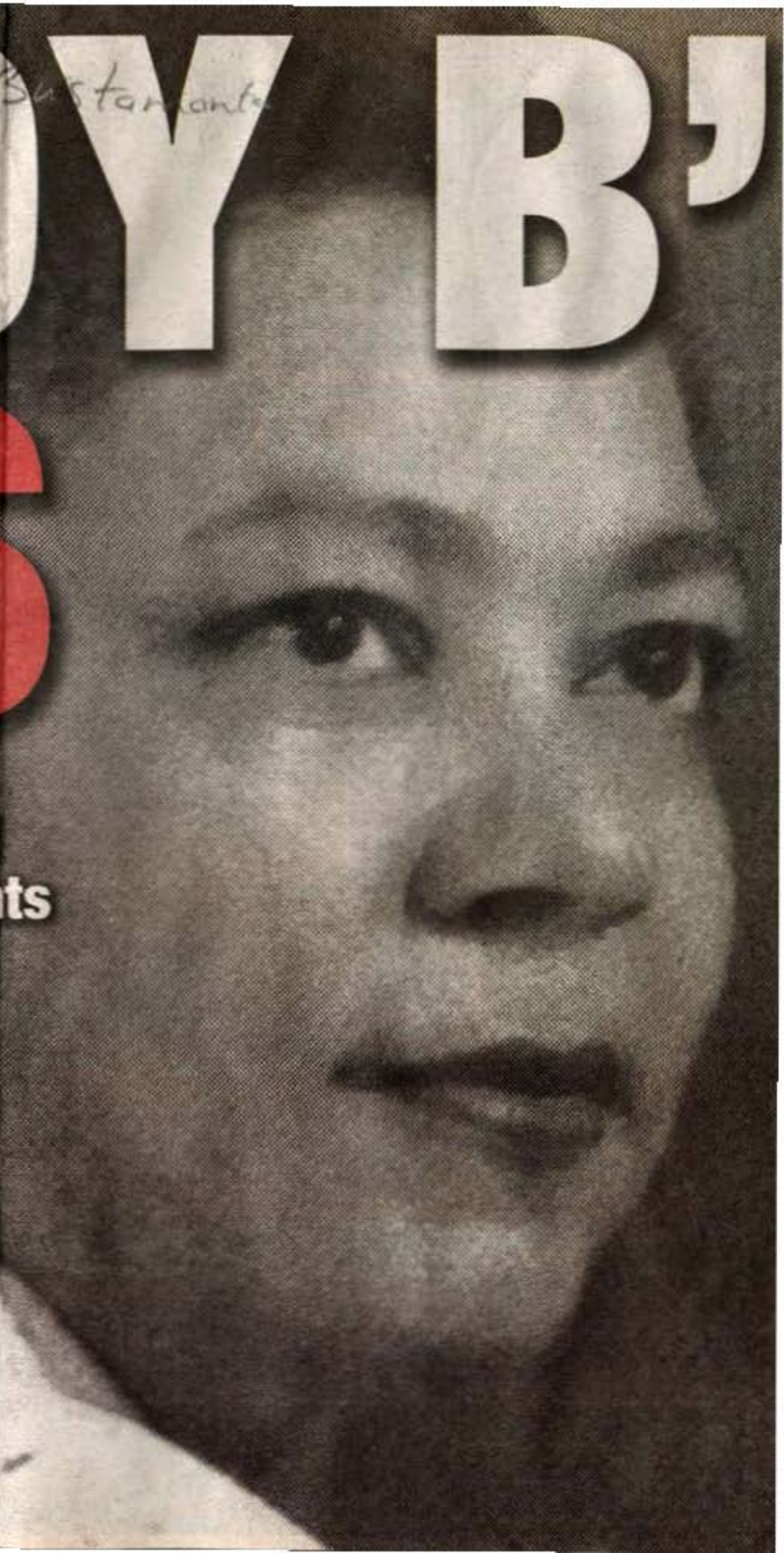


'LADY B'

DIES



Widow of National Hero Sir Alexander Bustamante hailed as champion of workers' rights

LADY Bustamante, highly regarded as a defender of women's and workers' rights, and widow of late former Prime Minister and National Hero Sir Alexander Bustamante, died in the Tony Thwaites Wing of the University Hospital of the West Indies yesterday afternoon. She was 97.

'Lady B', as she was more affectionately known, had been ailing in recent years and was confined to bed. However, the Sunday Observer learnt that her passing took her caregivers by surprise as her condition worsened suddenly yesterday at about 10:00 am.

