

# Desmond Hoyte (1929-2002)

Re- Stabroek News December 30th. 2002

## Desmond Hoyte laid to rest

The wooden casket bearing the earthly remains of Hoyte was lowered into its tomb even as tributes were being delivered by friends and supporters at the site.

The decision to speed up proceedings was as a result of the convergence around the burial site of overzealous mourners who broke through barriers erected to maintain order.

Thousands had from early in the afternoon converged at the Seven Ponds Place of Heroes in the gardens to witness the final rites which commenced way behind schedule around 6:45 pm following the cortege's arrival at 6:24 pm. The cortege was originally to have left Parliament Buildings at 3.30 pm for the gardens.

As with the earlier ceremony at Parliament Buildings, a vociferous crowd obstructed smooth access by the military contingent which accompanied the body to the burial site.

Invited guests and other dignitaries who had gone to the site to pay homage to the fallen leader were soon engulfed by the sea of persons many of whom had followed the body along its path from Parliament Buildings.

The open-back vehicle bearing Hoyte's flag-draped casket was finally driven to the entrance to the Seven Ponds where top military officers bore the casket shoulder high to the tomb.



Gun salute: Members of the Guyana Defence Force with weapons raised giving former Executive President and Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces, Hugh Desmond Hoyte a fitting send off at last evening's interment. (Lawrence Fanfair photo)

As the casket was being positioned over the hole excavated for burial, the crowd which had converged near the immediate area, surged forward thereby curtailing the military pomp and ceremony.

After several unsuccessful pleas by party leaders for the crowds to clear the immediate burial area, the ceremony commenced with Leader of the Reform component of the PNC/R, Stanley Ming recalling his association with Hoyte.

However, by the time he had completed his remarks, Hoyte's widow Joyce, requested that his body be immediately lowered into the ground as the crowd continued to press closer to the grave's edge. Continuous pleas to clear the area to allow workmen to complete their task were ignored forcing the visibly upset widow to leave the ground before the tomb was sealed.

As onlookers continuously behaved in an undignified manner, she also witnessed a member of the crowd falling into the hole on top of the casket.

According to Ming, "Hugh Desmond Hoyte was many things to many people" as he recalled his first meeting with the man who was his friend

On the occasion of their first meeting, Ming said he had been critical of the administration which Hoyte was part of. It was after a follow up encounter initiated by Hoyte, at which Ming said he

offered suggestions where changes should be effected and these were followed by Hoyte as president, that he befriended him.

Subsequent invitations by Hoyte for him to join the PNC prior to 1992 were refused because he felt unsure of being able to make a contribution.

This, he said, however commenced a new dimension in his relationship with Hoyte, one of personal friendship which he considered very special.

It was this bond which in subsequent years took them to many parts of the world during which they observed several of the initiatives etched in the Guyana 21 plan, a blueprint for moving the country forward on which the party campaign at the 2001 general elections was based.

"What nature of man is this" Ming questioned rhetorically, while highlighting a personal experience in which the two visited the family of the children killed at the recent race track accident. He recalled that as they were about to enter the home to meet the children's parents, Hoyte, tears in his eyes, made the comment that he knew what the family was going through since he had passed that way himself with the loss of his two children in an auto accident on April 30, 1985. According to Ming it was this side of Hoyte, not visible to many, that proved to him that he was humble and sensitive.

One of Hoyte's colleagues, Donald Robinson, quoted the last two verses of a poem by Kemson: "Crossing the bar" to describe the passing of a man he considered "a statesman, a patriot, lawyer, raconteur, a man of a thousand virtues, my colleague, my brother, my friend".

Former PNC Chairman and attorney at Law, Winston Murray, in his farewell to a man he called his chief, dear leader and dear friend, said that Hoyte had left a legacy of solid achievement. Persons he said had a duty to honour Hoyte's unfulfilled commitment. He reminisced on his working relations with Hoyte and on his score sheet of economic growth, inclusiveness, and while in opposition, avenues of cooperation, dialogue and a far reaching proposal crafted on the eve of his demise to ensure equity and justice.

