

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES*Friday, October 18, 1991*

The House met at 1.40 p.m.

PRAYERS[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]**PAPERS LAID**

1. Annual Report of the Registrar of Trade Unions in respect of the year 1990. [*The Minister of Labour, Employment and Manpower Resources (Dr. The Hon. Albert Richards)*]
2. Report of the Auditor General on the accounts of Trinidad and Tobago Methanol Company Limited for the year ended December 30, 1989. [*The Minister of Finance (Hon. Selby Wilson)*]

*To be referred to the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee.***SPECIAL SELECT COMMITTEE****Shiva Dharam Sabha (Inc'n) Bill**

Dr. Anslem St. George (*San Fernando West*): Mr. Speaker, I beg to present the report of the Special Select Committee of the House of Representatives appointed to consider and report on a bill entitled "An Act respecting the Shiva Dharam Sabha of Trinidad and Tobago."

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS**Oropouche Constituency****(Visits)**

67. *The following question stood on the Order Paper in the name of Mr. Trevor Sudama (Oropouche):*

- (a) Could the Minister of Works, Infrastructure and Decentralization state why he refuses to respond to my letter to him of June 3, 1991, requesting him to have on-site visit with me of certain critical highways, drainage and bridges problems in my constituency?
- (b) Could the Minister state what is the policy of his Government with respect to requests from duly elected representatives of the people in the House of Representatives for the addressing of problems brought to the attention of the Government?

- (c) Could the Minister state why he visits the constituency of Oropouche at the instance of those who are not duly elected representatives but chooses to ignore the duly elected representative when such requests are made by the latter?

The Minister of Industry, Enterprise and Tourism (Dr. The Hon. Bhoendradatt Tewarie): Mr. Speaker, we request a deferral of this particular question.

Question, by leave, deferred.

**Foreign Debt
(Rescheduling)**

68. Mr. Trevor Sudama (*Oropouche*) asked the Minister of Finance:

- (a) Could the Minister state when the debt rescheduling arrangements with foreign governments and commercial institutions, will expire and, after that date, what will be the annual foreign debt that this country will be required to pay in the ensuing five years?
- (b) Could the Minister state whether his Government intends to negotiate any further rescheduling agreements with foreign governments and international commercial institutions?
- (c) Could the Minister state whether his Government intends to incur any additional foreign indebtedness before the expiry of his term of office?

The Minister of the Environment and National Service (Hon. Lincoln Myers): Mr. Speaker, the answer to this question should appropriately be placed in the context of the circumstances which, in the first instance, dictated the need for the rescheduling of the external debt of this country.

When this Government came into office in December 1986, foreign exchange reserves were at a critically low level and being depleted at an alarmingly rapid rate. Projections undertaken in 1987 showed that substantial financing gaps had already emerged in our balance of payments and this threatened to persist. These gaps could no longer be financed by the drawdowns of the external reserves of the country. The position was further aggravated by the bunching of external debt repayments on short and medium-term loans for the period 1988 to 1992.

At the end of 1988, our external debt amounted to US \$2.4 billion and the creditor composition was as follows:-

| | US \$million | per cent |
|------------------------------|---------------------|-----------------|
| Commercial Bank Creditors | 821 | 34 |
| Official Bilateral Creditors | 308 | 13 |
| Multilateral Creditors | 218 | 9 |
| Private Placement Bonds | 654 | 27 |
| Financial Leases | 278 | 12 |
| Other Residual Creditors | 122 | 5 |

Over the period 1988 to 1992 a substantial financing debt, approximating US \$1.5 billion, was being projected. It was therefore necessary for Trinidad and Tobago to seek rescheduling arrangements with its foreign creditors. Such heavy repayments would have seriously impaired the capacity of the economy to resume growth. The postponement of these payments would allow the country to maintain an adequate level of imports thereby forestalling disruptions of the productive sector. As a result, a precipitous rise in unemployment would be prevented and the country would be kept supplied with essential goods such as pharmaceuticals, foodstuffs, raw materials and capital goods. In the light of these considerations, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago entered into negotiations with its external creditors with a view to rescheduling its maturities falling due within the period 1988 to 1992.

Loans from commercial institutions totalling approximately US \$446 million or 54 per cent of the total commercial debt of \$821 million were rescheduled.

Official loans with Paris Club creditors, amounting to US \$278 million or 90 per cent of official debt were rescheduled and an instalment/sale agreement amounting to US \$69 million or 29 per cent of financial leases was rescheduled with a syndicate of Japanese leasing companies.

The debt relief under this rescheduling operations provided for the postponement of payment in the sum of US \$793 million in the period 1988 to 1992. This represented only 33 per cent of the external debt outstanding at the end of 1988. A considerable proportion of the debt was excluded, that is, debt that was still being disbursed and debt which was secured by assets including productive offtake arrangements. Additionally, it had become normal practice to exclude private placement bonds and a number of these maturities were falling in the period 1990 to 1994 as follows:

| Year | US \$ million |
|-------------|----------------------|
|-------------|----------------------|

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| | |
|------|-----|
| 1990 | 119 |
| 1991 | 49 |
| 1992 | 138 |
| 1993 | 84 |
| 1994 | 94 |

1.50 p.m.

The Government always anticipated that the nature of the rescheduling operations with the high level of ineligible debt for rescheduling would have resulted in an increase in the debt service commitment to a level, which while uncomfortable, would have been sustainable, based on a level of medium-term projections.

It is to be noted that the bulk of this debt was negotiated prior to 1987. Accordingly, the debt service before rescheduling and after rescheduling, since 1988, is as follows:-

| Year | Before Rescheduling | After Rescheduling |
|------|---------------------|--------------------|
| | TT \$billion | TT \$billion |
| 1988 | 1.832 | 1.500 |
| 1989 | 2.588 | 1.539 |
| 1990 | 3.077 | 1.908 |
| 1991 | 2.333 | 1.008 |
| 1992 | 3.022 | 2.746 |
| 1993 | 3.043 | 3.043 |
| 1994 | 2.580 | 2.580 |
| 1995 | 2.291 | 2.921 |
| 1996 | 1.942 | 1.942 |

From 1992, debt service includes payment to the IMF. From 1993, the figures are the same because there is no rescheduling.

These debt service projections are based on an evaluation of the country's medium-term balance of payments which were undertaken by the Ministry of Finance in March, 1991. The evaluation was based on a number of assumptions:

- i. That the average price of crude petroleum in 1991 will be US \$19 per barrel.
- ii. The average price of crude will decline to around US \$18 in 1992 and then rise over subsequent years at an average rate of four per cent per year.
- iii. A rise in imports associated with the exclusion of projects in the energy sector would create a current account deficit in 1992/1993.
- iv. The current account deficit will be covered in 1994/1996 with the coming on stream of new export products associated with energy investment.
- v. The current account gap in 1992/1993 would be covered by net public and private capital flows despite:
 - (a) The heavy repayment schedule of private placement maturities in the Japanese market; and
 - (b) The repurchase obligations to the Fund over the period 1992/1996.
- vi. Net public and private capital flows will emanate from the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank principally for the energy sectors, bilateral creditors and private creditors.

Total estimated from these sources are as follows:

In 1992, US \$329 million; 1993, US \$315 million; 1994, US \$230 million; 1995, US \$210 million; 1996, US \$185 million.

- viii. It must be clearly understood that any change in those fundamental assumptions would justify a review of our projections and this Government would take the appropriate and responsible actions to ensure that the financial position of the country is not impaired.
- ix. In the light of the foregoing background the following specific answers are provided to the questions raised:
 1. The debt rescheduling arrangements with foreign governments expired on March 31, 1991, while similar arrangements with international commercial institutions would expire on August 31, 1992.

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For the syndicate of Japanese leasing companies the agreement will expire in December 1992. This country's foreign debt payments over the 1992 to 1996 period are as follows:

| Year | Foreign Debt (TT \$) |
|-------------|-----------------------------|
| 1992 | 2.7 billion |
| 1993 | 2.43 billion |
| 1994 | 2.5 billion |
| 1995 | 2.29 billion |
| 1996 | 1,942 million |

On the basis of our current medium-term projections, a further rescheduling of debt with foreign governments and commercial institutions will not be necessary. It should be pointed out that if the underlying assumptions or exogenous factors change in an unfavourable direction, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago is prepared to take whatever responsible actions it deems necessary to ensure that the financial position of the country remains secure and sound.

Government has negotiated financing for projects in the energy sector. To date, agreement has been signed for only part of the financing needed. The remaining portion for which an agreement is yet to be signed amounts to US \$82 million. Another loan agreement for the sum of US \$4 million will be concluded shortly with the Inter-American Development Bank. This loan is to finance an environmental protection and rehabilitation project. The projected draw down of all these loans is incorporated in our external debt projections which are estimated to fall from US \$2,507 million at the end of 1990 to US \$1,711 million at the end of 1996.

Mr. Sudama: Mr. Speaker, I just want to thank the Hon. Minister for the very comprehensive nature of the reply and also to tell him I am very intrigued about his assumptions made for the inflows of foreign exchange. What I would want to ask him, although this was not part of the original question, and if he has the information: in view of the heavy debt services outlaid from the year 1992 onwards, would he tell me what percentage of Government revenues they constitute and what percentage of projected exports, these heavy debt service payments for 1991 onward constitute?

Mr. Myers. Mr. Speaker, as the Member rightly said, this was not part of the original question so we are not quite prepared for that. I would want,

however, to say that the assumptions which we have put forward are quite reasonable in the circumstances. If he wishes to pose another question at any time, I will be happy to answer.

ORDER OF BUSINESS

The Minister of Industry, Enterprise and Tourism (Dr. The Hon. Bhoehdradatt Tewarie): Mr. Speaker, I seek leave of this honourable House to proceed with resolutions 6, 7 and 8 under Private Business and to afterwards commence debate on bill No. 2 under Government Business which is the Drug Bill and, some time during the proceeding at a later stage, to deal with the committee stage of the Telecommunications Bill.

Question put and agreed to.

REBIRTH HOUSE (INC'N) BILL

Adoption

Acting Minister of Education (Hon. Oswald Hem Lee): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that this House adopt the report of the Special Select Committee of the House appointed to consider and report on a private bill for the incorporation of the Rebirth House and matters incidental thereto.

Question proposed.

Question put and agreed to.

Report adopted.

Question put and agreed to, That the bill be now read the third time.

Bill accordingly read the third time and passed.

2.00 p.m.

CHURCH OF SPIRITUAL METAPHYSICS (INC'N) BILL

Adoption

Acting Minister of Education (Hon. Oswald Hem Lee): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that this House adopt the report of the Special Select Committee of the House of Representatives appointed to consider and report on a private bill for the incorporation of the Church of Spiritual Metaphysics and for matters incidental thereto.

Question proposed.

Church of Spiritual Metaphysics Bill

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Question put and agreed to.

Report adopted.

Question put and agreed to, That the bill be now read the third time and passed.

Bill accordingly read the third time and passed.

SHIVA DHARAM SABHA (INC'N) BILL

Adoption

Dr. Anselm St. George (*San Fernando West*): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that this House adopt the report of a Special Select Committee of the House of Representatives appointed to consider and report on a private bill entitled an act respecting Shiva Dharam Sabha of Trinidad and Tobago.

Question proposed.

Question put and agreed to.

Report adopted.

Question put and agreed to, That the bill be now read the third time.

Bill accordingly read the third time and passed.

ORDER OF BUSINESS

Mr. Raymond Palackdharrysingh (*Naparima*): Mr. Speaker, I just want to bring to your attention that the last time we were in the House the Telecommunications Bill was before us and then it was indicated to us that the Child Services Care Bill would be debated today. We come to the House and just out of the blue this bill is now going to be debated.

What I want to indicate, Mr. Speaker, time and again we have had this problem and I hope that the Government would be more courteous to the Opposition in giving us time to study the bills.

The Minister of Industry, Enterprise and Tourism (Dr. The Hon. Bhoendradatt Tewarie): Mr. Speaker, we just sought leave of this honourable House to deal with the committee stage of the Telecommunications Bill at a later stage in the proceedings. But more than that, Mr. Speaker, the Drug Bill has been on the Order Paper for some months.

DANGEROUS DRUGS BILL

Order for second reading read.

The Attorney General (Hon. Anthony Smart): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that the bill to provide for the control of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances and to make provision for the confiscation of proceeds of drug trafficking and other provisions in connection with drug trafficking and matters connected therewith, be read a second time.

Mr. Speaker, this bill has had a long circuitous passage through this Parliament, and it is still passing through the Parliament. It was introduced in 1989 and was passed in this House. It then went to the other place where it was being considered in committee when the Parliament was prorogued in October of 1989, and it therefore lapsed.

It was reintroduced in the other place in 1990, and sent back to committee in its original form. The unfortunate incidents of July 27, last year, put an end to the deliberations of the committee and the Parliament was prorogued in November 1990 and the bill once more lapsed.

It was then reintroduced one more time in an altered form. It had the benefit of the deliberations of the other place. It was reintroduced again in 1991, in the other place, and was passed, I believe, unanimously in the other place, and is now before us.

The purpose of this bill, Mr. Speaker, is to consolidate the law as it now stands. I refer to the 1961 Act, dealing with narcotics and psychotropic substances as amended by the 1985 Act. So that, in the first instance, what we are doing is consolidating those two Acts. In addition, we are seeking—and this is the most important part of the bill—to introduce new provisions for the confiscation of the proceeds and the assets of convicted drug traffickers.

In the bill in its original form, when it first came here in 1989, we had sought to introduce a concept of liable persons. In effect, what that bill was doing was seeking to confiscate the proceeds of drug trafficking, but in circumstances where in some cases person were not actually convicted of drug trafficking. On that occasion there was tremendous debate, not only in this honourable House, but throughout the country. The issues relating to this piece of legislation were ventilated high and low; on the television, on the radio, in the newspapers and everybody had an opportunity to say his piece on this legislation. I am stating that the bill before us today has had the benefit of views, as expressed by everybody or any person who has had an interest enough to make his views heard on this bill. So that is the reason, Mr. Speaker, why it enjoyed easy passage in the other place.

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So that we are seeking to consolidate and, also, as I said, to introduce provisions for the confiscation of the proceeds of drug trafficking. The important difference from the bill that first came is that these provisions for confiscation would relate only to those persons who had been convicted of drug trafficking offences.

We have also, Mr. Speaker, removed the clause from the earlier bill that provided for a joint anti-narcotic committee. We believe that such a committee can be set up administratively and there is no need to introduce such a committee in the legislation. The committee, in fact, would comprise persons who would be able to bring their expertise and their training to bear on this very severe problem of drug trafficking, and I refer to persons in the Defence Force, persons in the Customs, persons in the Ministry of Finance, and of course the Police Service. As I said, such a committee could be set up administratively.

Mr. Speaker, the important part of this bill on which I have spent some time, has to do with the matter of confiscation, because the whole point of the new provisions of the bill is to take profit out of drug trafficking—that is the whole point of it—to take the profit out of drug trafficking. The provisions give circumstances in which a confiscation order can be made. A confiscation order involves the confiscation of property of a drug trafficker after he has been convicted. Where a person has been convicted either in the Magistrate's Court, or in the assizes on a drug trafficking offence, the High Court must, before sentencing him, determine whether he has ever benefited from drug trafficking. If he has, the court must impose a confiscation order to deprive him of his proceeds. It is not necessary for him to receive any payment or award for the offence to which he has just been convicted. All past payments or rewards for trafficking of which he may or may not have been convicted and which may have taken place before or after the commencement of this bill, if it is passed, are also taken into account as payments or rewards received in connection with drug trafficking by others. If he has so benefited, a confiscation order will be made.

The order is to be made before the defendant is sentenced for the offence for which he has been convicted. In making the confiscation order, at least in imposing a sentence, the court will not have regard to the amount of any confiscation order that has been made. So, in other words, this confiscation order is separate and apart from any sentence that may be imposed for the actual offence of drug trafficking.

