

I remember Carlton Alexander

By Ian Boyne

Even the communist world is coming around belatedly to a central truth: To develop an economy you need a special breed of people whose creativity, innovativeness and dynamism will turn ashes into gold.

Karl Marx himself had stated quite clearly - though it was lost in the Leninist rubble - that a dynamic capitalist class had to emerge to transform society before one could have the surplus with which to liberate the working class. One of the major problems in the third world is not the presence of capitalists. In fact, it has been the very opposite: there has been too little evidence of the dynamic entrepreneurship which is needed to spur economic growth.

To have a group of zestful, resourceful business people is a primary asset to any society, particularly one in the Third World. In Jamaica there have been a few whose work was instrumental in planting the seeds or of sustaining growth. The Hon. Dr. Carlton Alexander was one of them.

His passing last week has "eroded the country's human resources stock," as Industry and Commerce Minister



The late Carlton Alexander

Claude Clarke said last week. Carlton Alexander was not your typical businessman, interested in business just to make money to consume luxuries and to display wealth. He belonged to that generation of men for whom the development of business was seen as a supreme challenge, one having almost religious dimensions.

They saw themselves as having a chance to change their society for the better and for maximising their own human potential. Making money or engaging in showy consumerism was not a primary concern. It was the chal-

lenge, the sheer excitement and thrill of business which fascinated them. And so also was the opportunity to participate in nation-building. I have for long had a soft spot for Carlton Alexander. Coming to think of it, I have dealt with him in every single job I have had.

The first time I met him was when as a young, unknown JIS feature writer I went to interview him at his then surprisingly unattractive office on Harbour Street. At first I dismissed the absurd, if ambitious, thought. Me? Interview Alexander? He does not know my name. He is extremely busy. There is no way he would see me. But he did and during the interview, which lasted for about two hours, he showed no signs of cutting it off. He made me feel comfortable.

I remember writing up the interview (or did I?) But I know it was never published. How could I ever face him again? There he was condescending to

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have an unknown journalist interview him and what happened? The predictable: It did not see the light of day. But like Mr. Alexander, I am not one for giving up. So when I began profiling outstanding people for *Flair* magazine (of all places!) I called Uncle Carlton, as I would later call him dearly, and I got my second chance.

This time he had moved to more elegant and prepossessing surroundings at the Scotia Centre. As I sat waiting for him around the imposing table, my eyes caught a beautifully framed painting (or photo?) of an eagle soaring to the heights. I couldn't help but reflect on how similar that picture was to his own life. He had left school at sixteen and with few qualifications there were also few options, so he landed a job as stock clerk at Grace Kennedy and Company.

He threw himself into the job, as though he was doing the work of the chief executive. As he would explain later to me, his philosophy was to go the extra mile and to learn the other man's job so if the position became vacant he could fill it.

With that attitude, inevitably he got promoted early, and the promotions continued until he became chief executive of one of the largest conglomerates in Jamaica.

We shall miss you, Uncle Carlton. As George Eliot has said, "What do we live for if it is not to make life less difficult for each other?"

Carlton Alexander has done that. Uncle Carlton, as the song asks, "Did you ever know you were my hero?"