

B/N Manley, Michael



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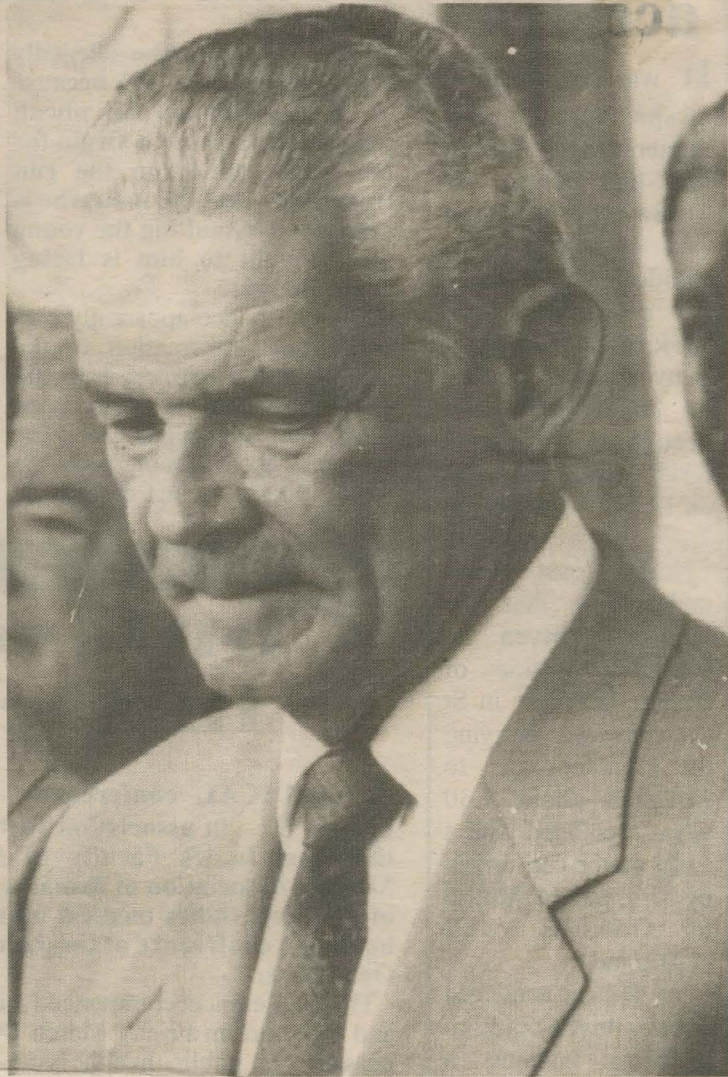
Farewell, Michael

DEATH has robbed Jamaica of one of its finest sons, former Prime Minister Michael Manley. He died last Thursday, at 73 years of age. The tributes which have come in from local leaders as well as those in the region and around the world point to the stature of the man and the high regard in which he was held.

We believe that Mr Manley was a committed advocate for the poor and who worked hard to improve the lot of people at the bottom of the ladder. Without doubt and without fail he tried to give the broad majority of Jamaicans a sense of belonging in their country and a place in the sun. Mr Manley was clearly a visionary, determined to make a difference in this country which, when he came to power, had serious inequities within the population on which neither development nor harmonious relations could be built. Indeed, part of the difficulty of the Manley years was due to the fact that by the time he came to power in 1972 the nation was well on the way to creating two Jamaicas and there were some who would not have it otherwise.

Mr Manley set about through a variety of social legislation and programmes to bring poorer, disenfranchised Jamaicans into the main stream of the country. Today we would say he sought to empower the majority. Many point to some of the programmes of this empowerment such as JAMAL, free education, increased places in high school, the minimum wage, repeal of the Masters and Servants Act and the Bastardy Act, Land Lease and Food Farm programmes, the National Housing Trust and others. It was, too, a period of enlightenment, even of the ferment of ideas, for many Jamaicans who felt free to discuss issues of their nation's development, to argue over its Budget items, to discuss the terms of trade and Jamaica's dealings with the world.

True, Jamaica's friendship with Cuba rankled many and ghosts were raised to frighten people even as the leaders including Mr Manley made injudicious statements and took action that could not assure a people concerned about their sovereignty. As the economy began to be severely strained by the mass of social programmes and poor management and investment failed to materialise, opposition widened especially when basic staple foods, still heavily subsidized and underpriced were hard to find. Into that brew, with heightened rhetoric and every opportunity taken to widen the rift between the two Jamaicas, came unprecedented violence which made many Jamaicans throw Mr Manley out of office by 1980. But within nine years the country was



Michael Manley

put again into his hands. He walked away gracefully from it five years ago when he told the nation that he was too ill to go on. He continued his private contribution to causes which he had always supported. Now he is gone from us. We salute him and remember him for the work he did in changing Jamaica for a whole generation. If only the rest of us could combine to change it forever.

B/N MANLEY, MICHAEL

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