The bill goes on to indicate, Mr. Speaker, what the amount of the confiscation order must be. The court will have to assess the value of the proceeds of the drug trafficking, the value of payments or rewards the drug trafficker received in connection with drug trafficking, not simply his net profit once his outgoings have been deducted.

That exercise, Mr. Speaker, of trying to determine the value of the proceeds of drug trafficking would be a difficult one, because the prosecutor would then have to look into the drug trafficker's assets and try to come up with a figure. To overcome the difficulties inherent in establishing precisely what part of an offender's wealth represents the proceeds of drug trafficking, the court makes certain assumptions. Except where those assumptions are shown to be incorrect in the defendant's case, the court makes certain assumptions. The assumptions are that any property which the defendant held at the time of his conviction, or at any time since derived from drug trafficking, that any property transferred to him on or after the date, which preceded by six years the institution of the present proceedings would similarly derive.

So, in other words, what the court assumes is that once you are convicted of drug trafficking, any property that you may have owned for a period up to six years before you were actually charged is assumed to be property derived from drug trafficking. There are provisions in the Act for the defendant to prove otherwise. So that where an assumption is made it is up to the defendant to show that, in fact, property derived over the period of six years before he was charged was not property derived from the proceeds of drug trafficking.

There are also procedures, Mr. Speaker, for determining the amount of the confiscation order and for providing information to the court about the defendant's financial dealings. They are all set out in the bill. Some of the provisions are extremely complicated once you read them, but once you read them a second or a third time, they begin to make sense.

Mr. Speaker, there are also procedures in the bill for assessing what is realizable property. In considering what property may be available for realization to satisfy the confiscation order, the court is to take account of all property held by the defendant himself, whether legitimately or illegitimately acquired, and any that

is in the hands of third parties to whom the defendant has made a gift. The total amount that may be realized from these assets is the total value of the defendant's property, less total amounts of any obligations having priority, plus the value of

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any gifts that he has given. The amount that may be realized from any individual third party is limited to the value of the gift he has received. Such value is to be determined by the court on the same basis as the value of payments or rewards for drug trafficking.

Mr. Speaker, on the question of enforcement of a confiscation order, under clause 36 of the bill, once a confiscation order is made it will set out what the value is, and the amount of money that the convicted drug trafficker is supposed to pay in respect of the property that he has acquired illegally. Once the court makes that determination, if the convicted drug trafficker refused to make a payment of the amount, there are provisions in the bill for him to serve certain periods in prison, depending on the amount of the confiscation order. For a small amount, there would be a short period of imprisonment, and the period increases as the amount increases. The bill sets out what those periods are.

There are additional enforcement procedures, Mr. Speaker, under the bill. The bill provides for the appointment of a receiver. Under clause 40 of the bill, the prosecutor or the DPP may apply to the High Court, seeking the court's involvement in the enforcement process. Such an application may be made where a confiscation order has been imposed and is not subject to an appeal. In those cases, the prosecutor may apply to the court to appoint a receiver. There are provisions that determine how the receiver is to act in these circumstances.

Mr. Speaker, there are also provisions in the bill that allow for action to be taken in advance of, or during the trial to ensure that assets remain available to satisfy any confiscation orders that may be imposed on the defendant, as well as after the trial, to safeguard property until enforcement procedures take effect.

Two of the avenues provided under the bill, Mr. Speaker, are restraint and charging orders. Applications for either may be made *ex parte* by the Director of Public Prosecutions to a judge in chambers. In other words, during the course of an investigation, even before someone is charged with a drug trafficking offence, if the investigators believe and satisfy a court that the person about to be charged is likely to get rid of his assets, there is a provision for the DPP to go before the court—so that even before a person is charged, during the course of an investigation, and also after a person has been charged, even before he has been convicted—to ask the court to make a restraining order preventing the suspect from getting rid of his property, or a charging order, which is putting a charge on the property to encumber the property. Of course, there are provisions in the bill to provide for compensation in the event that at the end of the day, the person is

not found guilty or the person is not charged at all. There is investigation so that it is not necessary to charge the person; there are provisions in the bill which provide for compensation.

So, Mr. Speaker, there are also provisions in this bill that give additional powers of investigation to the authorities. There are provisions for the court to make orders to make material available to the investigating officers. It says:

“Where there are reasonable grounds for suspecting that a given person has carried on or benefited from drug trafficking, the police may apply to a judge in chambers for an order under section 49 requiring specified material or material of a particular description to be made available to assist the investigation or for a relative or associate of the suspected person to make a statutory declaration, identifying property belonging to the suspected person. Before granting such an order, the judge must be satisfied, not only of the reasonable grounds for suspecting the specified person involved in drug trafficking, but also that the material is likely to be of substantial value to the drug trafficking investigation for the purpose of which the application is made.”

So, that is an important consideration. The judge must be satisfied that the material required is likely to be of substantial value to the investigation.

There is also additional authority under the bill for searches to be carried out in a number of circumstances where access to material may be needed, but where it may not be feasible or appropriate to apply for an order under clause 49. These provisions allow for the investigating officers to have authority to search for material in certain circumstances.

There is also a provision, Mr. Speaker, to require certain Government departments to disclose information. This is under clause 52. It says that in respect of information held by government departments, clause 52 provides an additional procedure enabling the court to order disclosure of material likely to facilitate restraint orders or charging orders or realization of property under clauses 38 to 40.

Mr. Speaker, what is important, also, in this bill, is that it provides for the creation of two new offences. The first is the offence of assisting drug traffickers. The offence set out in clause 48 is aimed at those who assist another to retain the benefit of drug trafficking, whether by laundering the proceeds, concealing them,

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or removing them from the jurisdiction or in any other way. That is clause 48, and that deals with the whole question of laundering.

The offence is defined in terms of entering into or being otherwise concerned with an arrangement. The phrase "being otherwise concerned" broadens the scope of the offence and may, for example, bring within its range, people who advise the trafficker on the best way of investing or disposing of his proceeds. This sort of arrangement with which clause 48 is concerned is one whereby another person is helped to retain or control his drug trafficking proceeds, or whereby another's drug trafficking proceeds are used to secure funds for him, or to acquire property for his benefit.

There is a crucial mental element, Mr. Speaker. In order to commit the offence, the person entering into the arrangement must know, or at least suspect that the person he is assisting is or has been involved in drug trafficking or has benefited from drug trafficking. It should be noted that it is not sufficient that the person assisting should have received payments in respect of another's drug trafficking activities. He need not ever have handled the drugs, nor need the person assisted have been convicted of any drug trafficking offence. If the person assisting him suspects him of involvement in trafficking, that is enough. Because the laundering offence is itself a drug trafficking offence by virtue of the definition of drug trafficking in the bill, it will be an offence, knowingly, to assist a launderer to retain the benefits of his own proceeds of laundering.

So that, Mr. Speaker, in addition to the new offence of drug trafficking, there is also an offence of prejudicing an investigation under clause 53, and that would deal with situations where a person tips off a suspected drug trafficker that his affairs are under investigation.

Mr. Speaker, these provisions in the bill are provisions which, by and large, follow the provisions of the Drug Trafficking Offences Act, 1986, in England. There has been some debate, or the point of view that these provisions, following closely on the English provisions, ought not to have been in the bill. There is some suggestion that we should have made up our own bill, in other words, but there is good reason for following the precedent as set in England.

It was the English, Mr. Speaker, who initiated the convention against the illicit trafficking in narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances. It is a UN convention that came into being in 1988. It was the British who engineered and who sponsored that convention by and large, and that convention sets out, in detail, the

kind of legislation that countries, by and large, should enter into to deal with this nefarious act of drug trafficking.

So that, in following the provisions of the English Act, we are seeking, really, to harmonize the legislation to deal with a problem which is worldwide. We are seeking to harmonize our laws relating to matters of trade and foreign investment and so forth, because we are seeking to have closer ties with the Caribbean. The same principle is being applied insofar as drug trafficking is concerned. Drug trafficking is an international crime, it transcends borders, national borders, and in order to deal with it, one has to co-operate with countries all over the world.

2.30 p.m.

In fact, one would notice, Mr Speaker, that the frequency with which drug traffickers coming from Trinidad and Tobago are being apprehended in foreign ports is increasing. That is because there is tremendous co-operation going on between the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and the governments of England, the United States and Venezuela, in attempting to deal with this nefarious activity. If we are putting on the statute books, a law which would assist in dealing with this international problem, which would harmonize the whole legal milieu in order to deal with it, I think that is a progressive and good step.

The provisions of this bill, as I said, comply with the provisions of the UN Convention Against Illicit Trafficking in Narcotic and Psychotropic Substances. So that we are taking a step forward by the introduction of this bill. That is only one aspect of the bill. I have dealt strictly with legal issues of this bill. I am sure other Members of the Government will deal with other aspects of this problem, because it is not only a legal problem. One has to deal with the problem of supply, the problem of demand, and the problem of rehabilitation of those persons who have suffered as a result of the use of dangerous drugs.

My contribution here today is simply to set out what the law is and to indicate also, before I take my seat, that this bill requires a three-fifths majority because it seeks to derogate from the provisions of sections 4 and 5 of the Constitution and it will, therefore, require a special majority.

I have no doubt that in the debate that will follow, even though a number of side issues, I am sure, will be raised, at the end of the day, all of us in this House will support this piece of legislation which has been long overdue but which finally has come to this House in a form that will be acceptable. I therefore have great pleasure in commending this bill to this honourable House.

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Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Question proposed.

Mr. Panday: Mr. Speaker, I give way to my young colleague. I am sure what he has to say will be of extreme importance.

Mr. Jenson Fox (*Port of Spain North*): Mr. Speaker, truly, I am full of disappointments, sometimes. Thank you very much, Leader of the Opposition.

I want to throw the first side issue in this matter here before us today. The fact is that this bill has been brought forward, pulled back; it is here before us again, and there are true concerns in this nation today. I have not heard the hon. Attorney General advance one of the most fundamental aspects of dealing with the question of drugs in Trinidad and Tobago, that is, each and every one of us in this country can point out where a drug den is, and who the drug pushers are. I am sure that there are Members of Parliament sitting here today, who know who these drug pushers are. I know some of them very well. You talk to the police—and I understand their problems too—but what is done? This is not something new. This is something that has been happening for the past 20 years, when marijuana first came on the scene, then we had mandrax or something like that; now we have the hard cocaine in our land.

The question is: Do we have the will to challenge this disease that is infecting our land? Do we have the will to remove this disease from the streets? Do we have the will to protect our young people, truly? I am not convinced at all because, as I said, anybody in Trinidad and Tobago can tell you where the drugs are, and who is pushing them, on their “block”.

I look here and I notice that in the preamble, section 54 seeks to provide protection for people who inform against disclosure of their identity. What is the point being made here? Somebody who comes forward and says, “I know there are drugs at the corner”, the law is now saying that it will protect that person. To my mind, that is a masquerade. The truth lies right here in this Parliament where parliamentarians know who the drug pushers are, and where the drugs are.

I want to ask the question today: Do we, as a responsible Government, have the will to proceed in a particular direction, to enforce the law in such a rigid way that we will move in on these drug dens? This bill will not be worth the paper on which it is written unless we have that will to move forward. We can do everything. We can seize people's property; we can threaten them; we can expose ourselves. But the question must be asked: Why has the police force of Trinidad

and Tobago, backed by the gut-will of the Government of the day, not been able to move in on these drug dens? That raises all sorts of questions. It raises the question of whether within a national police force—I do not mean to tarnish the image of the police, but there are questions that must be asked and answered—there is direct involvement in supporting drug pushers on the “block”. It goes further, and the question has to be asked, and must be asked, whether people are being backed politically; whether there are political forces in the midst, who cover and provide protection for drug pushers.

I do not mean to go into an area in which I do not have the authority, but quite clearly, Mr. Speaker, when I hear people saying that they wrote letters of recommendation based strictly on friendship and they did not know that these letters were being used in an attempt to protect nationals of Trinidad and Tobago who are before courts in a foreign land, I challenge that. I challenge it simply because it is a known fact that the US Drug Enforcement Agency has been working very closely with the police in Trinidad and Tobago. I cannot understand how a prominent national of Trinidad and Tobago is arrested in the United States, brought before the courts, and information which flows through INTERPOL and the Drug Enforcement Agency in the United States, back to the police here in Trinidad and Tobago on a daily basis; information which is sought on one side of the border or the next side, assistance by both police forces—are we to believe that our police force, at the most senior level in the country, was not made aware that this national of Trinidad and Tobago, a prominent citizen, was before the courts? I would have thought that certainly if that information was brought forward—

Hon. Member: Ignorance.

Mr. Fox: He is right. There seems to be much ignorance of late. If that information had been advanced, and to my mind, should have been advanced to the police in Trinidad and Tobago, then certainly the next person in line who would have been informed of that situation would have been the Minister of National Security. If he can stand here today and say that he did not know, then God help us. That proves my point. How will we remove the drugs from the street? If he cannot protect his fellow colleagues in this land from making fools of themselves,

then God help us. We will not be able to remove the drugs off the streets of Trinidad and Tobago. A lot of nonsense has been taking place in this country, a lot of cover.

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2.40 p.m.

Recently we had a situation where I brought forward an issue with old-age pension cheques that have not been served on people for the past seven years. When the matter was advanced the goodly Minister stood up in public and said, 'well, you know, we cannot always get these things in grip in time,' or words to that effect. I asked the question: What is time, two months, three months or seven years? Well if seven years is the situation, that is not enough. That relates to the kind of hood and crook attitude we have had in this country for many years and which continued during the past five years in terms of dealing with the drug issue in Trinidad and Tobago.

Our citizens have been destroyed. The young people in this country have been made to look like invalids, like cripples. I am scared. I wonder how many Members of this House walk through Port of Spain and see naked young people walking through the streets. We talk about relieving the vagrancy problem; we talk about taking the destitutes off the streets and there has been all sorts of "ole talk", window-dressing, but our young people walk the streets naked and not a man or woman in authority in this land moves a serious finger to stop that.

How did these young people get on the streets in that manner? Did their parents throw them out? The jail system was not working so they are back on the streets? They cannot find money to buy clothes? How did these young people get on the streets, naked as they were born and no one is concerned in picking them up? There have been all sorts of laws advanced in terms of how we are going to deal with that. These are people who suffer. Mr. Speaker, do you understand why we cannot make progress? Members on the Government benches do not pay attention when serious, progressive statements are made in the House so they grumble and mumble among themselves. I am saying that the vast majority of young people on the streets of Trinidad and Tobago are people who have been affected by drugs, people who have had on the freedom on their blocks to accept and take drugs all because the will is not there to deal with the problem where it is, which is right on the block.

I ask any police officer in this land today who has children in Trinidad and Tobago, I ask any parliamentarian in this House today who has children in Trinidad and Tobago, if they are prepared to continue to allow people to operate on their blocks. A Member in this House some time ago talked about picking up cutlasses and going to the hills or something like that. Challenge me now, because I am challenging every community in this country to wipe out their "drug blocks".

Wipe them out! If the Government cannot do it, and the policemen cannot do it, then the communities are duty-bound right in this country to wipe them out. I ask every citizen in this country to move on those drug-pushers, ban themselves to protect their children because their children and their children's children would end up on the streets of Port of Spain and nobody will cry shame for them.
[Interruption]

Yes, Mr. Leader of the Opposition, we would come here and pass pretty laws which will be written into *Hansard*. They will be documented in pretty black-covered books and placed in the offices of the Government Ministers. Where do we go from here? I want to see something more concrete. I am standing here today and I am saying that I will support anything included in this bill, to remove drugs from the streets, but I do not want my colleagues to come forward again and make fools of themselves in the eyes of the nation. People in this country are not stupid. People will judge us.

