TRIBUTE TO
MR CHARLES THOMAS JOHN
DELIVERED BY THE
FINANCIAL SECRETARY
MINISTRY OF FINANCE & ECONOMIC MANAGEMENT

The staff at the Ministry of Finance & Economic Management joins with the family in mourning the loss of the late Mr. C.T. John, a true and devoted son of the soil. He was the Mayor and ambassador extraordinaire for “Salem City” as he calls the village where he spent most of his life. It is indeed a sad moment for all of us who knew him personally but this is the fate of all flesh – So I am here to join his relatives and friends in celebrating his life.

My first personal contact with Mr. John was at the Montserrat Secondary School where he was the Principal and I was a student. Our relationship was fine until he suspended me for habitually having three buttons of my shirt opened and exposing my chest, and later for forcing me to join the Cadet Corps. As much as I rebelled against this dictatorial approach, you can now see that I am fully buttoned up and I not only stayed and enjoyed the Cadet Corps but went on to spend twenty one years in the Royal Montserrat Defence Force.

My second personal contact with Mr. John came in 1993 when I left the Office of the Auditor General to join the team at the Ministry of Finance as Principal Assistant Secretary. He welcomed me with a broad smile and introduced me to the staff. After that I knew the honeymoon period was over. He took me into his office, gave a brief speech about the Ministry and the workload and then opened a large file on his desk. He then said, “... you have been around the civil service long enough. This is the correspondence file. You will sit with me over the next week while I deal with the various correspondences and documents. The following week you will deal with the file by yourself and I will review what you have done. Thereafter, it is your responsibility to deal with all matters in the file including referring and following up on the documents and correspondences sent to officers for appropriate action.” That was my introduction to the Ministry. I had to learn fast because there were always deadlines to be met. I also learnt
over time that he had so many other things to do that he did not have time to spoon feed me anyway. When he corrected my work, it went something like this, “...boss man you did good”. He went away did it over and said, “this is how I would have done it.” The reality is that if he had to redraft my work, it would have been of a poor quality but he made feel good. I would later measure my progress against the number of corrections made – and after all I needed to keep my pride intact.

Mr. C T John went to the Ministry of Finance as Financial Secretary in January 1989 from the position of Permanent Secretary, Development. His first major challenge was coping with the problems caused by the passage of Hurricane Hugo and the chaos that ensued. His second challenge would have been the volcanic crisis which started in 1995 – the effects of which have lasted over 17 years. It was a crisis that profoundly changed the lives of many of our people and one which placed extraordinary levels of pressure on the Ministries of Finance & Economic Development especially in sourcing and allocating resources to fund the overwhelming needs of the island.

These were the times when sleep was a luxury and to ensure that you were always ready to respond, you were given beepers, mobile phones and handheld radios that you were required to keep near at all times. It was a time when the loss and needs of people were far greater than the resources that were available. It was a time when no matter how you allocate the funding available there were groups of persons, with legitimate needs, that could not be met. This often incurred the wrath of many, even colleagues. In this environment there was little that the Ministry of Finance and government generally could do without being criticized. I dare say that he managed the pressure that came from these circumstances extremely well and surely the ‘wounds’ from that period did not affect his work or his approach.

He was the right man for the time. He had tremendous energy and the sort of man who moved so quickly that he would reach his desk before his car engine shuts down. He had good command and control skills which are necessary in times of uncertainty and disorder. He was able to bring key officers together and
assign tasks appropriately to deliver whatever was required at the time. He certainly worked well with his team in Finance and also the team in the Development Unit where he was the Permanent Secretary earlier.

The staff at the Ministry will remember him fondly as a firm leader, highly focused and driven to achieve anything that was binding on him or where he has given a commitment. He understood the rules and laws of the public service. He had an excellent memory recalling examples and precedents from earlier times. He was a great teacher with an eye for detail. In all of this he had a great sense of humor which makes you, for a moment; forget the pressure of the office. A very important trait that I admire was that he knew when to say, “I don’t know and asked for assistance.” As trivial as this may sound, this is as essential response especially when time and quality matters.

We at the Ministry have no doubt that he will be missed but as Henry Longfellow wrote –

Lives of great men all remind us  
We can make our lives sublime,  
And, departing leave behind us  
Footprints in the sands of time.

There is no doubt he has left behind his footprint for us to remember fondly or initiate debate. But surely his life did not pass uneventful and we cannot argue that he did not make a significant contribution to Montserrat that is worth our celebration.

We wish you a pleasant journey C. T. and condolences to the bereaved family on behalf of the Ministry of Finance & Economic Management and my own family.

Thank you all.