national Planning Council for government, private sector and trade unions as part of his thrust towards a culture of partnership in democratic governance.

He kept his vision of a civil society, the principal aim of which he saw as "the empowerment of the people in all phases of national life." Upon his Party's return to power in 1989, he re-examined the economic strategy of his party between 1981 and 1988 and accepted a larger role for market forces in government policies. "The role of the State was re-defined with less direct involvement in the economy but was still expected to lead as the vital mobilizer of national effort, a catalyst in the democratization of the economy, and as creator of an egalitarian social framework."⁹

That the redefinition confused both former supporters and opponents remained a mystery to him for some time. He repeatedly justified his change of emphasis on grounds of the new reality of "globalization" in the world. But he also increasingly invoked the accomplishments of the much maligned 1970s which admittedly saw his unsuccessful battles with the IMF and the destabilization forces from the North, but

which also witnessed him facilitating the transfer of power and opportunities for full involvement to a new generation of young leaders - many of them evolving from the rural and urban black skinned underclass - in both public and private corporate life. They were to become the true beneficiaries of his social transformation policies.

A staunch advocate of Caribbean regional integration, he served as a major architect of CARICOM (the Caribbean Community), and he became in retirement a catalyst and interlocutor with all the major leaders in Central America and the Caribbean region formulating the program for the newly created Association of Caribbean States. He also acted as Chairman of the Caribbean Development Task Force and actively helped in engineering the involvement of the United Nations in assisting the restoration of democracy in Haiti.

Never one to avoid a debate, Mr. Manley once told his North American critics of his alleged softness on Cuban communism that in Jamaica one did not drive a creed contrary to one's own underground, one out-argued it. He was a politician who understood the place of intellectual inquiry in human development and the obligation of the man of action to invest such action with thought and reflection. He was the author of approximately seven books on politics and international affairs, and a well-researched book on the history of West Indies cricket.¹⁰ He was the recipient of several honorary doctorates including one from his native University of the West Indies, where he was appointed in 1996 to the newly endowed Chair in Public Policy at the Mona Campus in Jamaica. He lectured at many leading American universities as a distinguished Visiting Fellow throughout the 1980s.

He naturally attracted several public awards including the United Nations Gold Medal of the UN Committee on Apartheid for services to the anti-apartheid struggle, the Order of Jose Marti from Cuba, the Order of the Liberator from Venezuela, the Order of the Caribbean Community from CARICOM, and the very high and rare Order of Merit from his native Jamaica.

He departed the scene with no pretence of having found the definitive answers. But he has left behind a legacy of pointers for his successors. Despite his seeming passion for the market-driven economy, statism having proven sterile, he was too much a realist-cum-visionary to expect free-wheeling capitalist free enterprise to succeed in Jamaica at the expense of the dignity, freedom, and cultural confidence of the human resource.

He would agree with Michael Witter, the UWI economist, in his spirited response to a visiting super consultant, that "all ideas brought in should edify the Caribbean people, should empower them to at least influence the direction of socio-economic development in the region, and motivate them to be subjects of their own history rather than objects of foreign corporate cost calculations."¹¹

His populism was rooted in far more than the charisma of a tall, handsome figure nicknamed "Joshua" by his adoring public and cutting a dash at the demagogue's podium. His service to the working-class people of Jamaica through trade unionism and the building of a sophisticated industrial relations system, and to the rest of Jamaica through his advocacy of self-reliance and participatory democracy is not likely to be lost, he felt, unless someone with a fascist totalitarian spirit takes over Jamaica. For totalitarian Manley was not! His was a democratic spirit rooted in his social background and reinforced by his long apprenticeship over the bargaining table where agreeing to disagree is the stock-in-trade and where, for all the table thumping, all ideas must be made to contend if a useful decision is to be taken.

The human being's sense of self-worth was central to his political philosophy. For without self-respect freedom is empty and someone without self-respect will lack the self-confidence to make full sense of freedom. A society that fails to provide this to its citizens, he felt, is guilty of institutional humiliation and is an indecent society. He wanted Jamaica to be a decent society. He extended this to all and sundry. A young black Briton of Jamaican parentage writes him at age of 13 and promptly receives a reply, the beginning of a lively correspondence, which fueled the ambitions of this youngster in the Caribbean diaspora reaching out for self-esteem and identity. Today the young man is a successful journalist, a politically aware, self-contained, confident professional in Britain with a sense of identity driving him to meet all odds. He credits Michael Manley for his success. There are tens of thousands like him.