Mr. Speaker, we have had heard all sorts of pretty speeches about the protection of our islands. We have heard talk about the coast guard being enhanced, their ships being made ready with the ability to track down drug pushers. Everybody in this country knows that every single day people enter Trinidad and Tobago's territorial waters, whether it is official or unofficial ports, with drugs and we are silent. We talk to each other and say, "You know so and so doing it; you know this one and that one doing it." But it continues and it shows no courage; it shows no strength; it shows no real virtue.

People die every day where drugs are involved. Just recently, we had an incident on the foreshore in my constituency, where supposedly somebody came in from the mainland in a boat with an automatic weapon and sprayed the foreshore with bullets and killed two people—a man and a woman. No big thing. We now have foreign nationals attacking our shores and we talk about being able to protect. So we put our citizens, our children on the road, naked. We know where the drug-pushers are; we expose our shorelands to foreigners who can wage guerilla warfare against our people with sophisticated automatic weapons. Trinidad and Tobago has become a total "free for all". It is a shoot-up now. Every day

somebody gets shot; every day some gang on this side wipes out somebody on the other side. This is a country that we, as the guardians of our democracy, as the pilots of our destiny, are preparing for our children.

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Trinidad and Tobago is a beautiful country. We are blessed with beautiful people, rich in a number of aspects; in some areas much richer than other people and other countries. The one thing we lack is true soul; not just the man in the street, because one has to understand him and maybe excuse him, but one cannot excuse Members of Parliament who draft legislation and come to Parliament and try to hide the truth behind thick documentation of pretty words and do not come forward and stand in this House and confront the matter head-on; provide the type of machinery and training for the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service; enhance their lot; make them feel worthwhile in their jobs; ensure that the procedure of promotions are brought up to level and put in place so that when promotions are due people get them; that officers on the line are truly recognized, not just in police stations but in the community. The community must be able to stand and look at these officers in public and see that they are the officers who are protecting and serving them.

There must be a closeness between the police and its community. That cannot happen; they cannot function and find the will to move in on drug-pushers when the politicians create nice phrases and hide the truth behind it.

The Government of Trinidad and Tobago must—not by talking about a few cars and trucks—recognize that there are serious problems within the police service and those things must be addressed because they relate directly to the functions of the police; their ability to put their lives on the line when it is necessary; where a constable can be bold enough because he knows he would not be overridden in his community, that the public and the politicians will back him so he will move in on that block and take it over. This is his block, his community, move in and take it over. But we are lacking in so many areas. So many areas of truth, we have fallen down on.

I want to see the hon. Attorney General advance positive avenues by the time this bill is passed in this House, that would convince me that our children would not end up on Frederick Street, naked. He does not believe it but I want to tell him it is a real possibility, and if he cannot see it happening in Port of Spain, he ought to take off his glasses because he cannot see with them; have a better look.

I want him to advance avenues in this bill that will convince me that once and for all, when this bill is passed in this House, that I will not see drug dens in my community; that I will know that the police station in my community has the total wherewithal and backing to move on these drug dens, in conjunction with the community.

Yes, the bill supports community effort and that sort of thing. I want to know that by the time this bill is passed in this House, our coast guard will stop that nonsense that happened on the foreshore, where a foreign national can rush our shores with a submachine gun. Not only do that, but kill our nationals and get away, and we hear nothing more about it. I want to know that every single citizen in this country can feel a measure of security, faith, hope—more than anything else—that the children will walk the streets of our cities, towns and villages; will go by the beaches without fear and be able to commit themselves to our streets and not worry about the fact that their children will be exposed to this scourge.

I would hope that the hon. Attorney General will address these matters before the bill is passed. Thank you.

Mr. Arthur Sanderson (*Fyzabad*): Mr. Speaker, it would appear that things are actually changing in Parliament. I rise this afternoon to support this bill.

My colleague, the representative of Port of Spain North—and I am sure other colleagues in various constituencies—would be making very, very startling revelations and also points that the hon. Attorney General should actually look at; not because this is the campaign period, but because the issue which we are dealing with is one of the issues that are actually scorching the earth, not only Trinidad and Tobago. I do not want to take the line of my good colleague for Port of Spain North, because that is a very highly debatable issue.

Mr. Speaker, before continuing, I would like to say that you will recognize from public statements that I am no longer a member of the National Alliance for Reconstruction and that I will now represent my constituents, which is the constituency of Fyzabad, for the remainder of this term, and the upcoming term, as an Independent Member in this House. I do not like to talk about who is going to win, because politicians normally would advance the statement that they all would win but I will let the people decide. They have the final voice in the whole thing. Let the people decide.

3.00 p.m.

This is a well-rounded bill, but we must realize that drug trafficking and drug-users go hand in hand. If there are no users or addicts, there will be no drug trafficking. My contribution in relation to the bill, after having looked at all the legal ramifications which have been put forward in Parts 1-9 is that there are certain things which can actually be put into place, without having to interfere or

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interface with the legal aspect, whether it be three-fifths majority or otherwise, in order to control, reduce or get rid of the hard core issue of the trafficker, if it is implemented.

Before this House some time ago, there was the Child Care Services Bill, 1991. I would like both the Minister of Health—because I see in this bill the Minister of Health would be empowered with certain responsibilities—and also Minister of Social Development and Family Services to know that no matter what bill comes before this House, if it is perceived even within Cabinet, that Ministers want to hold the hog with the responsibility to get rid of a certain thing; and if it is further perceived that there is no co-ordination within ministries to attack the issue, I believe that we are heading in the wrong direction.

Why do I make this point? If one would journey throughout this country, one would recognize that the mules are agents towards the whole thing; they are called drug mules. They come from various classes in the society, especially the poor, black class.

Mr. Sudama: Who is the most recent one?

Mr. Sanderson: I do not want to get into that debate at all. That one is too big.

One would recognize that addicts now use children as a cover-up to support their vice. This is a true statement. This has nothing to do with whether the NAR brings forward a bill, or the PNM or the UNC as an opposition would oppose, or debate the issue. This has to deal with what is the reality outside there.

Sometimes when you travel, be it as a passenger, or as a driver, you would observe many addicts demonstrating to the population at various corners or junctions, that their child or children are in need, and they have the child or children burning in the sun, or wetting in the rain, in order to create an atmosphere to get some form of sympathy. The Trinidadian and Tobagonian, or the Caribbean man—because it happens throughout the Caribbean—is so sympathetic towards the cause which is advanced on many occasions, that he either takes out \$1 or \$5 or whatever he may want to give.

If one would look closer at the situation, one would observe a police officer standing at that junction conducting traffic, whilst the perpetrator carries on his act or trade, using a child or children. Does the Bill deal with something like that? It does not.

My recommendation is very simple. During my term of office in this Parliament and Government, I have recognized that it is not bills in many cases

which need changing or to be introduced. It is simple methods to be put into place and the bureaucracy carries it through. What is wrong with the administration putting into place a new system, for women police officers, in general, to now take a new role—because they are there to protect and serve—to protect children who are used in such a manner by their parents.

You see if we are directed towards getting rid of the addicts, then the traffickers at the end of the day would be eliminated, because what we are dealing with is not a simple situation of getting this bill passed with a three-fifths majority; it is implementing the law after it is passed. Many bills have been passed through this honourable House over 20 to 30 years and they are still there in the statute books, not implemented.

If one looks at the structure of the bill, the ordinary man-in-the street—and I believe I can speak for the ordinary man-in-the-street—would perceive that it was put into place for a certain class in the society, which is the business structure; because when we talk about confiscation, assets and a number of things which have value, and not small value; we are talking about millions and billions. Do you think the small man has such an asset? Do you think confiscation would relate to the man who steals or borrows \$10 to buy a rock or two? That does not apply to him. This applies to a certain class that is now perceived to be running the drug business in this country.

There must be some system within this Bill which would not only protect, but at the same time, lend a hand of support for that person who may now want to walk a new road; some sort of assistance which would interlink with the Child Care Services Bill—we have not voted for it as yet—some form of consideration which would help to tie in the various ministries, be it Health, Family Services, National Security or as the presenter of the bill, the representative for Diego Martin East the hon. Attorney General; there must be an interlocking mechanism because bills on paper are not necessarily the way to solve problems.

3.10 p.m.

When I hear criticisms being levelled at the police service, I want to say that sometimes, without facts, people make criticisms that are not really justified. There are very honest members in the police service who would like to see the right be right. But in any organization, no matter what organization, there is the good and there is also the bad.

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Mr. Speaker, some time ago it was said, “show me the capital of New York” and one would say, “Trinidad” because there is a semblance. In this business of drugs, money talks and the other thing walks. It is not right, if one looks at the situation under which honest police officers operate, you will want to know whether this man is a human being. There are situations, even in the police service, where constables, corporals, sergeants, even in the senior division, know what is to be done. The question is whether the wherewithal is there to carry it through.

I remember in 1989 when the famous or infamous drug report was laid here right here in this Parliament and came up for debate, it was said that the previous regime were the ones who brought the country to the state it was in as a result of drugs. But whatever government is in power, one must look at this thing internationally. The former government was not in Costa Rica; the former government was not in New York, Mexico, Canada. The NAR Government neither is in Costa Rica, Panama, America, wherever. This is an international issue. Pointing fingers at individuals or party does not solve the problem, but once facts are there to deal with the issue, then we should point fingers.

The coast lines in this country that were basically the ports of entry to drug trafficking, prior to 1986, were just manned with skeleton staff. After 1989, with the assistance of the Government of the United States of America, through whatever kind of donation that was made to the Ministry of National Security, vehicles were then handed over to the Government and the Ministry of National Security. By extension, the Government also purchased quite a number of vehicles in order to strengthen stations and divisions that required some form of assistance. But the drug trade still goes on.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that the wealth of experience we have here as Members who represent the voices of their various constituencies, be they representatives who are Ministers, Opposition Members or Independents, the point is, there is a wealth of information, knowledge, and simplistic ideas that are not to be placed in bills, but to be listened to by those in authority and by extension, it should travel through so that the small man in the street would not continue to be the victim of that wicked curse which is now scourging the world.

Again, I want to reiterate and I sincerely ask the Minister of Health, the Minister of Family Services, the Minister of National Security, the Attorney General, the presenter of the bill, to make some co-ordinated effort at a policy that would now recommend to the Minister of National Security that the police service

now look at a new area for the women police division; that addicts or children who are presumed to be taken advantage of as the pawn in order to carry through their vice, that some system be put into place to curb such a situation. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Basdeo Panday (*Couva North*): Mr. Speaker. I want to repeat and reiterate the point made by the hon. Member for Naparima and that is to say that there has got to be some respect for the proceedings of this House. If the House is debating a particular bill, Members ought reasonably to expect that the debate on that bill will continue. I do not believe that there is a single Member in this House who walks with all his documents at all time in respect of all bills which are before the House. That cannot be reasonably expected of a Member of this Parliament. If this Parliament is debating a bill and it goes from one day to the next, it is reasonable to expect that that bill will be debated and Members will prepare for it.

I think we went even further. It was intimated to this House that we shall be continuing another bill when we resume and lo and behold the Leader of Government Business comes before the House today and springs it on us—yes, it is on the Order Paper, I know that—and say “We are going to debate this bill”, and that makes me suspect. I ask: Why did the Minister spring that bill on us now? What is the reason? Mr. Speaker, I am loathe to come to the conclusion but I regret that I have to come to the conclusion that the reason for bringing this bill now is to draw a red herring across the face of the population in the light of the public outrage surrounding what is now known as the “Mansoor letters.” That is the reason for this bill. No decent Minister would violate the conventions, rules and decency of this House in the way that it was done today if there was not an ulterior motive in bringing this bill before the House and I say that is a cover-up. One can expect that from the Member for Caroni East. I had planned to move an amendment when this bill came before the House. I may not be able to do it because I do not walk with all the documents for all the bills that are before the House at all times. I came here to debate the bill the Member indicated would be debated today. I shall debate this bill and I shall give to the House what contribution I can.

3.20 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, the thing that comes uppermost to mind as we begin to debate this Bill today is the fact that our country, Trinidad and Tobago, is teetering on the brink of the abyss into which so many other countries have fallen, and that in

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the eyes of the world our highest public officials appear to be involved in drug trafficking in one way or another; and that is a very sad thing that is happening in our country.

Mr. Speaker, to bring this Bill now, at this particular time, reeks of hypocrisy. It is true the bill has been on the Order Paper and presented to the House before; it went to the Senate, it was defeated, and went back to the Senate and so it has been there for a long time, but to present it now, at this particular time, to jump ahead of other bills, in my humble view, reeks of a kind of hypocrisy. The sudden dash to deal with this bill has to be taken against the fact that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has failed or refused to ratify the 1988 Convention Against the Illicit Trafficking of Narcotics and Psychotropic Substances, so that this Government stands guilty on the first count. No my friend. You do not need a bill before you can become a signatory to a convention. And I am saying that the signatories to the Convention Against the Illicit Trafficking in Narcotics Drugs and Psychotropic Substances as at January 31, 1989, did not include Trinidad and Tobago, and the Government may want to explain to this House why it has not supported the United Nations on this Convention.

The signatories to the Conference's final act also does not include the signature of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. Mr. Speaker, they may want to explain that to the House, but it reeks of hypocrisy for other reasons.

The Minister in presenting this Bill seemed to want to get off his feet as quickly as possible and he is not even here to hear what other Members have to say. He got up, presented the bill and took off and one would not have thought that a Bill of such significance to this country's population, especially the youths of this country as has been indicated by the two previous speakers, would have received such scant courtesy from him. But this bill has been debated in the Upper House so there is not much for me to say. He did not even examine the problem of drugs and what he ought to do with it and I thought at least he owed this House that.

Dr. Tewarie: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order. I just want to indicate to the hon. Leader of the Opposition that the original version of the Bill was fully debated in this House and, in fact, was passed by this House. It was only when it got to the point of arriving in the other place that another route was taken which eventually led to the Bill being brought amended to this House.

Mr. Panday: Mr. Speaker, I do not know what are the implications of that. But does the Member mean that we ought not to debate this bill? Then why did

you bring it back, for formality or do you want a vote? If you bring a bill before the House it is brought to be debated, and if it was defeated in the other place and you had to revise it and bring it back, then it must be debated all over again and that is how I understand the procedure of this House. I do not know if the Minister knows more than me, and if he does, well then, I bow to his superior intelligence and knowledge.

Mr. Speaker, the point I was making though is that the hon. Attorney General did not think that this House deserves the courtesy of having his reasons given or even the drug problem debated and the debate must be opened by him.

Mr. Valley: Mr. President, just for clarification. Has this bill been passed in the Senate as yet? [*Cross talk*]

Hon. Member: Yes.

Mr. Panday: I do not think that they ought to jump on the Member's back for something like that. He is right. The bill came before this House, and it went into Senate. As I recall, the Senate put it into committee stage. The Parliament prorogued, it lapsed and they carried it back into the Senate and debated it and my impression is—if I am wrong I hope I am forgiven—that the Senate passed it and we are now debating a Bill that has been passed in the Senate.

Mr. Speaker, the point I was making is that the Attorney General made a point that one of the objects of this bill is to take the profit out of drug trafficking. I am trying to say, that if he really wants to talk about drugs and he wants the benefit of this House on how to deal with it, that is a good principle, and I agree that we ought to take the profit out of drug trafficking because people are engaged in drug trafficking for profit. Now if we want to take the profit out of drug trafficking, then we have got to deal with two sides of the coin, not just one. We have got to deal with the question of supply and demand. If people do not demand drugs, there will be no supply. People are not going to make money from something that people do not want, so that it is extremely important for this House to consider and debate whether we ought not to adopt a system that has been tried or is being tried in the United Kingdom, and that is to develop a system where drugs can be supplied legally to addicts. If we decide on developing a system in which we supply drugs legally to people who are hooked on them—people are going to buy them no matter what you do—and set up proper monitoring systems, we begin now to identify the drug traffickers. So if a drug-user identifies himself some arrangements would be made for him to receive a supply, on condition that he now also agree to therapy and other systems to cure him. I do not know the

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implications of that, but that is a matter we should debate and not jump on people's back, as in the case when a Member in some other place said that there were 35,000 women who seek the services of an abortionist in the back yard.

