



Crofton St Louis

BUZZ JOHNSON

1951 to 2014

A TRIBUTE

It is with sorrow that Caribbean Labour Solidarity has learned of the death of Buzz Johnson, on 11 February 2014. Buzz was a CLS member of more than 30 years standing. His role in CLS, however, was a tiny part of this most progressive Caribbean son's career. He is better remembered as a progressive political actor, an educator held in high esteem and the founder of the ground-breaking Karia Press, a vitally important UK-based publishing house.

Buzz, who was born in Buccoo, a coastal town on the south west of Tobago, the sister island of Trinidad, had settled in the UK but travelled extensively across the globe in support of progressive individuals and organisations. He had returned from a visit to Tobago shortly before his death, having promised to deliver a presentation on the current situation in T&T to CLS's March meeting.

Buzz played a key role in a range of political activities spanning the Black Power Movement in Trinidad and Tobago in the early 1970s; the anti-racist struggle in Britain, particularly in relation to seeking the truth about the death of Colin Roach; his deep support for the Grenada Revolution; and his campaigning work on behalf of the Grenada 17, which contributed to thwarting their judicial killing by the US and leading to their eventual release.

Buzz's world was not limited to the purely political, as he also recognised the value and potential of community and arts organisations. For example, he was a founder or early member of many institutions, including the Claudia Jones Organisation, established in 1982 to provide support and empowerment to women and families of African-Caribbean heritage; the Ackee Housing Project, which provides supported housing to young women; the Institute of Race Relations; and Ebony Steel Band, among others.

One of Buzz's many outstanding achievements was the establishment of Karia Press. Set up in London in the 1980s, this black publishing venture brought to a wider audience a fresh cohort of Caribbean writers and thinkers. Although pursued by the spectre of shortage of cashflow, Karia managed to publish more than fifty titles.

These included the works of many Caribbean writers who are now established authors. Karia's heterogeneous list encompassed the late Elean Thomas, Dr Merle Collins and Dr Morgan Dalphinis.

Many Caribbean academics, unable to find an outlet for their work among

mainstream UK publishers, were given a readership by Buzz. For example, he published Hubert Devonish's *Talking in Tones: A Study of Tone in Afro-European Creole Languages* in 1989. Morgan Dalphinis's *Caribbean & African Languages - Social History, Language, Literature and Education* was also published by Karia, as were books by Richard Hart and George Lamming. Buzz was not enraptured by stellar authors but considered it vital to expose all aspect of Caribbean literature. Thus he commissioned and published Amos Ford's *Telling the Truth: The Life and Times of the British Honduran Forestry Unit In Scotland (1941-44)*, whose members played a key role in the Second World War.

In 1984, Buzz, having conducted extensive research, wrote and published *I Think of My Mother: Notes on the Life and Times of Claudia Jones*, one of the first major works on this T&T-born dynamic political and social activist.

Buzz was one of the small group of publishers who examined the place and struggles of the Caribbean community in the UK followed by Lord Gifford's report of his independent inquiry into the Broadwater Farm uprising, *The Broadwater Farm Inquiry* (1986), followed by *Broadwater Farm Revisited* (1989). *Policing In Hackney 1945-1984*, the Independent Inquiry Report into the shooting death in Stoke Newington police station of Colin Roach, was also published by Karia in 1989, as was Lord Gifford's *Loosen the Shackles, First report of the Liverpool 8 Inquiry into Race Relations in Liverpool*.

The contribution made by Buzz to the development of communities across the globe is the testament of a fruitful life, as is his work with Karia Press, whose publications can be found in places ranging from the Kenyatta University Library to the bedroom of a young woman in Buccoo. Importantly, Buzz was a precious friend to many across the world, as is evidenced by the tremendous outpouring of shock.

We in CLS share that tremendous loss, and extend our deep sympathy to his family.

Buzz is survived by three children, Amandla, Jamila and Themba, his sister Cynthia and his mother Adwina.

Dennis Bartholomew

On behalf of the Executive Committee - Caribbean Labour Solidarity

Goodbye and safe journey, dear friend and comrade
NORRIS CHRISLEVENTON "BUZZ" JOHNSON
2 November 1951 – 11 February 2014

The funeral service will take place at 1 p.m. on Saturday 1st of March at [All Saint's Church, Haggerston Road, Hackney, London E8 4EP](#). Followed by the reception, held from 3.30 p.m. at the [West Indian Cultural Centre, 9 Clarendon Road, Hornsey London, N8 0DJ](#). Buzz will be buried in Tobago.

Buzz's son Amandla Thomas Johnson has given permission for his details to be made public, should anyone wish for further information relating to the funeral arrangements. Amandla's email address is tjamandla@gmail.com.



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