She was taken to the hospital and died at approximately 4:40 pm.

Last night, Prime Minister Bruce Golding said her passing has taken from us the most enduring icon of Jamaica's political struggles.

Pointing to her marriage to Sir Alexander, founder of the Bustamante Industrial Trade Union (BITU), Golding said Lady Bustamante "was a heroine in her own right, having been in the front

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PM says Lady B dedicated her life to people of Jamaica

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line of the fight to secure and defend the rights of the worker in the 1930s.

Added Golding: "Jamaicans reserved a special place in their hearts for 'Lady B' and she enjoyed the love and adoration of Jamaicans from all walks of life and all political persuasions. "We are deeply saddened by her passing, but we are an immensely richer country and people for the life she lived and the completeness with which that life was dedicated to the people of Jamaica."

Labour Minister Parnell Charles, who is also a long-serving official of the BITU, said Lady B was "the last of the personalities that accompanied the revolution that Sir Alexander led on behalf of the working class in Jamaica".

Praising her for the work she did with Sir Alexander, who was also the founder of the Jamaica Labour Party (JLP), Charles said "certainly, a legend has passed".

Charles also thanked Seragh Lakerasingh and his wife, Effie, for their unwavering commitment to caring for Lady Bustamante over many years, adding that they did so when most people would have forgotten her.

The JLP, in a statement, expressed deep sadness at Lady B's passing and said her contribution to the political development of Jamaica was inestimable.

"Lady B... was unselfish in her service and contribution to the party. We could always rely on her sage advice when there were issues to be resolved," said JLP general secretary Karl Samuda.

"Long after she left the public stage and even during her illness she continued to be a trustee of the Jamaica Labour Party and was a source of inspiration," he added.

"She can truly be called the matriarch of the JLP. Her passing represents the end of The Era in our political development. We will miss her."

Born Gladys Longbridge in 1912 at Purson Reid, near Ashton in Westmoreland, Lady Bustamante described herself in her book — *The Memoirs of Lady Bustamante* — as a "welcome baby", even though she was born out of wedlock.

"Being born out of wedlock was not a major issue in rural Jamaica then," she wrote.

She studied commercial subjects at Tutorial College in Kingston before going on to work with Sir Alexander, who she said she admired because of

his concern for the poor.

She was Sir Alexander's private secretary from 1936 when he was a businessman, then a trade unionist and then a politician until he became prime minister in 1962.

"I took up my job with pride and great expectations of becoming involved more with people than with paper and pencil," she wrote.

At the time of her passing, Lady Bustamante was honorary treasurer of the BITU, a position which demonstrated her stated commitment to trade unionism, to which she spoke in

her book.

"A series of unlikely events led me into the thick of trade unionism and politics," she wrote. "Before too long, I would become deeply involved in the movement to reform Jamaica. The folks at home would marvel at the fact that the quiet Sunday school organist from Ashton was in the forefront of national upheaval, fighting for the underpaid working class and the hungry unemployed. Almost all my working days have been spent in this service, even now so late in life, I am still fully committed to trade

unionism and I propose to continue that way until that breath has left my body."

Last year, on the eve of her birthday, the *Observer* published an interview she gave to JIS News in which she thanked God for sparing her life.

The article also quoted Seragh Lakerasingh as saying that humility was the hallmark of Lady B's life. "She was never swayed by positions and status; she was easily accessible. She was all things to all persons," Lakerasingh said.

In her memoirs, Lady Bustamante described the role



This photo published in Lady Bustamante memoirs shows her and Sir Alexander about to board the flight to London to attend the 1962 Commonwealth Prime Ministers Conference.

of women in the labour movement of the 1930s.

"We women were the mainstay of the union's organisation, though we could hardly have functioned without the brave men who toiled day and night, facing all sorts of criticism and opposition as they tried to help the workers," she wrote.

"Bustamante was the busiest of us all, scouring the rural areas, forming branches, listening to grievances, offering solutions and calling publicly upon government as well as private employers to deal fairly with the masses," she added.

She said that when Sir Alexander died on August 6, 1977, she was "paralysed with grief". However, she forced herself to stay active, getting involved in many causes, including the Bustamante Hospital for Children, of which she was patron.

She also engaged in social work islandwide, especially among port workers and their families, in sugar communities and among children of destitute parents. She was also actively engaged in work at a number of voluntary and charitable institutions.

Last night, Prime Minister Golding said that "an announcement will be made shortly of the arrangements being planned for the nation she served so well to bid her its final farewell".