3.30 p.m.

We have to think about these people; we have to care about them. Are we going to do something about it? Are we going to prevent them from being murdered and butchered? Let us talk about it. We have degenerated to a level where we cannot debate anything logically and impartially any more, we have to degenerate to personalities. So they jump on the poor gentleman's back, they want to kill him, but they would not say what they would do with the 35,000 women.

Now, I understand there are about a similar number of drug addicts in the country. I was listening to a programme on the radio—I do not know the facts but maybe the Government does—and I believe that there are about 35,000 people who are hooked on cocaine and other drugs. I do not know, it may be more. But the point is, if there are 35,000 people who are hooked on drugs, there are two elements of the trade. One is that the drug is coming into the country because there is a local demand, so we can start to tackle it from that point of view. We can examine whether people who are hooked on drugs, cannot be identified for the purpose of administering therapy and so getting them off the drugs and at the same time cutting out the demand.

I think that experiment is being tried in the United Kingdom. I am not sure how successful it is, but if we are serious, we have got to tackle it in that way.

Of course, the other one is that the drug is imported into the country in transit, because there is a demand somewhere else. But, Mr. Speaker, the Member for Port of Spain North referred to the vagrants who are the result of drug addiction and they are very young people, as you know, strong people just caught in this web and so forth and cannot get out. They need help. The Government has promised all kinds of things. The former Minister of Health was building all kinds of homes and all kinds of nonsense we heard before the House. Poor people, they are still out there.

I attended a trade union conference in Bogota; that is Colombia. Now, Colombia is supposed to be the place where they produce a lot of drugs and I expected that when I had gone down to Colombia, I would have seen vagrants all over the place, but to my great surprise I did not see any. I did not see vagrants like the ones I find in Trinidad, that is people who are the direct result of being the victims of drug addiction. I asked the authorities why we did not see this and their

answer was that the moment they discover that people succumb to drugs, they have a system whereby they would treat them and so forth. So one never finds them on the streets. Of course, there are other kinds of things in Colombia that you find on the streets; little children begging, they have a name for them, "abandinados", children that have been abandoned. But I did not see the kind of vagrants we see here, because they have developed a system.

Mr. Speaker, the bill reeks of hypocrisy for other reasons as well. These points were mentioned by my colleagues who spoke before me, and that is to say that the drug traffickers are known. Trinidad is not New York. It is not the United States. It is not Miami. We have 1.2 million people here living on less than 2,000 square miles of earth. You cannot be a drug trafficker in Trinidad and hide. You cannot be a drug trafficker in Trinidad and nobody knows. Everybody knows. The two colleagues who spoke before me said that and everybody knows that. In fact, drug traffickers are dying of old age in this country. The only way we get rid of them is when they die of old age, or you hear of somebody from another gang killing them off.

One well-known, famous gentleman, who was reputed to have engaged in this kind of activity, died of natural causes quite recently. But I say that the drug pushers are known, and the Government, the authority, does nothing about it. It has to be because they do not want to do anything about it, but it has a tremendous backlash. I give you an example, Mr. Speaker, of part of that backlash.

Someone, whom I knew well, came to me and said that there was a drug pusher in a place called Frederick Settlement. Frederick Settlement is a place in Caroni which is opposite the Caroni distillery, near to the police station. This person came to me, and said he needed help. I said, "What happened?" He said, there is a man who is openly pushing dope in Frederick Settlement, openly destroying the youths, his friend and his brother or some family were caught up in it and that is what was bothering him. He did not know what to do. He did not know, whom to go, so he came to me.

When he came to me and he reported this matter, I said, "Why do you not go to the police?" [*Interruption*] I am repeating what the gentleman said, I am not casting aspersions on people. I do not do that until I investigate the matter. That is why I have written a letter to the Prime Minister, which I shall refer to later on. I said, "Why do you not go to the police?" He says because the man told him, openly, "I have the police under control." He may be lying, he may not be telling the truth, but the man said, "I have the police under control; police eating out of

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my pocket and anybody who tells the police that I am pushing drugs, the police are going to come back and tell me who the man is that made the report and he could kiss this earth good-bye.” So he was scared to death and he told me this.

I discovered after he unburdened himself to me that I did not know what to do either, because I began to think of all kinds of things. Suppose I go to the police and I tell the police about this, they ask me who reported this and I mention the man’s name and this man turns up dead in a gutter the following morning, how am I going to live with myself? I am sure that there are many people in this country who know about drug trafficking, who really are helpless. They do not know to whom to go, because, if the Government does not take a strong hand, they are entitled to believe that the Government is involved, and not only the Government, but high officials, and possibly the police.

So, the thing deteriorates and nobody knows where to go and the drug pushers walk tall; they push the drugs, they are viewed with impunity and I am afraid to go to the Attorney General. The Attorney General was then the Member for Ortoire/Mayaro. I was afraid to go to him. It seems as though I was right. He would have given a recommendation to harm the fellow. So I was right. I am making this statement in the House today, so that my conscience is cleared and my burden is relieved. I have discharged my duty today. I have told the country about it. I have not mentioned the man’s name. I am not going to. I can tell you that I am not going to mention this man’s name at all. I hope he is not a suspect, and I hope he does not turn up dead, but I believe that this is the only place that I could have made that report. I am telling you that it is in Frederick Settlement; I am saying that he is doing it openly; I am saying that he left the country for a while

and I am saying that he came back and he is doing it now. I hope you do not pick me up in a gutter tomorrow because of that.

Now, Mr. Speaker, having regard to the stand I have taken, there was a death threat at my law office, yesterday morning. But be that as it may, Mr. Speaker, it is this kind of frustration where people see drug lords acting with impunity; they see their sons and their daughters being destroyed. My colleagues who spoke—the Member for Port of Spain North and the Member for Fyzabad—displayed a kind of helplessness. That is why the Member for Port of Spain North talked about setting up vigilantes. That is tantamount to what he said—I believe that the people of the village must wipe out the drug-pushers.

I invite him to withdraw that suggestion, not because I do not want them wiped out, but the day we in this country develop a system of vigilantes, where private individuals go around with guns, killing people—even though they are drug-pushers—the society will degenerate into chaos; that is, people will start with good intentions and they will say I know that man pushing drugs, he destroyed my wife, he destroyed my child, he destroyed my brother and my sister and, therefore I am going to get him. *[Interruption]* The Member knows he was part of that, he was bringing in those guns for the PNM, there is evidence of that. Well, we will talk about that some time else.

Mr. Speaker, it is that kind of frustration that has led the hon. Member—and I understand how frustrated he must be—to advocate a system of vigilantes. Vigilantes are dangerous. It is better to change the Government and put a Government that can deal with the problem, rather than be so frustrated and say, “Well, the Government will never do anything about it, let us take matters into our own hands. Let us get guns and wipe out the drug pushers. I think that is a dangerous thing and I ask the Member to withdraw it, although I say I appreciate how he feels.

Mr. Speaker, the bill reeks of hypocrisy at this particular stage, because it omits a very important dimension of drug money laundering. I believe that the learned Attorney General talked about new offences and so forth; he talks about money laundering. Okay. Fair enough. But there is speculation in this country that drug money has been laundered by a political party and in this bill he should have taken the opportunity to introduce a provision that prevents political parties from receiving money from drug barons, for political purposes.

On the public platform it was being bandied all over the country about millions of dollars being received and cheques were published in newspapers. Up to this day there has not been an explanation of what has happened to over \$1 million which came from questionable sources.

Mr. Speaker, the statement that political party made—and I am talking about the political party—is that: “We are satisfied that the money was received and we are satisfied that the money was spent.” That is the contempt they have for this country. When we are shown a cheque for \$200,000, a cheque for \$300,000, a cheque for \$500,000 and so forth, and moneys being accumulated and that they are going into the bank account of a top officer of the ruling party, and that having been the case, not a word of explanation—if there were an explanation to this,

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would this country not have had it? This country would have had it. But not only do they not give an explanation, the Member most likely lost the election because of that, and we are so happy that he has heard from the grave that he must go back.

I wonder what they take people in this country for. I really wonder what they take people for! It is tragic. The contempt and contumely with which they treat this public. But, Mr. Speaker, be that as it may, I am suggesting an amendment to this bill to include two things: one is that political parties must also be prevented from laundering drug money. If political parties receive money from drug lords they are encouraging drug lords and they cannot deal with drug lords after that.

That is why they have something called the Cobra. Everybody knows about the black speedboat called the Cobra, everybody besides the Government. Everybody knows about the black boat called the Cobra. If they were interested in getting the Cobra, they would have sought the assistance of other countries. The hon. Attorney General is reported to have said—and it really makes this bill reek—it was reported in the newspaper that the Attorney General said that the police in Trinidad are not equipped to deal with the problem of drugs, they do not have the wherewithal. They do not have the wherewithal to deal with drugs.

Mr. Smart: Please, Mr. Speaker, I do not want the Member for Couva North to misquote me.

Mr. Panday: I do not think he would doubt that one. Or where the Prime Ministers says, if you know anything about drugs come and tell him because they do not trust the police. Are you surprised that the gentleman that came to me was scared to death of going to the police? They had the word of the Prime Minister on this. But it is strange that the Prime Minister I the person who says “Come tell me.”

According to the Attorney General, Anthony Smart, in the *Express* of July 18, 1989:

“The Trinidad and Tobago Police Service does not possess all the skills necessary in what is to be the country’s fight against drug trafficking. Furthermore, he indicated the Police Service is not the repository of a lot of skills necessary for the job.”

Mr. Smart: Mr. Speaker, that is quite different from what the Member for Couva North had attempted to say. I said the Police Service does not possess all

the skills that are necessary, and that is an indication that there is need to beef-up the Police Service, not that the Police Service is unable to deal with the problem of drugs. He has to make a distinction.

Mr. Panday: I thought I was quite clear. I am saying they are not equipped. They are not equipped to deal with drugs. That is the point I am making and that is the purport of that statement. I do not think that what I was saying differs substantially from what he is saying, but the point is that, if you are interested—

Mr. Smart: Just to make it quite clear, I said that there is a need, for instance, to have co-operation, as I said earlier, with various governments and countries in order to deal with this international problem of drug trafficking. So that one gets assistance, one co-operates; there is a system for mutual assistance between governments dealing with this problem, and that is the point I am making.

Mr. Panday: Well, I want to tell the Member that he cannot say that now. When I know as a fact that the Government refused help in 1987. In 1987, they refused help from the American government to deal with drugs. It is obvious that Trinidad and Tobago is too small. When I quoted the Minister, I did not mean to cast aspersions on him or the police. The Police Service in Trinidad and Tobago is not only incapable, but will, for a very long time, be incapable of dealing with the problem of international drug trafficking. The reason is that we are a small country with thousands and thousands of miles of coastline. That is the simple problem. You have to monitor the entire coastline because they come in at Cedros. The Member for Port of Spain said Oropouche, a Member said they came in at Carenage, we know for a fact that some boats have been found at—

Mr. Sudama: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order. I have heard no such reports that drug traffickers are operating in Oropouche.

Mr. Panday: That was a slip of the tongue. Because I believe that the connection must have been because somebody's name who was mentioned in the Drug Report is contesting the seat or something, I do not know. It just came out. Forgive me, I did not mean Oropouche, but Toco, Mayaro, Moruga, Cedros, Tahiti and Tobago, also.

So that we would never really have the resources. I think the country is too small, having regard to its large coastline to ever be in a position where it is going to have the resources to deal with the drug problem. It means, therefore, that we have got to co-operate internationally and this Government has been in office for

five years and nothing has been put in place. Nothing of any significance has been put in place.

Mr. Smart: Point of order! The Member is misleading the House. The Government has been involved in a number of efforts with Venezuela and the United States. Up to about a month ago, this Government signed an agreement with the United States for the provision of some US \$200,000 in the fight against drugs.

Mr. Panday: I used to criticize the former Government for that same attitude. I am sure you would remember our good old days, Mr. Speaker, when we used to quarrel about agriculture. The first thing the PNM would jump up and say, "We brought in \$900 million worth of food." We would quarrel about agriculture and they would quote all the figures they had spent on agriculture and nothing annoyed us more than that, because the amount of money you spend on agriculture has to be reflected in what happens in agriculture.

So that, similarly, do not tell me that you have brought in this money and you have signed this treaty, and you have done that. Show me that the drug is being prevented. Show me that people cannot walk onto the shores as the Member for Port of Spain North said and shoot people and go back out. Tell me that they have caught them. Tell me they have caught the Black Cobra, and then I will say that something substantial is being done. The Black Cobra trades with impunity, and you tell me you are doing something. I do not want to know how much money you have spent at all.

So that, Mr. Speaker, I am saying that the present Government cannot deal with the problem of drugs. One Member before me mentioned one thing called the will, that they lack the will. They lack the will because they are tainted in the way that I have said. They cannot fight drugs. That is why I am telling the Member to have some patience and not go for vigilantes yet. Let us try moving them first, putting proper instruments in place to deal with the problem, instead of going to vigilantes. When political parties receive money from drug lords they cannot fight drugs. Therefore, we must put it in this Bill. That is the most significant laundering that can take place, the most dangerous kind of laundering that can take place. There is suspicion that surrounds the Government with respect to that. They have not answered these questions.

The second one is, if your politicians are involved in drugs in some way, the whole society is going to take part. Therefore, there has got to be some provisions in the Bill that deals with how Ministers acquire property. For example, if a Minister on a Minister's salary, who was fairly poor before, acquires a large estate with a house on it, that should be priority, we should investigate that immediately.

If a minister, whether he was former ambassador or not, whether he was junior minister or not, builds a house for \$2 million you must ask questions. This bill has got to entrench these issues of Ministers. Ministers must be able to answer for the property they have. I am saying that this bill should deal with that matter.

Mr. Speaker, also, we are going to be the laughing stock, of not only the international community, but we are going to be the laughing stock of the national community, if, while we are passing this bill, we do not insist that our exemplars resign if their names are linked in any way with drugs or drug-pushers or convicted drug dealers and so forth. For the integrity of the nation, Ministers have resigned for less than that.

Mr. Speaker, it is a tragedy that the Law Association should come out in today's paper and make the statement they made, because my information is that less than half the executive was present. Of a 15-member executive, seven or eight people sat down and took a decision and spoke for the entire legal profession, making statements without basis. There is no basis for the conclusions at which they have arrived.

Mr. Speaker, unless we sincerely deal with the issue of exemplars, what do you expect from the rest of the community? I wrote a letter to the hon. Prime Minister, dated October 14. In that letter—*[Interruption]* Oh, yes I am prepared to start with me. I agree, start with me, but I want you second.

Mr. Speaker, I wrote a letter to the hon. Prime Minister involving this matter of drugs. It is dated October 14, 1991, and it raises the issues that I thought the Bar Association would deal with. I said in that letter,

“Dear Prime Minister:

It is my painful duty to write to you officially on a question of most urgent public concern for the independence and integrity of the judiciary which is, by constitutional convention, a non-partisan matter of a joint consultation with His Excellency. Arising out of recent publications evidencing letter, copies which are attached, from the Chief Justice and others, together with

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explanations of the Chief Justice on the occasion of the opening of the law term, there appears to be serious concern as to the misuse of the Chief Justice's office. The following issues arise."

