

The Chief Servant of UWI

Congratulations to Mr Robert Bermudez, the new UWI Chancellor.

Wonderful is the way that I would describe the statements made by Mr Bermudez as he addressed the audience at his inauguration on Saturday last at St Augustine. He has called himself Chief Servant of the University of the West Indies.

Among his other statements Mr Bermudez said: "This Daaga Auditorium named in the memory of a rebellious slave brings to mind a rebel of my time Makandal Daaga, a man who chose to identify himself as the Chief Servant, a description that resonates deeply with me as it captures what I believe good leadership to be."

The mention of Makandal Daaga, just one year after his death, should remind those who knew him about his accomplishment.

For those who may not know the title Chief Servant was first used by Tubal Uriah Butler.

Now the time has come for the nation to be given a comprehensive understanding of what Chief Servant Makandal Daaga had achieved.

This would mean that the work of two organisations that he founded, Pegasus (1962) and NJAC (1969), should become more familiar to the current generation.

Mr Bermudez also said: "(UWI) must never forget our core pur-



Former mayor of Port-of-Spain Louis Lee Sing, left, and new UWI Chancellor Robert Bermudez, following Saturday's inauguration ceremony.
PICTURE ANDRE ALEXANDER

pose, the education of our youth, we cannot just produce certified young people, we must produce energised citizens with a social conscience motivated to change their world, the university must encourage student activism, discourse on the issues of the day and the freedom to develop their minds outside of the strict confines of their studies."

Such was essence of what Daaga inspired as a student leader.

Daaga (then Geddes Granger) entered UWI in 1966, shortly after he demitted office as Executive Director of Pegasus and became President of the Students Guild

one year later.

As President, the future Chief Servant's office was at the Guild Hall, where the Daaga Auditorium now stands.

The late Keith Smith, then President of the Student's Guild, re-named the Guild Hall and called it Daaga Hall because of the Chief Servant's role in placing UWI students at the centre of Caribbean life.

It is incorrect to state that the building was named for the 19th Century hero, even though the original Daaga certainly deserves the accolade.

Before it was burnt down in

1980 Guild Hall (Daaga Hall) was the centre of student activity and activism on the Campus.

It was where students met daily.

It housed the student's cafeteria, the students' recreational centre and it was the staging area for many student dances and performing arts productions.

Outside the hall there was an almond tree, which at one time became the "Philosopher's Tree" where there were ongoing discussions about all the issues of the day during student liming.

In 1968, from that iconic building, Daaga motivated the St Augustine Student's Guild to start out-reach programmes such as the John John Community Project where students taught Math, English and History at St Paul Street.

Daaga led discussions regarding the idea that the University is the Student and that students should be represented on all administrative bodies at UWI such as the Senate, Council and Finance and General Purpose Committees.

In August 1968, student participation became institutionalised at an Inter Campus meeting of Students Guild Presidents.

Beside Daaga (St Augustine), the other two presidents were Ralph Gonzalves (Mona) and Darlington Smith (Cave Hill).

The Chief Servant was there during the 1967-CARIFTA debate between UWI economists and local private sector.

In October 1968, Daaga led the student's demonstrations when the Jamaican government banned Dr Walter Rodney from returning to his post after attending the Black Writers Conference, Canada.

The next year Daaga led more student's demonstrations against the British invasion of Anguilla. He also led the protests against the refusal of UWI to re-appoint the Guyanese lecturer, Dr Clive Thomas and Trinidadian Dr Andrew Camacho.

Daaga and the students were there during the bus strike.

Furthermore, when the West Indian governments had virtually abandoned students who were imprisoned in Montreal Canada during the Sir George Williams University matter, it was Daaga who mobilised students to defend their fellow West Indians.

As a direct consequence NJAC was formed at the Guild Hall on the 26th February 1969.

Mr Bermudez has honoured the Chief Servant Makandal Daaga appropriately.

I repeat that the new UWI Chancellor has stated that Chief Servant is "a description that resonates deeply with me as it captures what I believe good leadership to be."

Aiyegororo Ome
Chairman
NJAC