



**BUSTAMANTE INDUSTRIAL TRADE
UNION (BITU)**

TRIBUTE

**FUNERAL OF
LADY GLADYS MAUD BUSTAMANTE**

**Sts. Peter and Paul Roman Catholic Church
Liguanea**

Saturday, August 8, 2009

The recent death of our Honorary Trustee and Treasurer, Lady Gladys Maud Bustamante, widow of the Jamaican National Hero and Founder of the BITU, the Rt. Excellent Sir Alexander Bustamante, has saddened us greatly. However, as it is said, “every cloud has a silver lining”, and we think it pertinent to honour Lady B’s memory by reflecting and celebrating the positive side; the side that has reignited public interest in the role of women in our Trade Unions.

Despite the sorrow which engulfs us today as we lay to rest our Founding Mother, Lady Bustamante, the Bustamante Industrial Trade Union (BITU) is honoured that the name of our union is associated with two of the most illustrious Jamaicans:-

The late National Hero and Jamaica’s first Prime Minister, the Rt. Excellent Sir Alexander Bustamante, our founder, and his widow, the Most Hon. Lady Gladys Bustamante, our co-founder.

We owe it to them today, that we can proudly wave our flag and sing our anthem, unashamedly, and also be assured that the rest of the world respects us for that.

In her own right, Lady Bustamante can be regarded as a heroine of the labour movement, as she has served for more than 60 years in the movement as a strong friend and supporter of the workers.

Lady B had a personality that never changed. She has talked with crowds, and kept her virtue; walked with Kings and not lose the common touch. Where there has been hatred, she showed love; where there was despair, hope; where there was darkness, light; where there was sadness, joy.

We do not need to reiterate the achievements of Sir Alexander today, because his remarkable contributions to Jamaica’s development, especially in terms of his political and trade union leadership are widely known.

However, we feel that, at this time, it is important for us to re-assert our position that the partnership of Sir Alexander and Lady Bustamante is, inarguably, the most significant contribution to the development of the regional workers movement and has certainly contributed tremendously to the success of the worldwide labour movement.

We believe in Lady Bustamante as a true hero, in her own right, for many reasons:

She came from the bowels of the working class, from an unappreciated rural environment, at a time when the rights of women were not very well respected and when women were not largely recognized as potential leaders.

In her own quiet and unassuming way, Lady Bustamante overcame all these challenges and teamed with Sir Alexander to help build a nation and a people.

She not only provided the clerical skills that the union and the movement needed in its infancy, but actually went out into the field with Sir Alexander to recruit members, communicate with them, organize and join demonstrations and picket lines, face the wrath of the colonial powers and set up charitable support for the workers and their families during periods of extreme hardship.

Today, these contributions may seem simple, but in the context of pre-Independent Jamaica, we believe that they are enough to convince us that Lady Bustamante deserves to be acknowledged of the Mother of our Movement, for parenting the union through this most difficult period.

Inside the BITU, Lady B always interfaced with staff. She would normally make it her duty to make contact with every member of staff, in every department, to discuss issues of their personal concern as well as work related issues.

Even though Lady Bustamante was a part of the management of the Union, she could in many aspects be perceived as the delegate at the workplace, for time and time again, many a man or woman would take to Lady B their issues, concerns or grievance to be addressed.

Today, we lay her body to rest, but cannot lay bury either her soul or her spirit. Those live on, not only within the walls of our office at number 98 Duke Street, but within the borders of our nation.

We know that her spirit will continue to inspire us to overcome the challenges that remain with us.

It will help us to break down the barriers that still stand in the way of national unity and give us the strength to withstand the worst effects of the current global economic crisis and even the urge to turn these challenges into opportunities for good.

We thank all those who have shared with us during this period of great grief, and we hope that after she is buried you will continue to recall her achievements and recreate her contributions.

However, anyone who knows the true character of Lady Bustamante will know that she would not want us to recall her in sorrow, but that we will celebrate her life, her contributions and her achievements.

We do not believe that it is by chance that both Sir Alexander and Lady Bustamante died during periods when we were celebrating our Independence and our Culture. It is deliberate and it serves to recommit us, at a time when we are best positioned, to restore our Nation to respecting

good values and honest attitudes, to respect our elderly and our young and respect life as beyond sacred.

Many persons would have been jealous of the relationship between Sir Alexander and Lady B, not only because of the love they shared, but because of what it brought to the Union.

There is a saying that “history usually repeats itself”, but we cannot guarantee that this piece of history, whether written or unrecorded, will ever repeat itself in this generation or in generations to come.

Let us grasp this opportunity, even more that we grasp the opportunity that the death of Sir Alexander gave us in 1977, and let us not allow ourselves to be blinded by the tribal distractions that separate us.

We know that her soul rests in peace today, as she travels on to join Sir Alexander in Glory and to recreate that very successful partnership, and we hope that in death they will be as much an inspiration to all of us, as they were in during their lives on earth.

God Bless Their Souls, God Bless Lady Gladys Maud Bustamante.

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