I really put this letter to the issues. That is why I say the Law Association is treading on very thin ice and they have raised the question of their own integrity. I said in that letter and I repeat here:

"The following issues arise:

Whether the Chief Justice has, concerning the recommendations surrounding the writing of the letter, said what is true. The issue would involve the consideration of the following additional matters:

- (i) the nature of the letter, is it a recommendation for the Mansoor family, vouching for its uprightness of character and high standing in the community over a period of three generations.
- (ii) The time when it was given, firstly, it was dated at or around the same time as the recommendation of Minister Selwyn Richardson and of Father Gerard Pantin, who admitted at the time he wrote the recommendation, he knew of the drug conviction and the purpose for which the recommendation was to be used..."

4.00 p.m.

Mr. Sanderson: Mr. Speaker, I want to quote Standing Order No. 36 (10). It says:

"The conduct of the Governor, Members of the Senate or the House of Representatives, or of Judges or other persons engaged in the administration of justice shall not be raised except upon a substantial motion moved for the purpose; and in any amendment, question to a Minister, or debate on a motion dealing with any other subject any reference to the conduct of any such person as aforesaid shall be out of order."

I would like that to be applied since the office of the Chief Justice is one of those.

Hon. Member: The Member does not understand the Standing Order.

Mr. Panday: Mr. Speaker, this is a letter written to the Prime Minister for the purpose of setting up a tribunal to find out the truth. The Chief Justice's character is not being impugned at all, and I have not said a single thing here that has impugned it—not a single thing. I said, "issues arise", and we are saying, once

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these issues arise, they must be dealt with. No attack is being made upon the Chief Justice at all. You would have noticed—

Mr. Speaker: You are not questioning the conduct of any person or persons mentioned in Standing Order No. 36 (10).

Mr. Panday: No, Sir. What I am saying is, that should the issues arise, which we are calling upon the Government to take a constitutional procedure to determine; we are not attacking him. As a matter of fact, we are not condemning the Chief Justice. We are saying set up an institution which is provided by the Constitution to deal with this issue.

Mr. Sanderson: Mr. Speaker, I would like the point to be upheld because the mere introduction of the letter questions the office of the Chief Justice.

Mr. Speaker: Order please! Order please! The hon. Leader of the Opposition has indicated that he is not bringing into question, the conduct of the President, the Members of the Senate or the House of Representatives or judges or other persons engaged in the administration of justice. I think he has clarified this. I would allow him to proceed and if any such person, or persons' conduct is brought into question, I shall invoke the Standing Order.

Mr. Panday: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I shall abide by your ruling.

Mr. Speaker: The speaking time of the hon. Member has expired.

Motion made, That the hon. Member's speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. [*Mr. R. Palackdharrysingh*]

Mr. Panday: Mr. Speaker, the point I was making is that there is an issue and nobody knows the truth. That is why section 137 of the Constitution speaks the way it does. It says that if an issue like this arises, there is a procedure: you set up a tribunal to investigate the matter, and then come to a finding. I am not coming to a finding. It would be rude of me to make allegations against the Chief Justice, as it is indeed rude of the Law Association to say that nothing wrong has happened without examining the issues which I have raised in the letter to the Prime Minister.

Mr. Speaker, it goes on:

"(ii) That the time when the letter was given firstly, it was dated at or around the same time as the recommendation of Minister Selwyn Richardson and of Father Gerard Pantin, who admitted at the time that he wrote the recommendation, he knew of the drug conviction and the purpose for

which the recommendation was to be used and secondly, it was given nearly one year after the loss referred in (iii) below.

(iii) The explanation given by the Chief Justice.”

The nature of the trick to which he was subjected, should be investigated. I continue:

"He said it was to be used for the purpose connected with the loss to the family in the events of July 27, 1990—no mention was made of this in the letters and Robert Mansoor does not support this.

(iv) The explanation given by Robert Mansoor—he said that he did not tell the Chief Justice what the recommendation was for but he maintained that he did not mislead him. The question arises, whether on the basis of Robert Mansoor's explanation, the Chief Justice ought to have known the purpose for which the letter of recommendation was to be used having regard to previous publications in the media.

(v) When did the Chief Justice find out that he was tricked, what steps he took, when he did, to nullify the effects of the alleged trickery? Was the Chief Justice tricked on previous occasions, and if so, on what occasions was he so tricked?

(vi) Whether Paul Mansoor was under surveillance by the local police in respect of drug trafficking, and whether this fact was known to the Chief Justice.

(vii) Whether the local police..."

Mr. Butcher: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order. To me, in simple layman's terms, I feel that this issue is questioning the conduct of the Chief Justice, and I ask that you invoke the Standing Orders. As an ordinary Member of Parliament, as an ordinary layman—I am not a trained lawyer—I feel these are issues dealing with the conduct of the Chief Justice, and I would like the Standing Orders to be upheld.

Mr. Speaker: Order please! I think that the hon. Member has made his point. Can we continue without going into the details of the letter at this time, please.

Mr. Panday: I was making one point, and that is,

(vi) Whether the local police..."

nothing about the Chief Justice.

"...alerted the American authorities of Mansoor's criminal activity, that day;"
the day it was done—

"and whether it was felt that justice would be better served by the American authorities arresting and prosecuting him for the offence rather than the local police taking that step, and if so, why?"

Do you know why that is extremely important, Mr. Speaker? That is extremely important because the information is that the local police knew of this incident, and they informed the customs because they could not touch him. He had too many big friends. He was too big.

Mr. Speaker, do you realize that the American authorities did not seize the BWIA plane? Do you realize that the American authorities did not fine BWIA upon whose plane they found the drugs? Is that not the international convention? Is that not the international rule, that if they find drugs on an aeroplane, they fine the airline millions of dollars, and so forth? Why was this one not seized? Was it not seized because the American authorities were alerted by the Government and they set their trap?

If people in this House feel that is not a matter of public concern, they will answer on the public platform because that is where the final arbitration will take place.

Hon. Member: I agree.

Mr. Panday: That is why people who pretend that they are jefe when they go down to Debe, they meet the wrath of the people. They face the wrath of the people wherever they go. They can walk down how many aisles they want with fake brides; they can open how many dustbins they want, when they go down to the people they will face their wrath. Hypocrisy does not work either in legislation or in life.

Hon. Member: Just like those missing files.

Mr. Panday: It certainly does not work for long. We are dealing here with a very serious matter. If it is 35,000—

Hon. Member: Question the conduct of the Chief Justice in public.

Mr. Sudama: Mr. Speaker, this is mainly for my own edification. When I look at Standing Order 36 (10), I am not sure whether the question of the conduct of the Governor, Members of the Senate or House of Representatives—and, of

course, we have no Governor anymore—or judges or other persons, whether their conduct ought not to be questioned in the exercise of their functions, or whether, in fact, their conduct is subject to question other than in the exercise of their functions. I get the impression that their conduct in the exercise of their official functions ought not to be questioned in this House. The question is, whether their conduct outside of their official function is subject to question.

4.10 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: The Standing Order says that their conduct can be questioned, but it has to be done upon a substantive motion moved before the House.

Mr. Panday: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, you have ruled and I am not going back to that. I want those seven members of the executive of the Law Association—there are 15 members on the council, but seven turned up. They had less than a quorum but they took a decision for all the lawyers in this country. That is their business. The lawyers are going to deal with them.

The point I was raising is that I think this country should be told the circumstances surrounding the apprehension of a local person involved in international drug trafficking and I believe the hon. Member did, in fact, say something about that. He spoke about international persons being involved. The reason I have raised these points is that the passing of legislation is not going to deal with the drug problem. I think this problem crosses political partisan barriers; it involves the nation. If, in fact, 35,000 people are hooked on drugs and our youths are being destroyed by it, then people should not be afraid to discuss it. People should not hide behind rules because when those kids are traumatizing and dying, there are no rules. Those who seek to hide behind rules, demonstrate their own hypocrisy and they demonstrate the level of their own commitment. Once there is a rule to hide behind, they will hide behind it regardless of what is taking place in this society. That is very tragic indeed.

This Government should say why that BWIA plane was not impounded; they should say why it was not fined when that is known to be the international rule. Because if that is the case, look at the implications that arise. It means that our own policemen, not only are they not properly equipped and cannot be properly equipped, but they are demoralized in the performance of their own duties. It means that if there is a “big shot” in this country who knows many people and who can get recommendations when they like, then they can operate with impunity and no one can challenge them, not even the police. Was Mr. Mansoor

under surveillance? Is it a fact that attempts were made to arrest him on previous occasions but somebody on high pulled strings and prevented him from being arrested? I find it enormously strange that our local police should have to resort to that kind of method in order to apprehend an international drug trader, to report the matter instead of dealing with it here.

Mr. Speaker, I agree with you that I must not bring the Chief Justice or anybody into disrepute but I had thought to myself—that is why I read—that there were three letters. One was about the Chief Justice which is a constitutional and legal matter. I thought I would deal with it in that way. The other one is the hon. Member for Ortoire/Mayaro. That one is a political situation and I would deal with that politically. With respect to Fr. Pantin, in my view, that is a private matter and that is the man's business. It is the business of priests to help people in any circumstances. That is their job. At least he spoke the truth. He knew and he tried to help this person because he believed the person was being tricked. That is the job of priests. Therefore, I am not here to say a single word about Fr. Pantin. One is constitutional and legal, the other is political, and the other is private.

I will deal now with the political matter and surely the former, learned Attorney General will not object to my reading his letter which is dated June, 10. Now Fr. Pantin's letter is dated June, 7, three days before. Fr. Pantin knew three days before, not our Chief Justice, he would not—I beg your pardon—our former Attorney General, the Minister of Health.

"TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This is to certify that I have known Robert and Helen Mansoor and their children for the past sixteen years, most of this period as their neighbour.

The family is well knit with solid Christian principles and a deep sense of welfare for their community.

Robert is a hard-working businessman who recognises the virtues of integrity. I have pleasure in recommending the Mansoor family."

It is asking you to stretch the imagination beyond reality, to say that when that recommendation was sought, the recommender did not ask what it was for. It is stretching the imagination beyond reality. Anybody who goes to anyone for a recommendation—and that happens in the office of politicians all the time, the first thing you ask them is the purpose of the recommendation. "Well, I want it because I am trying to get a visa." To whom shall I address it? and so forth, because the purpose of a recommendation is to help the man, *vis a vis* somebody

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else. So you put that to the immigration officer and say, "Well, I know this gentleman and he is looking for a visa." I have done it a hundred times.

Mr. Smart: As Minister of External Affairs or in your private capacity?

Mr. Panday: Do you not know better? I am sure you know better than that.

So you address the letter: "I know this person; he has no criminal record. He informs me that he wants to go to the United States for a holiday to visit somebody or for medical treatment. He assures me that he will be returning after the holiday and, therefore, I shall be much obliged if you will do what is possible in your power to assist him in getting a visa for that purpose." How many of us have done that on hundreds of occasions? But, always we ask. Nobody can convince me that the former Attorney General did not ask. This is the former Attorney General, this is not an ordinary person.

Mr. Smart: I wonder if the Member would give way on this point. I think I want to make it clear, as I understand it, no Minister of Government other than the Minister of External Affairs ought to write any such letter to any foreign Government or any embassy. What if he is turned down? It means that Government is telling a representative of this Government, "no", and that brings this Government into disrepute. So no Government Minister ought to write such a letter.

Mr. Panday: Well, I have done it. Sue me! Shoot me! Jail me! I have done it and I say to the world that I have done it. I will go on any public platform and say I have done it in those situations. Neither do I lie about it. I will never say that I do not know for what purpose was the recommendation.

4.20 p.m.

I speak truthfully that I have done so and I am saying that many Members of this House have also done likewise. I am saying that I am going to continue doing it. If I can assist people who wish to get their visas to go somewhere for a holiday, go for medical treatment or visit their families and so forth, and they want a letter from a lawyer or myself—whatever capacity it is—will I refuse? No, Mr. Speaker. *[Interruption]*

The point I want to make is that he did not ask. I believe he will say that he asked and was told that this was for the purpose of the business they had lost with the fire in Port of Spain. It was to Mr. Robert and Helen Mansoor; he knew them and the children; and it was for business purposes. First of all, the letter does not

say anything about business. Who did he think it was intended for, the banker? Do you think the bank was going to lend him money because he has solid Christian principles? Banks do not lend money because you have solid Christian principles. They do not even lend money because you have solid Hindu or Muslim principles. They lend money when they can make a profit and get back their money, when it is secured.

Was this not intended as a character reference? Christian principles have nothing to do with money. Banks do not lend on Christian principles. I have never heard them take Christian principles as security in my life. If it was for the Mansoor family, what about the children?

"The family is well knit..."

He may fool other people, not me.

"I have known...and their children..."

The family is well knit...solid Christian principles..."

He may think he can fool anybody in this country, but this was intended for exactly the purpose for which it was used, which was a character recommendation to reduce the sentence of a drug mule.

Mr. Richardson: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order. Let me say straightaway, I deny that allegation, *in toto*.

Mr. Panday: You can deny it in anything else. The facts are going to confront you and hang around your neck like a tyre.

Hon. Member: The way you destroyed Ramnath.

Mr. Ramnath: Keep me out of that. I can handle myself.

Mr. Richardson: Everybody you try to destroy gets stronger than you.

Mr. Panday: Look at him, even stronger than you today.

I ask, if this was for business purposes, one would have expected that this letter would have been directed specifically. This letter is enormously and deliberately vague. No banker—or people intended to lend money or get involved in a joint venture—is going to use this letter as a recommendation for that:

"This is to certify that I have known Robert and Helen Mansoor and their children for the past sixteen years, most of this period as their neighbour.

The family is well knit with solid Christian principles and a deep sense of welfare for their community."

Nothing about business.

"Robert is a hard-working businessman who recognizes the virtue of integrity."

Now, all I say is that I am sorry for him. I want to say that. I feel sorry for the former Attorney General.

Mr. Richardson: You are the last person I want to feel sorry for me.

Mr. Panday: I am going to give it to you nevertheless. I am going to sympathize with you whether you like it or not. That is a Christian principle. I am a man of great Christian principles. I will sympathize with him whether he likes it or not.

That is to say, he tried a "thing" and he got caught. It backfired because he did not know it would hit the press, or whatever it is, and he must do the decent thing. He must do the honourable thing. He must say he made an error. At least the Chief Justice said: "I was tricked." [*Interruption*] Well all right, my friend says that he said he was tricked. If a man who was the Attorney General of this country for so many years—a Minister and so forth, second in the Government—can be tricked like this so easily, God help this country!

I make these points, not because I want to berate my colleague in this House. I do not want to do that. I do it because I think we are talking about a serious matter and I do not think we can sweep it under the carpet, no matter what the rules. I think that when we come to this House and we begin to pass legislation—legislation which my friend at one time described as draconian. As a matter of fact this must be the legislation he referred to when, one day, he told me: "I hope when I come to this House and introduce draconian legislation you will not talk about human rights and all that sort of thing."

The legislation is draconian, and maybe draconian measures are necessary. But how do you tell the population that you will inflict draconian measures against them but, when it is the former Attorney General, the Minister of Health, a Member of the Government, some jefe somewhere, the rules are going to be different? If you do that, then you negate this piece of legislation; nobody is going to take it seriously. Or every time you implement it, the country will go up in a roar. They will say, "I bet you if a little black boy from behind the bridge wanted a recommendation—"

Mrs. Donawa-McDavidson: Or a little Indian boy from Caroni.

Mr. Panday: Or a little Indian boy from Caroni—well he black too. *[Interruption]* Whether he would get the recommendation, that is the issue. Will he get the recommendation? In fact, the announced practice is that if you are convicted of a drug offence in the court on the first instance and you go to the Court of Appeal, your sentence will be doubled. We have to deal with these issues. We cannot sweep them under the carpet; we cannot have double standards with this thing. We have to say that if there is one rule for John, there is one rule for Harry. There has to be one rule for everybody, then people will begin to respect the law. And if people respect the law—although I said that I was against vigilantes, I suggest that the hon. Member has the germ of a good idea, but certainly not to go and wipe off the drug lords and so forth. But we have to set up community watches. We have to set up crime watches within the community who will report to the—*[Interruption]*

4.30 p.m.