He saw Hoyte's passing as a commute to life on a higher plain. He said he felt confident that Hoyte would be welcomed into the Kingdom of God to render advice on the country's further advancement. Party stalwart, Joan Mabel Baveghens, speaking for the ordinary members said they remained committed to his ideals and will take comfort in his memory.

Musical renditions by the combined joint services band and poetic recitals also complimented the tributes as Reverend Eustace Semple performed the last rites. As this was being done, three trumpeters from the Guyana Defence Force blew the last post amid a line of military personnel with their swords held aloft.

Shortly afterwards two white doves were released into the night sky in a symbol of peace to the fallen leader and a 21-gun salute reverberated through the gardens heralding the end of the proceedings.

Earlier in the day, crude behaviour on the part of many of those who converged around Public Buildings marred the ceremony in the courtyard.

Around two thousand people gathered from as early as noon, braving the blazing sun to witness the State Funeral.

However, what were supposed to have been hallowed proceedings were desecrated by the vulgar behaviour of scores of those who had assembled - an atmosphere which bore little, if any likeness to the solemnity emanating from within.

Persons lined the streets, fences, hung from trees and even took up positions on a scaffold in the churchyard of St Andrews to witness the event yesterday.

As they took up their positions, many of those who assembled reflected upon the life and works of Hoyte while some others were overcome by emotion and others had sadness reflected upon their faces.

As the procession, moving from the Square of the Revolution, made its way down Brickdam for the ceremony which was supposed to have begun at 1:30 pm, some persons began to lament their inability to enter the compound of Parliament for the ceremony, which was by invitation only, and the security arrangements which they felt were too restraining. Barricades were erected, and were initially manned by police officers. By the conclusion of the ceremony however, persons had breached these obstacles and had congregated on the street outside Parliament, as police who at one time manned barricades were forced to mingle with the crowd. They were concentrated between Cornhill Street and Avenue of the Republic.

At 1:10 pm the procession from the Square of the Revolution arrived with Hoyte's body - it had been preceded by small groups which broke away as the procession moved along Brickdam.

Many persons rushed around the vehicle carrying the body and attempted to follow it into the courtyard though the majority were unsuccessful. They did however succeed in blocking the entrance to the courtyard, preventing the body from entering. An appeal had to be made by the interim leader of the PNCR, Robert Corbin, for these persons to remove to allow Hoyte's body to be brought in.

Other persons voiced words of disapproval at the decision to conduct the funeral at Parliament: "How they could bring he back hey? He didn't even want to come to this place when he was alive," one man remarked.

As the ceremony progressed, after a delayed start, the crowd became restless due to the length of the programme and many concentrated their attention on other activities.

While seemingly calm at times, the huge crowd erupted into a loud cacophony of voices as President Bharrat Jagdeo delivered his address. In the minority were those whose solemn countenance gave way to looks of agitation as many persons mocked the President and hurled insults at him. PPP General Secretary, Donald Ramotar during his address was treated in similar fashion earlier. There was little if any challenges to the vulgar chants which accompanied the President's address, his words were drowned out by the sometimes angry voices. When the ceremony finally reached its conclusion a short while before 4:30 pm, the scene outside the Parliament Buildings was confused, the street teeming with gaggles of persons who were still hoping to catch a glimpse of the body of the former President.

An appeal was again made by Corbin, this time for the orderly movement from the Public Buildings to the Botanical Gardens.



*Members of the Guyana Defence Force under the scrutiny of senior military brass, unhooking the straps on former President Desmond Hoyte's casket prior to its interment at the Seven Ponds, Botanical Gardens last evening. (Lawrence Fanfair photo)*



*A military officer salutes Joyce Hoyte after presenting her with the national flag which had been draped on the casket of her husband, former President Desmond Hoyte prior to interment at the Seven Ponds, Botanical Gardens, last evening. (Lawrence Fanfair photo)*



*The scene outside Parliament Buildings yesterday where several thousand persons from all walks of life gathered to witness the State Funeral for former Executive President Hugh Desmond Hoyte. (Ken Moore photo)*



*Paying homage: Members of the Disciplined Services with heads bent and swords drawn paying their respects to former Head of State, Hugh Desmond Hoyte as the vehicle bearing his remains made its way to his final resting place at the Seven Ponds, Botanical Gardens, last evening. (Lawrence Fanfair photo)*