The tolerance he brought to political discourse even in the wake of short-fused spirited exchange, the magnanimity of spirit, his refusal to hold grudges, preferring to conduct public affairs on the basis of principle rather than on petty personality considerations, his ability to come to grips with myriad contradictions and complexities of human condition in various settings of human interaction, his capacity for civility and generosity towards his opponents, his educability and readiness to explore

thought as basis for action - such are the legacies he will have left to his successors in public management and political leadership.

His understanding of history and of the deep social forces of contemporary Jamaican society, still in transition, made Michael Manley bring to his work an enduring vision, sustained application (his capacity for hard work is now legendary), passion and great intellectual energy, a certain courage and daring in confronting the imperatives of change, and a tenacity of purpose in pursuit of goals he felt were best for the Jamaican people. That this is so is, in his favorite phrase, "impatient of debate."

It is all this and more which have given to Jamaicans the opportunity to be free to clobber him with reminders (especially among the chattering classes)¹² of his "faults" and "failures", but also to acknowledge with conviction the great many positive and likely lasting contributions he has made to the building of his nation and the shaping of civil society in post-colonialism.

ENDNOTES

1. *The Guardian*, March 8, 1997, p. 22. See also the *Independent*, March 8, 1997, p. 18, *The Times*, March 8, 1997, p. 23, and *Le Monde*, March 9, 1997, p. 10.
2. See Darrel E. Levi (1989) *Michael Manley: The Making of a Leader*, (Kingston, Jamaica: Heinemann Press, pp. 43-84).
3. Wayne Brown (1975) *Edna Manley: The Private Years 1900-1938*, (London: Andre Deutsch). See also *Edna Manley: The Diaries*, edited by Rachel Manley, (Kingston, Jamaica: Heinemann Press, 1989), and *Edna Manley Sculptor*, Kingston, National Gallery, 1990.
4. Shridath Ramphal, "Obituary Michael Manley," *The Guardian*, March 8, 1997, p. 21.
5. Both Perez and Castro were present at Manley's funeral in Kingston, Jamaica on Sunday, March 16, 1997.
6. The two-party system the provenance of which was presided over by Michael Manley's father and his charismatic cousin Alexander Bustamante deteriorated into tribal warfare between the Jamaican Labor Party and the People's National Party after the late 1960s when gun violence was introduced into the electoral campaigns. In the 1980 elections, just over 800 persons lost their lives by gun

violence as part of that election campaign. Rival partisan gangs are said to have delinked themselves from political masters, switched to drug-trafficking and thrown up their ghetto leaders ("dons"), described by one politician as "protectors" of turfs in the depressed areas of Kingston.

7. See the Michael Manley and Karl Levitt correspondence in *Small Axe*, Volume one, Number one, 1997, edited by David Scott, University of the West Indies, Mona Campus, Kingston Jamaica, pp. 77-115.

8. See Rex Nettleford (1989) edition of *Jamaica in Independence: Essays on the Early Years*, especially the chapter by Maxine Henry-Wilson on "The Status of the Jamaican Woman, 1962 to the Present," pp. 244-248.

9. See Michael Manley and Karl Levitt, op. cit.

10. Michael Manley (1988) *A History of West Indies Cricket*, (London: Andre Deutsch); see also *The Politics of Change: A Jamaican Testament*, (London: Andre Deutsch, 1974); *A Voice at the Workplace: Reflections on Colonialism and the Jamaican Worker*, (London: Andre Deutsch, 1975); *Jamaica: Struggle in the Periphery* (London: Third World Media, 1982) and *Up the Down Escalator: Development and the International Economy, A Jamaican Case Study*, (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1987).

11. Michael Witter, comment on lecture delivered by Jeffrey Sachs at the University of the West Indies in celebration of market forces and neo-liberalism.

12. Jamaica abounds in radio talk-shows ("chat-shows" to the British) which invite comment on social, economic and political affairs for many hours a day. Political leaders are often telephoned by talk-show hosts to clarify policy-options or the content of specific policies. At the time of Manley's death there was an impressive number of radio "talk-shows" - First Edition (KLAS Radio), Breakfast Club Radio (Radio Hot 102), Independent Talk (Power 106) in the mornings Straight Talk, (KLAS Radio) Hotline (Radio RJR), Public Eye (JBC), Perkins on Line (Hot 102) mid-day and Sharp Talk (RJR) inter alia.