Mr. Smart: May I ask a question? I wonder if the Member for Couva North recalls that the said Mr. Mansoor has stated publicly, that he did not tell the Member for Ortoire/Mayaro the reason his son was charged. He did not tell the Member for Ortoire/Mayaro that his son had been charged and was involved with problems with the American authorities?

Mr. Panday: I also recall, he said, “but I did not trick him. I am surprised at the reaction of the Minister.” He also made that statement if I recall rightly. He said, “I am surprised about the reaction of the other gentleman”, and “I did not deceive them”, I remember that too.

The point about it is there is so much suspicion surrounding this incident, that an enquiry must be made into it to clear the air.

Miss Nicholson: No enquiry.

Mr. Panday: No enquiry! Obviously, no enquiry. Every time I try to get off the subject, they are putting me back there.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member has three more minutes.

Mr. Panday: Three minutes, Mr. Speaker, then let me thank you for extending my time and say that we have to do something about drugs, but we have to do it as a community. All of us have to put our heads together and come up with the answer. You cannot deal with this as though it is your baby and then have one standard on one hand and another standard on the other.

I am sure there is not a single Member in this House who does not want something to be done about the drug problem. We await your response. Thank you kindly.

4. 33 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.00 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

The Minister of Health (Hon. Selwyn Richardson): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have pleasure—and I underline that—to rise this afternoon to support the hon. Attorney General in his quest to have this honourable House pass a bill “to provide for the control of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances and to make provision for the confiscation of the proceeds of drug trafficking and other provisions in connection with drug trafficking and matters connected therewith”.

This is a long overdue development, but, as we country people would say, “better late than never”. It is never too late because, again as we country people would say, “I have absolutely no cocoa in the sun” and I could repeat that all the time, I do not have to look for rain despite the many innuendoes heard here this afternoon by minds that possibly do not know any other culture.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, for the past 10 years, the scourge of drug abuse has created an ugly stain, not only in Trinidad and Tobago, but throughout the region. As one who has been involved, both as a defence lawyer for 15 years and in public life for some 18 years, I could certainly speak from my experience as a former Attorney General, former Minister of National Security and now as Minister of Health. I am proud of this administration for what it has done over the past five years, and for what it is doing, including the steps that it is taking this afternoon, to ensure that we do all in our power to eliminate this scourge.

Because we are not a naive people, we accepted that for many years prior to this, serious problems existed in relation to the use and abuse of all sorts of drugs in this country. However, the horrors associated with the so-called harder drugs like heroine and cocaine—cocaine in particular—were not part of our experience and we only associated them with the sites before this, outside of our region. Unfortunately, because of the boom which we experienced in the late 1970s and the early 1980s, we have become a transshipment port and that is the real danger in which we find ourselves—being at the edge of the South American continent.

At the start of the decade all this has changed and in several of our counties we now witness the disastrous consequences of cocaine on our small 1.2 million population. Our young people have been particularly vulnerable to the relentless progress of this epidemic of drugs.

The Trinidad and Tobago Government has established demand-reduction activities that offer alternatives to drug use and hopefully will also insulate young people against involvement in the drug subculture. I will refer to that in some more detail later.

Every time I speak on matters related to drug abuse problems, the extent and the pervasiveness of the consequences and impact of drug use never fail to amaze me. We are talking about the impact on the family. On one occasion—sometimes again we are looking at the implications for the efficient policing of our communities or strategies for eradication of crops like marijuana. The impact of narco-trafficking and our capacity to engage successfully in international trade, threatens even now, to strike at the very core of our ability to survive in a rapidly contracting globe.

The escalation in drug trafficking over the last 15 years has paralleled several other developments in the whole region during that time. It is indeed encouraging that we are now beginning to see the first signals that the new thrust of this Government is working. In fact, just on September 28, Prime Minister Manley of Jamaica, sent an urgent message to Prime Minister Robinson, with a return ticket for me to participate in a drug awareness week in Kingston, Jamaica, because of what this administration—Trinidad and Tobago—is doing, and in particular because of the steps taken by this Cabinet to deal with the drug culture.

As we approach the 21st century, it is the firm resolve of this administration to create in our country a solid multifaceted economy, an important aspect of which will be its involvement in regional and extraregional trade. Recent events in Eastern Europe, superimposed on the imminent establishment of a single Western European market, lead us to the inescapable conclusion that competition and opportunities on the global market will become increasingly intense. I raise that because we have to be so careful. The drug culture has even endangered what this Government has tried to do in the areas of international and regional trade. The Member for Couva North raised the question of fines and even confiscation of our national carrier. We have witnessed the effect on the Jamaican national airline and as well, their ocean-carrier service in the last 10 years or so.

5.20 p.m.

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Mr. Deputy Speaker, I was at a meeting of law enforcement matters held in Jamaica, in October 1989 at which I had the honour to lead the Trinidad and Tobago delegation. I was very impressed with the progress the Jamaican Government and private sector made in instituting security procedures for their ports and their carrier. As a matter of fact the policies developed by JAMPRO were adopted as a model to be utilized in developing similar procedures in other territories in the Caribbean. Our situation in Trinidad and Tobago is somewhat different from most of the other territories. Of course in the region while we do not produce possibly as much marijuana as Jamaica and Belize, our proximity to the South American mainland has made us a very attractive location to the “narco” traffickers, and this is the danger for a transshipment of their products to countries not only in this region but in particular, to North America, Canada, the United States and even to Europe.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, for example, on May 8, 1989 two females were arrested with a total of 3,795 grammes of cocaine strapped to their thighs at Heathrow Airport. They arrived by British Airways. On June 29, 1989, a British male was arrested coming from Piarco with 471.3 grammes of cocaine strapped to his body. He came by BWIA, the national carrier; on June 5, 1989 a Dominican male was arrested with 306 grammes of cannabis in his baggage; on August 6, 1989 a British male was arrested with 3,205 grammes of cannabis in his baggage; on August 6, 1989 a male Trinidadian was arrested with 2,120 grammes of cannabis in his baggage; on November 29, 1989 a British female was arrested with 3,254 grammes of cannabis in her baggage; on December 4, 1989 a British female was arrested with 932.600 grammes of cannabis in her baggage coming by BWIA; on December 17, 1989 a West Indian male coming up on BWIA had 83.6 grammes of cannabis in his baggage; on the same day a British male had 500 grammes of cannabis in his baggage on BW900; on January 11, 1990; a British male was arrested with 195 grammes of cannabis in his baggage, he came up on BWIA 900; and on January 25, 1990 there was one British female with 3,000 grammes cannabis on her person again coming up on BWIA 900 from Port of Spain.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is just to show you the chances people take in order to make money and the dangers again, to our national carrier. Our national airline has already incurred millions of dollars in fines it can ill-afford. Of course it is not the national carrier, it is really the Trinidad and Tobago taxpayer; all of us have to pay, due to the detection of drugs on arrival both in the United States and elsewhere—mostly in the United States.

Fortunately, I have had discussions at all levels with my colleagues and counterparts in the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom up to recently and I can tell you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they are all happy—police, customs in particular; the law enforcement agencies—with the actions being taken by this Government to stem this scourge. Possibly this is why they have not been more drastic in confiscating or fining our national carrier because they are satisfied that this Government is doing all in its power to stem this scourge.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, clearly, this has posed serious problems to the survival of all small carriers in this highly competitive world. We are increasingly detecting cocaine on passengers travelling from producer countries through Trinidad to other countries, in an attempt to confuse the destination country officials by making it appear that their journey originated in our country rather than the producer country.

All of these efforts by “narco” traffickers demonstrate their determination and the extent to which they are willing to go in order to market their products and their produce.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the reality is that we are countries—and this country is a country at war and this Government, a Government at war—with a vicious small clique of men and women whose criminal minds are capable of severely undermining our country, our economy and our very people. Narcotic trafficking threatens to paralyze our means of transporting our products to our major trading partners as it continues to corrupt the legitimate work and business of our carrier. We would be naive and foolish to view the situation anything less than a war which threatens our very survival as a competitive trading nation. I am sure you would have been glad to have listened to the media yesterday when they spoke of our healthy trade surplus. Thanks to this Government.

5.30 p.m.

We cannot allow narcotic traffickers or drug traffickers to impede, in any way, the progress this Government has made in the last five years, as a result of our very good decisions and the hard sacrifices made not only by the Government but by the people of Trinidad and Tobago whose confidence we enjoy.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I also had the privilege to lead a delegation of Trinidad and Tobago at the World Ministerial Drug summit in London, which commenced on April 11, 1990. I made a plea on behalf of the Government and people of Trinidad and Tobago for our small non-producing Caribbean countries which are

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in the firing-line, in particular, Jamaica, Barbados, even Antigua. As I said at that meeting, we are not a producer of cocaine, but we are very vulnerable, the fact being that we are only seven miles, in some places, away from the South American mainland. As I also said there, the threat to civilization is real, not only to the producer and the demand countries, but to innocent bystander countries in South America and the demand countries in North America.

The fact is, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I also said, the demand not only results in the demand for drugs, but has an immediate by-product—and this might have been with some ESP, because these comments were made on April 9, 1990. Not only is there a demand for drugs, but there is some immediate fall-out, there is also a demand for fire power. They go hand in hand: drugs and guns. In one year—I think it was between 1984 and 1985—we had over 100 guns exported by the Miami underworld to Trinidad and Tobago. As far as police records show, only

two or three of those guns were recovered, and the pattern was there. In a nutshell, I had warned, because the statistics would show, in 1978, 17.73 grammes of cocaine were seized in Trinidad and Tobago. Three arrests made; 17 grammes of cocaine seized. In 1989, that is 11 years later, 62 kilogrammes, 888.24 grammes were seized as opposed to the three arrests in 1978; 11 years later, 456 arrests were made. When you think of that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, out of a population of just 1.2 million people, 436 arrests made, 11 years later.

Part of the fall-out created havoc with our economy, particularly in the late 1980s. Money was completely withdrawn from the mainstream economy. An inordinately large part of our finances had to be and still has to be—because this Government and this administration is serious about eliminating as far as possible this trade, this scourge—spent on policing, for example, on the Police Service, on the coast guard, on the army, on equipment and materials, *et cetera*. So that it is affecting us in every possible way: money spent on special squad being trained by the police, more courts, court time being spent on drugs and in drug trafficking, and on dogs. We had to beg the British to assist us with a programme for dogs. They have given us 13 dogs in the recent past, 13 dogs specially trained, doing a very good job I must say at our airports. Customs and immigration, doctors and nurses; we have a doctor full time just dealing with drug addicts. We have rehabilitation of drug addicts. On education; instead of concentrating in our schools, trying to teach our children, we have to show our children the hazards of the use of drugs.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, to cut a long story short. I pleaded with the powers that be, particularly at that conference—because the United States was represented—on behalf of our small countries in the Caribbean, to pass more effective gun laws, to control the export of guns, particularly from North America; the guns that come to protect the drug trade. It was just one year later, as you know, that we almost lost our lives as a result of what took place, a direct result of the drug trade, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

As you know, since that day, the Brady Bill was passed which allows sales people or companies trading in guns to take a three-day break; at first it was advocated that a seven-day cooling off period be allowed to investigate any would-be purchaser of guns. I think that was cut down to three which, of course, does not get you very far. But at least it has gone somewhere.

Mr. Deputy Speaker—the Minister of Family Services will deal in some detail with parts of the programmes that this Government has put in place to ensure that we have not only deterrent action, but that we deal with people who have been unfortunately involved with this drug programme. Among other things, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in May 1987, just six months after this administration came into being, we took firm steps for the first time, to set in train, action to take care of people involved in drugs, *et cetera*. We set up what was called TACADA (Technical Advisory Committee on Alcohol and Drug Abuse). Their mission is to develop a research capability for continuous assessment of the extent and peculiarities of the problem of not only drug abuse but alcohol as well; to reduce the demand by the nation's population for alcohol and all sorts of drugs, through the development of a public education and information programme and to develop a cohesive and well-co-ordinated partnership among all government agencies, non-governmental organizations, community groups, international agencies, and even foreign governments in the offensive against drug abuse.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, that programme is so high profile, it is so important to this administration that Cabinet directed that it be administered by the Prime Minister himself in the Office of the Prime Minister. I think before it was the Minister for Health. Well, I am being corrected. My friend and colleague tells me that it was always under the Prime Minister's office.

It is essentially responsible for developing programme and project proposals, monitoring their progress and providing expert advice to Government on various drug abuse matters. TACADA is, in turn, responsible to the Inter-sectoral Co-

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ordinating Council on Alcohol and Drug abuse, called ISCADA, a committee comprised of Ministers of Government from various strategic ministries and a representative of the non-governmental sector. Mr. Deputy Speaker, scarce funds that we can well do with for health, for education, for policing, *et cetera*, are being pumped into that programme by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. But significant funding has been received from the United Nations Fund for Drug Abuse Control (UNFDAC) for this demand reduction programme.

Also, through bilateral arrangements the governments of the United States, Britain and France, have helped us with equipment and training needs. They have prepared a master plan and blueprinted the approach that is to be adopted by Government in addressing the problem of drug abuse. We have identified a need for continuous registers to keep abreast of data on the subject of drug abuse. For special studies to be focussed on areas of special interests: for surveys, for demand reduction and for public education and information. We also have community-based prevention activities.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I believe more details will be forthcoming, I am sure, from the Minister of Family Services in his presentation, because he is intimately involved, like I am, in the programme with the help of the Prime Minister and other ministers of this administration.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, progress in the area of co-operation has perhaps been one of the most satisfying aspects of the Caribbean and even the global prevention thrust. The level of co-operation and commitment which led to the development of the international convention against trafficking in narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances must continue as we attempt to develop new instruments and revise old methods to cope with this drug trade. This is why I am so happy this afternoon, to support this bill, which, as I said, is long in coming, through no fault of this Government, because from the time we came into office in 1987, we have taken steps to make sure that we are a party of this convention by bringing this bill on stream.

The Secretary General of the United Nations has pointed out in his annual report that:

“The monetary value in drug trafficking has recently surpassed that of the international trade in oil...”

Would you believe that, Mr. Deputy Speaker?

“The monetary value in drug trafficking has surpassed the international trade in oil and is second only to that in armaments.”

You wonder if you are in the right world when you read these statements, Mr. Deputy Speaker—which are true—and also when you sit in a place like this and you hear the innuendoes and the filth thrown at you by people who you think should know better. It is a searing commentary on contemporary international priorities that while many countries struggle with malnutrition, with disease, and a host of other economic and social problems, the trade in illegal drugs and arms stands as a pinnacle of international economies. As I said, it makes you wonder whether we should be part of this world at all or part of this human race.

The international community and Trinidad and Tobago and his Government have declared war on this illicit trade. It is in this spirit that our Hon. Prime Minister has proposed the establishment of an international criminal court which would be a judicial institution operating with the agreement of all states in the international community, and will adjudicate on the criminal responsibility of individuals who contravene international law.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in a magazine I saw circulated in this House about a month ago—I saw it had gained international support—some international organization had written to all Parliaments throughout the world, I understand, asking for support for the international criminal court. Unfortunately, as is not uncommon, they did not mention in that international magazine that the idea came from the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago.

Let me go straight to what was raised here this afternoon, because, as I said, when your conscience is clean, you fear no man; you fear God, you fear no man whatsoever. I work hard during the day and I sleep well at nights because I have nothing whatsoever to fear. I do not fear God. I love God because I live in such a way that I have nothing to fear.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is unfortunate that the Member for Port of Spain North, in order to make his headlines, by innuendo, threw out a veiled attack on me, by stating:

“Are we to believe that the police force was not aware that the Minister of National Security should have been aware of what happened to Paul Mansoor, the person who was convicted and charged with drug trafficking recently?”

