In memoriam: George Odlum (1939-2003)

Posted October 5th. 2003 by Gary Burton

The priority is to deepen and sustain the networks and the discourse which George Odlum, Tim Hector, Walter Rodney and Maurice Bishop, amongst others, developed and personified.

Twice within a year the website "guyanacaribbeanpolitics.com" delivered me news of the death of two towering Vikings of the long march of our people.

Just a year ago I flew the skies from London in shock and rage to my Antigua/Barbuda to pay respects at Tim's funeral It was there that I heard one of the classic funeral orations of all time, "Were you there?" by George Odlum.

And today I read David Hinds "…Few regions in the world have produced so many high quality minds…yet no other region in the world has sacrificed its finest talents at the altar of tribal politics than the Anglophone Caribbean…"

There was the wasting of Maurice Bishop, the sudden wiping out of Walter Rodney. A generation or two earlier, our major prophet, Marcus Garvey, was made to die, unsignified and finally marginalized in his time.

Our Caribbean decimates all those whose insights and commitment would overturn the centuries old despair and powerlessness of the mass of our people, women and men, of all our ethnic groups. Each of these exceptional voices is made to face the "tremendous odds and spirited opposition from a society whose philistinism has become a by-word…" (Odlum at Hector's funeral)

I suggest that we have never really replaced these giants of our struggle. We will be mindful of what we should be passing on to our young, "…rudderless and floundering youth…" in Odlum's special phrase.

Death must not find us thinking all is lost. We have to replace those we lose; we have to pass on an alternative vision of a future Caribbean civilisation. We have to retake the high ground from the pedestrian and brutalised barbarians who now run our politics and our public culture.

Garfield "Garry" Burton

London and Antigua/Barbuda