In furtherance of that innuendo, what he is saying is, in other words, that the United States Police Service should have told our local Police Service; our local Police Service should have told the Minister of National Security, and the

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Minister of National Security should have told the Minister of Health, so that the Minister of Health should have known. That is what he stated, that is what he is throwing out. People throw out mud and they hope it will stick, so the Minister of Health, apart from his many problems inherited from the past 30 years in health, should have known who was charged 10,000 or more miles away in Miami. His actions should have been guided by what the American police knew, what the Trinidad police should have known and what the Minister of National Security in charge of the police should have known.

Of course, everybody with common sense knows that things do not operate that way. There are many things that the Minister of National Security deals with, and many things I deal with which we do not go to Cabinet with; we do not tell our colleagues, we do not have time for that, to tell them about every detail in our charge. That does not arise. It simply does not arise. But, of course, in typical fashion, they throw mud and hope that some will stick. That is why, I suppose, he was given leeway to do that, in the hope that it would catch the media headlines. It does not worry me in the least.

But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in answer to my “friend” from Couva North—you want to keep far from “friends” like that—talking about big shots, I have, again, as I said, spent 15 years in private practice, and possibly 18 years in public life. During my time I have helped—it could not be hundreds, it must be thousands of people. I do not look at colour, creed, class, or race. I help everybody who comes to me for help. I have helped thousands of people in my time and I will continue to help thousands of people. There are always exceptions, and there will continue to be exceptions. *[Interruption]* He says it is the job of a priest to help.

I know that both in private practice, I do not know if he ever did that in his private practice—I have helped many people free of charge; poor people, free of charge, when they come to me and told me their plight and I realized that they did not have the wherewithal.

Certainly that is so in my public life; I also believe it is my duty as a politician to help people and I believe that is the very basic nature of our job, to help people. But, of course, he does not believe that. I do not know if he was speaking for his party, the UNC; as far as he is concerned, it is only priests who help people. Mr. Deputy Speaker, that is not my philosophy. My philosophy is that you are here on this earth for a very short time and whilst you are here, once you are in a certain position, you are here to help your fellow man. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker, he says it is stretching the imagination beyond reality if the recommender does not ask “what for”, when someone comes to him for a recommendation. As I said, I have no qualms whatsoever. I will repeat what happened in detail. This is the letter I wrote to the Prime Minister on July 31, 1991:

“Hon. A.N.R. Robinson,
Prime Minister,

Dear Prime Minister:

Re *Sunday Mirror*, dated July 28, 1991, headlined, ‘Minister in Drug Contract’. The above refers, the facts are as follows:

- (1) On or about June 1, 1991, Robert Mansoor, who lives obliquely opposite to me, came to my home and asked for a recommendation for himself and his family.”

Mr. Deputy Speaker, immediately, I asked him what it is for, and his answer was, “It is just a general recommendation, give me a general recommendation for myself and my family.”

Mr. Sudama: Did that not make you suspicious?

Mr. Richardson: Not at all, I have done that hundreds of times before, and, as I said, I will continue to do that. A general recommendation, as opposed to what the Member for Couva North did, giving directives to foreign governments.

I continue to quote from the letter, Mr. Deputy Speaker:

“Although on reflection I realize he was not specific...”

because what he asked for is a general recommendation. To continue:

“I was of the opinion it was for business reasons, he having lost all his property on Charlotte Street, Port of Spain, in the looting of July 27, 1990.”

Mr. Deputy Speaker. I do not know his store, but what I do know is that he had, as far as I am told, a one-door store on Charlotte Street, which was completely gutted in the events of July 27.

To continue to quote from the letter:

“I gave him the recommendation on Monday, June 10, 1991, copy attached.

- (2) As a result of an article which appeared in the *Mirror* of June 16, 1991, and which came to my attention later that week I realized that one of his children, Paul was charged in Miami for drug trafficking. I immediately

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went to his home and demanded the return of the recommendation. He and his wife assured me that it had no connection with the case, and although they could not locate it immediately, they would return it as recommended. Robert Mansoor eventually returned the said recommendation, the original, to my home later that month in my absence, delivering it to my official driver, Police Constable Waldrop. I have not seen any member of the family since.”

The rest of the article is not pertinent to this. It is about a libel action against the *Mirror* newspaper. I signed, “Yours sincerely, Selwyn Richardson.”

Mr. Deputy Speaker, just to explain as I said, I would like you to take note, that Robert Mansoor came to my home on June 3, 1991; this general recommendation was given to him on June 10, 1991. I am pretty sure it was a Monday morning. The first note that came to the public’s attention and which came to my attention was as a result of this article; in fact, I have it here, the *Sunday Mirror*, dated June 16, 1991. Ten days later this was first published, this first came to light. The headline was:

“\$3 million Coke Bust, Local Syrian held in Miami. For the first time in local crime history a Trinidadian of Syrian ancestry is being detained at a Miami prison for international drug trafficking.”

So that it was six days after the father got this recommendation that it appeared in any newspaper that his son was charged with drug trafficking.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, immediately, as I said, I went over to his home and I said I want back my recommendation immediately, although it had nothing to do with Paul Mansoor, who was tried for drug trafficking. As I said, both he and his wife came out to me and they assured me that it had nothing whatsoever to do with the case, and that they would give it back to me.

As I said, within a few days—bearing in mind the dated—June 3, he came to me; June 10, he got the recommendation; June 16, the charge first appeared in the newspaper. In the same month, by the middle of June he brought back my original recommendation. It is in my hand writing and, this is the recommendation. I lay it on the Table to show you what happened.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as far as I know from the media, the case was heard on October 1, four months later. So through the Ministry of External Affairs, we have directed that official investigations be conducted to find out exactly what

was used. Because, of course, there is no doubt that it must have been either a fax or a photocopy which was used, a photocopy of this.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The speaking time of the hon. Member has expired.

Question proposed, That the hon. Member's speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. [*Hon. E. Hosein.*]

6.00 p.m.

Mr. Richardson: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and hon. Members.

Within the next few days I am sure that this Government and the public will know, because of our official investigations, what was used in court. As I said, this is the original letter which was returned to me in June. Fortunately, it was not typed. This is the original; in my handwriting. So that the case was October 1, what was used in court must have been a photocopy. If that is not trickery, tell me what is.

Hon. Member: You wrote one recommendation.

Mr. Richardson: One recommendation. Of course, you know what happens in the media. Sometimes you wonder, as one exemplar said, if the media is just there to destroy, to pull down. I heard some reports on the radio and read reports in the newspapers, and I wondered if I am living in a real world, trying to help people and having a background, as I have, to see what happened and to hear what happened. The truth must come out. I have not blessed my eyes on any of the Mansoors since. I have no need to approach him or even to ask him to speak the truth, I know that his conscience must have bothered him and he must speak the truth sooner or later. On Friday, October 11, 1991, in the *Trinidad Guardian*—I believe it was in the *Express* also—the headline said:

"Mansoor: Prayers, not letters..."

The sub-headline said:

"Father admits keeping 'coke' charge from the CJ, Richardson."

Mr. Deputy Speaker, that is the truth. I am sure I speak for the Chief Justice when I say that we knew nothing of this coke charge until it was made known some time after the recommendation was issued.

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The campaign went on. You would have sworn that the media were looking for what, I know not, but a campaign was on to destroy, to pull down, to vilify. I said nothing. I have turned over the whole episode to my lawyers. But I did note that some time after there were letters in the newspapers apologizing for some editorials—an editorial particularly in the *Guardian*—which, if that was not defamation, I do not know what is. I cannot seem to put my hands on that editorial now but as a result of what came to light there were apologies in the newspaper on its front page. In fact, the headline of the editorial was really on the Minister of Health. The headline of the apology was addressed to the Chief Justice, and it was only in fine print you saw that they apologized to the Minister of Health for what took place.

To add insult to injury, so to speak, on Saturday, October 12, 1991, this card was delivered to my home. It speaks for itself. I shall put that in the record. The front page of the card says:

"I am sorry"

and the card reads:

"It is not easy to express the things I am feeling now so I will simply say I am sorry.

From Robert and Helen and Family."

I say no more. I lay it on the Table, Mr. Deputy Speaker. *[Interruption]*

The Member for Couva North said his conscience is relieved. I did not know he has a conscience. I know he does not have a heart but I did not know that he has a conscience. *[Interruption]* He said something about it being a slip of the tongue. His tongue slips all the time.

Mrs. Donawa-McDavidson: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I did not hear clearly what he said was written on the card and I asked him quietly to repeat it but I do not think he repeated it. I want to be sure what he said is written on the card. Could you pass the card?

Mr. Richardson: You are free to pass around the card, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because I have no secrets. As Mayaro people would say, "I have no cocoa in the sun, I do not have to look for rain."

Hon. Member: Coconut.

Mr. Richardson: "Cocoa and coconut."

I am just being told that the former Leader of the Opposition and Member for San Fernando East, recently on his campaign trail in Penal, and other places where he knows that party does not stand a chance like a snowball in hell, has been referring to the fact, as he states, that there is a definite link now, as a result of these recommendations, between drug barons and Cabinet Ministers. Of course, as a result of what I have heard, I have sent for that tape and I will take whatever

action I see fit. I do not even have the chance to listen to the radio in my quest to do public good, not only for myself but for this Government and the country.

The Member for San Fernando East, above all persons, attacks me for something done as innocently, as humanely, as the action I took by giving Mansoor that testimonial. Look at the difference in the action taken! You give somebody who is in need of a recommendation, not meaning much, but in the hope that it will help him in some way or another. On June 10, one hears that his son is charged, you get it back immediately, and unfortunately he uses it in a way in which, of course, it was never intended.

My friend from Couva North is a lawyer, and he would know, that in a court of law, action like that is always condemned, it does not stand a chance, like a snowball in hell. For example, if you are entering into a contract and I come to you and I do not lay all the facts on the table that is no contract, if Robert Mansoor says it is not trickery, and my friend from Couva North who is a member of the profession, and who should know better, says that is not trickery; tell me what is? Then, he could not be a member of the profession.

As I said, if I approach you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to enter into a contract—whatever the nature of the contract—not only would I be misleading you if I make an untrue statement to you—and this is well known in law—but if I withhold any material fact from you, then that is trickery. That is what is called "trickery." Whether Robert Mansoor says it is trickery or not; whether the Member for Couva North, who should know better, says it is not trickery, we maintain in law that it is trickery. I have a case here since 1774, in which Lord Mansfield, one of the best judges from time immemorial, stated that any actions like that amount to trickery, amount to fraud.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I said, imagine the Member for San Fernando East cannot even deal with the Member for Laventille—"poor good soul, bless her

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heart"—but he goes, I am told, on a platform in Penal and attacks me for something as innocent as that.

Mrs. Donawa-McDavidson: Mr. Deputy Speaker, may I just remind the hon. Member for Ortoire/Mayaro that it is not possible. I am an independent Member of the Parliament. The Member for San Fernando East cannot deal with me.

Hon. Member: She is absolutely right. Even when she was in the party he could not have dealt with her.

Mrs. Donawa-McDavidson: That party is the "Patrick's National Movement."

Mr. Richardson: I would wholeheartedly endorse that. The party to which I had the honour to belong in the 1970s and 1980s no longer exists. It is not the party that I belonged to. It is not the People's National Movement—I endorse what she says—it is the "Patrick's National Movement." When you have this new party taking people who wanted to destroy the People's National Movement, who wanted to destroy its leader and founder—the first Prime Minister, Dr. Eric Williams—and now they are the people who are waving the banner for that movement, it is not the PNM, it is the "Patrick's National Movement." I support what the Member says.

6.10 p.m.

Mr. Sudama: Would the Member give way to a question? Could he indicate whether the Member for Tobago East tried to destroy the original leader of the PNM?

Mr. Richardson: Mr. Deputy Speaker if you look at that action of the Member for San Fernando East as opposed to the action he took in 1980, when action was being taken against perpetrators of the worst sort of international corruption against the people of Trinidad and Tobago, he was then acting Minister of External Affairs for a few days, and whilst acting as Minister of External Affairs, he took steps, with his eyes wide open, to ensure that the witnesses could not come to Trinidad and Tobago to give evidence, witnesses who would have come to this country to support the people of Trinidad and Tobago in their quest to stop the international corruption that was taking place. This is the person who now attacks this Minister as a result of the action taken.

Fortunately, a book is being published in the very near future and I had the pleasure and the privilege of getting a sneak preview of this book. It should be out in the next month I am told. This is what the book states:

"In October, 1980, a PNM official sent, what Richardson interpreted as a veiled warning to the McDonnell Douglas officials who Richardson wanted to come to Trinidad to testify in the Navarro case. Responding to concern by the officials that they might be jailed or otherwise in danger if they came to Trinidad, the official promised in a letter, that while in Trinidad they would 'in no way be embarrassed either personally or by reasons of their corporate association, it being understood that the normal laws of the country would apply. For example, speeding, improper parking, currency violations, drugs, etc.)' Considering that Johnny O' had recently threatened them (McDonnell Douglas) with violence..."

and this is in the evidence. The directors of McDonnell Douglas were threatened with violence. I have the affidavit here:

"for having stopped payment on the \$175,000 cheque..."

one of many cheques—

"this ambiguous declaration of protection resulted in all the McDonnell Douglas witnesses refusing to set foot in the Trinidad ever again."

This is from the famous writer Paul Mc Laughlin. This is coming out in a book which will be published in November. The author of that threatening letter was none other than the Member for San Fernando East, who was then acting as Minister of External Affairs of Trinidad and Tobago. As the book said, it was quite clear that he issued this letter as a veiled threat, but it was very real. As the evidence would show—evidence which I got on oath, on affidavit from one of the directors of McDonnell Douglas later—one, O'Halloran himself went to McDonnell Douglas in Palm Beach, California and threatened the people; and two, as a result of the letter issued by the then acting Minister of External Affairs, Patrick Manning, Member for San Fernando East, they were not coming to Trinidad and Tobago, they were not touching this country with a rod. But he has the audacity now to go on a public platform and attack this Member for Ortoire/Mayaro. Mr. Deputy Speaker, sometimes, I wonder if I ever belonged.

The whole thrust of the contribution by the Member for Couva North was to attack the character of the Member for Ortoire/Mayaro. He has done that all his life without success and he will continue to do it unsuccessfully, of course. I am immune to him now. The Member for Couva North says that Robert Mansoor maintained that he did not trick the Chief Justice. Well, I have dealt with that. Since 1774, Lord Mansfield said any action like that amounts to a trick. So

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whether it is Robert Mansoor who said he did not trick the Chief Justice and by extension, Selwyn Richardson, or the Member for Couva North should know better, it still amounts to trickery, trickery of the worst kind.

One thing I must deal with, the Member for Couva North and I quote him, "...if they find drugs on an aeroplane." The fact is, what he was saying—again by extension—if the authorities in Miami found drugs on our aeroplane, why did they

not seize the aeroplane? His logic is so twisted. I have not received the evidence as yet, but when the Minister of External Affairs receives the report, I am sure he will pass it on to Cabinet and to me, but as far as I know from reading the newspapers, because that is what I base my contention on, the drugs were found on Paul Mansoor when he was in the terminal building. He was searched by customs officials in the terminal building. The drugs were not found on an aeroplane. If the drugs were found on an aeroplane, certain actions would have been taken. But of course, this is how he acts in order to make a point. The innuendo is, the drugs were found on the aeroplane; the aeroplane was not impounded; the Government was not fined because high people were involved. This is the innuendo; this is the mud he keeps throwing, hoping that some would stick some time. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker, all I said is that when we receive the evidence we will know what took place. What I do know on the one hand is that I saw in certain newspapers where Robert Mansoor was saying that his son was innocent and that he was being innocently used. On the other hand, some time later I heard on a radio station where Robert Mansoor, in giving evidence of character on behalf of his son—this came out in the radio report—stated that his son did it because the family was impoverished as a result of the events of July 27, 1990; the son thought he and his parents could not afford to meet the family bills so he did it for \$30,000 to help out the family, misguidedly. So I do not know where the truth lies. I am not to judge the truth, but this is what came out. This is what I have heard so far and when we get the official report then I will know.

6.20 p.m.

As I said Mr. Deputy Speaker, even with the media it makes you wonder whether you should bother at all, whether you live in the right world, when one sees the sort of attacks being perpetrated on me. As a result of those attacks, even before the *Guardian* newspapers apologized to me, I wrote this letter on October

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11, 1991, I believe it was last Friday, and sent it to one of the editors of the *Guardian*:

"Dear Sir,

Re: Editorial of 11th October, 1991
'THOSE MANSOOR LETTERS':

I refer to your editorial of today's date. Not only did Mr. Robert Mansoor not inform me that this recommendation 'was going to be used to assist in his son's defence' as you stated, but much more pointedly as you can see from copy of my attached letter to the Prime Minister dated July 31, as soon as the charges came to my attention (June 16), I 'went to his home and demanded the return of the recommendation.' Robert and Helen Mansoor assured me that it had no connection with the case, and returned the said recommendation to me that said month, i.e. June.

Your statement that 'even stranger was the fact that no correspondence was issued to negate the efforts of the letters when their true purpose became known' among others bears no reference to the facts. The P.M. immediately released my letter, on receipt, and same was made public.

Truth will prevail.

Selwyn Richardson."

I sent this letter to the Editor of the *Guardian* last Friday and I saw when the delivery was made. I sent a copy to the *Express*, of course. In the media sometimes you wonder if truth has any relevance, because, of course, those letters were never published. Up to now, that letter has not been published. It makes one wonder.

The Member for Couva North had a lot to say about truth and tongue slipping, *etc.* One wonders if it is the same Member who, according to page 1 of the *Express* of Tuesday, August 6, 1991, headlined "PM rejected Nigerian offer says Panday" said:

"Addressing an enthusiastic crowd at Penal Junction on Sunday, Panday said when he became a Minister in the NAR Government, he began looking at the offer of a cultural centre by the Indian Government.

'I also discovered,' he said, 'that the Nigerian Government had made a similar offer to the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. I began pursuing with the Nigerian Government, as well as the Indian Government, the

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possibility of setting up a cultural relationship with Nigeria, since half of our population are descendants of Africans.'

'I began to negotiate,' said Panday. 'But then Robinson fired me. And he refused the Indian cultural centre just to discriminate against the Indians. And because of that action, he could not accept the Nigerian cultural centre either.' "

Of course, when His Excellency, the High Commissioner for Nigeria read that he immediately went public and said that at no stage was any offer made. He did not only say "not only was an offer not made", but went on to state that such discussions never arose between the Government of Nigeria and the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. That was from the mouth of His Excellency the High Commissioner for Nigeria who is still the High Commissioner for Nigeria in Trinidad and Tobago.

Immediately after His Excellency, the High Commissioner issued that denial, the Member for Couva North, my "friend", my colleague, attorney-at-law, went public and stated he never said so. He said the newspapers misquoted him. That was his explanation; that is a man who talks about the slip of the tongue. His tongue is always slipping. This is the man who spent 75 minutes attacking me. It is not only his tongue that slips, his whole personality is slipping now.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would have to curtail. What I have to say is that this Government is very serious about drugs and doing something about it, in association with other governments and as a country. This bill, which would result in forfeiture of assets of drugs, has my full support. I have done a lot in my 10 years of Cabinet life; in my 18 years of public life, to ensure that our youths and country would not continue the way they are going to be enveloped in the drug culture, as we have been since the boom started in the early 1970s.

I will continue, in association with my Cabinet colleagues of the calibre that I am now with, to do all in my power to ensure that this drug culture is arrested. In my own constituency, we have a big problem with that drug culture. I know that other parties have turned a blind eye to drugs. In fact, some are even benefiting from the drug scourge and from the drug culture.

In 1985, the United Kingdom passed an Interception of Communications Act, 1985, Chap. 56. It is a pity that we are not brave enough to pass such a law. Many people, like the Member for Couva North, would go and parade and, by innuendo, attack people's character when it comes to drugs, but they will do nothing to ensure that the drug culture is stopped.

This Act allows interception in communications, of course, with certain conditions. For example, section 2(2) states:

"The Secretary of State shall not issue a warrant under this section to tap people's phone unless he considers that a warrant is necessary;

(b) For the purpose of preventing or detecting serious crime;"

In other words, like in America, they could now tap phones to ensure that if there is any suspicion that someone is involved in the drug culture, they can get at that person.

I do not think I would live to see the light of day when a bill of this kind will be passed in Trinidad. If that bill were to come to this forum, it would have my support. I hope that I would live to see this because I know what it would do. It would help the police and I want to assure you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I know that the majority of policemen in this county are interested, and are putting up a good fight to arrest and eradicate this culture. Of course, there are exceptions. *[Interruption]* Thank you. Let me make it clear that there are exceptions.

There will be exceptions in every organization. We have 5,000 policemen; you cannot have all "good" policemen, but I could endorse the fact that the majority of them are honest policemen; they are willing to help and they are doing all in their power to help. They will have the support of the Minister of National Security and this entire Cabinet.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I thank you and I commend the hon. Attorney General in bringing this bill. I am sure it will have the support of all right-thinking Members on this side, including possibly some Members of the Opposition and definitely most of the Members on the Independent benches, members of the "hard party". Thank you.

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Justice and National Security (Hon. Joseph Toney): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I beg to move that the House do now adjourn to Friday, October 25, 1991 at 1.30 p.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Before the motion is put to the House, the hon. Member for Oropouche was granted leave by the Speaker to raise a motion on the adjournment.

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Mr. Trevor Sudama (*Oropouche*): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will be brief with respect to this motion. I want to bring to the attention of this House, for the umpteenth time, the intolerable condition to which pupils and teachers of the Dyanand Memorial Vedic School in Penal are subjected, as a result of the delay in the completion of the new structure.

6.30 p.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, after repeated requests for a new Vedic school at Penal—and the Minister of Education, then Mr. Clive Pantin, visited that school with me in February, 1987—an assurance was given that this school would be regarded as a priority for construction. Years passed and I raised the matter again, and nothing was done. In July 1988, as a result of various questions, a stone was laid and construction began in April 1990. This shows you the manner in which the Ministry of Education functions and its relationship with the various denominational boards.

A promise was made that the school would be built in one year because it was not a major kind of construction which was undertaken. After one year in April 1991, the school was nowhere near completion but the parents were very tolerant and they decided to give a little leeway. Still little work was being done and the Arya Pratinidhi Sabha Board refused to treat the matter as one of urgency, particularly its President, who is in the habit of abusing teachers and parents when they rightfully protest; and this abuse was in front of officers from the Ministry of Education.

I raised the matter in the House, and the Minister's lack of responsiveness was expressed in that she merely said in part that the inconvenience stems from the tardiness of the board in bringing work to a conclusion, for reasons which have nothing to do with finance, and everything to do with the internal problems of the board and problems between the board and the Principal; as if the Ministry of Education has no responsibility for the education of children. That is, of course, if there are children down at Penal, so why should this Minister of Education be concerned with children down at Penal and the problems and inconvenience which they face. She gave that undertaking in her response to me on September 6, that construction work at the Penal Vedic School commenced in May. The construction period was projected to be 12 months.

"My information is that" she said on September 6, 1991, "the problems have been corrected." No problems were corrected. The building is in a very shoddy state; the construction is substandard; the walls are cracking; there is dust

everywhere and the children are not able to attend that school with any kind of convenience whatever. The parents protested. They withdrew their children from the school; the Ministry knew about it and the Ministry seems to ignore that a problem exists.

I want to raise this question very briefly. If public funds are being expended for a school which is under the responsibility of the denominational boards, and the board is dragging its feet; it refuses to respond to legitimate requests, does the Ministry of Education have any authority and power to direct the board to do what is its responsibility? From what I gather, it is either the Ministry does not care, or perhaps it has no power. That should be explained to me.

I do not understand why this Government only acts when there is protest. Then, the Member for Chaguanas complains that people only like to protest about everything. From April, they have been telling you about the inconvenience and that the school is badly constructed and the students cannot use the school. It was supposed to be ready for the beginning of the September term; it was not ready and for the past four months, two people were working on the school in order to get it completed.

The Ministry does nothing. I am told the substandard work was monitored by engineers from the Ministry of Education. I want to know if there are engineers with any competence in the Ministry of Education, and they see substandard work being carried out, whether they have a responsibility or not, or whether they care about how public money is being spent; or do they overlook obvious corruption which is taking place?

Today, I want to make a formal request to the Government to investigate the moneys spent on the Dyanand Memorial Vedic School. According to the Minister, when she responded to me in September, she said that the estimated cost of replacing the school was \$1,750,000; the Ministry's contribution is estimated to be \$1,312,500; so far \$1,144,216 has been paid to the board. If you go to that school, far less than \$1 million has been spent. The value of work done on that school is much less than \$1 million and perhaps nearer to half a million dollars. The Government and the Ministry of Education have a responsibility to investigate the amount of work being done and whether the amount expended by the Ministry of Education to date is justified, and let alone, whether the board will be putting its part of the contribution towards the completion of the school.

If the Government is serious about fighting corruption, it must investigate all suspicions of corruption. This one, with respect to the Dyanand Vedic School,

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smacks of corruption, in terms of the amount expended and the quality and quantity of work. The school is still not yet complete and the students and teachers are facing a lot of inconvenience and hardship.

I advised the parents to come here to protest. They protested at Penal and nobody took them on. The Chairman of the Arya Pratinidhi Sabha Board even used violence on parents there and caused his motor-car to strike a pregnant woman on the premises of the school. The matter was reported to the police and they took absolutely no action. It seems that once you are in the good graces of the Government, that you can do anything and get away with impunity and they drag their feet. I advised the parents to come and protest and they came last Friday and protested outside this Parliament and they went to the Ministry of Education and protested. Still nothing is being done.

I have been raising the matter in Parliament for five months now and nothing has been done. That is the only way you all act. People who do not hear will have to feel. It is only when the Member for Chaguanas went down there on Saturday and he was faced with a barrage of protests—I advised them to protest because that is the only way you can get action. I will continue to advise them to protest and to seek their legitimate rights in this country against an irresponsible and uncaring government, especially people in my constituency.

In order to make a big propaganda issue out of it, the Member for Chaguanas directs that the Minister in the Ministry of Industry, Enterprise and Tourism look at and solve the problems for them at Penal with respect to the Vedic School. He is now the Minister of Education for Oropouche. I want to know what is the function of the Member for Arouca South. Do you see how they go about the business of government? He wants to give a fellow political mileage, so he takes away responsibility for education in that instance, and hands it over to him; in order to facilitate him with a few votes. That is a lost cause, and I want to tell him that. It is a “jokey” system of government that they are carrying on in this country. It was only as a result of that protest on Saturday, that the Member for Chaguanas was forced to go and see the condition of the school and then he gave instructions that something be done.

I hope that something meaningful would be done to facilitate completion of work on the school. If nothing is being done, I am here giving warning that I am going to advise the parents to come back here and protest, until such time that this Government sees it fit to take effective action. At the same time, I am calling on this Government, if it is serious about its claims to pursue corruption, to look into the question of the construction of the Dyanand Memorial Vedic School in Penal,

to find out whether the sums expended there have been satisfactory, in terms of the quality and quantity of work done and to take appropriate action.

6.40 p.m.

In the meantime, on behalf of my constituents, I will continue vigilantly to seek and protect their rights. I am not doing this to gain votes because I do not have to do these things to gain votes. I do it in my representative capacity and they fully understand the limited powers that I have as a Member of the Opposition but they also support me fully for the vigour with which I make representation on their behalf and of course, when the time comes, they will express that in the appropriate manner.

I therefore urge the proxy Minister who is here with us today—I do not know what has happened to the substantive Minister but I said that her portfolio was taken away from her and distributed in various forms and fashions to persons who have other responsibilities. No wonder she is not in this House today to defend the actions of her Ministry. I hope that my good friend from Pointe-a-Pierre will take up the cudgels and defend his lady colleague this afternoon with respect to this saga, which is called the Dyanand Memorial Vedic School.

Acting Minister of Education (Hon. Oswald Hem Lee): Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me assure the Member for Oropouche that the substantive Minister of Education is indeed carrying out her duties elsewhere, representing the Government and people of Trinidad and Tobago at an international conference and that she is well in command of her Ministry.

I want to state as well that, in my view, it is unfortunate that the Member for Oropouche never approached the Ministry of Education with respect to coming and sitting with us—

Mr. Sudama: Mr. Deputy Speaker, on a point of order. I have raised this question with the Minister personally and I have raised it in this House. For the Member to come here and say that I never—

Mr. Hem Lee: I agree, but he never approached the Ministry of Education with a view to coming and sitting with the PTA or the teachers or the board to rectify the matter. He raised the matter in the House on September 6 and the Minister replied to him on that occasion.

I do not know of any corruption that is taking place with respect to the Dyanand Memorial Vedic School. As far as I am aware, and as the Member for

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Oropouche is fully aware, it is a board school and the Ministry's obligation is to make a contribution of 75 per cent of the overall cost and we have officials on site who have indicated to us that they are satisfied that the amount of money we have disbursed so far is indeed well spent. However, on Friday, October 11, the Ministry officials met with the President and members of the PTA at the Ministry of Education with a view to remedying the situation. At that meeting, it was decided that the Ministry would meet with the board to have certain things undertaken. Among them are:

To have the floor terrazzoed and sealed with respect to a dust problem that had emerged;

To have two additional water tanks installed and to erect ladders onto the tanks so that the official from WASA could fill the tanks;

To have the entry to the tanks well prepared and paved so that the trucks could have easy access to the tanks.

In addition to that the Ministry was supposed to ensure that 25 blackboard screens be placed in the school. Over the last few days or so these things have been completed. Today a meeting was held on site with the Director of School Supervision, the PTA, as well as representatives of TTUTA and members of the board and it was decided that teachers will return to the school from Monday, October 21 at normal time, 8.30 a.m.

Because of certain things that took place on the site and because certain teachers feel that they need additional security, the Ministry of Education has decided to provide daytime security there from now until school closes in December, 1991. We have also asked the board to provide partial fencing to a sensitive area of the school compound.

We in the Ministry of Education are very concerned about all the children, wherever they may be, be they at Penal, Port of Spain, Toco/Manzanilla or Point Fortin. We have been trying our best to ensure that all the students and teachers of the nation go to school under habitable conditions, notwithstanding the fact that many schools are old and in a state of disrepair. Based on what funds we have available, we have always been trying to do our best to ensure that our students as well as the teachers operate under the best conditions that we can possibly provide at this particular time. The students at this school are no less than the students anywhere else.

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In this school there is a particular problem with relation to the Board and the principal of the school and we have met with the president of the board on several occasions with a view to resolving the matter. We have advised the president of the board that he should take his complaints to the Teaching Service Commission rather than the Ministry, in order to have that aspect of the problem rectified.

With respect to the Ministry of Education, we have fulfilled all our commitments with respect to the school, ensuring that we upgrade the facilities there. I have every confidence that the school will be resumed to normal on Monday, October 21, and that there will be no need for the Member for Oropouche to continue to advise the people to make any form of protest, whatsoever.

6.50 p.m.

There are persons who are very much concerned about the welfare of those students and indeed the welfare of the parents and teachers in the Oropouche area and those persons are liaising closely with the Ministry. We are co-operating fully to ensure that his constituency will be getting the best of facilities from now on. Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Motion made and question proposed, That the House do now adjourn to Friday, October 25, 1991 at 1.30 p.m. [Hon. B. Tewarie]

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 6.52 p.m.