

Leave of Absence

Friday, April, 30, 1993

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, April, 30, 1993

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, I have granted leave of absence from today's sitting to the Member for St. Ann's East (Hon. Wendell Mottley) and the Member for Laventille East/Morvant (Hon. Kenneth Collis).

PAPERS LAID

1. The Immigration (Amendment) Regulations, 1993. [*The Minister of Education (Hon. A. Ramrekersingh)*]
2. Annual Report of the Public Utilities Commission for the year ended December 31, 1991. [*Hon. A. Ramrekersingh*]
3. Annual Report of the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago for the year ended December 31, 1992. [*Hon. A. Ramrekersingh*]
4. Annual Economic Survey of the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago for the year ended 1992. [*Hon. A. Ramrekersingh*]
5. Report of the Auditor General on the Accounts of the Students' Revolving Loan Fund for the year ended December 31, 1986. [*Hon. A. Ramrekersingh*]

Paper No. 5 to be referred to the Public Accounts Committee.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

The Minister of Education (Hon. Augustus Ramrekersingh): Madam Speaker, we are asking that the answers to the following questions be deferred for one week: Nos. 140, 141, 180, 191, 194, 200, 201, 206 and 208.

In the case of question No. 140, we are awaiting the Minister of energy who has the answer and he is on his way here. Hopefully, he will be here before this part of the agenda is over.

The following questions stood on the Order Paper in the name of Mr. Subhas Panday (Naparima):

**Sale of Natural Gas
(NUCOR)**

140. Could the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries state:

- (a) The price per cubic metre the National Gas Company will be selling natural gas to NUCOR up and until it embarks upon commercial production of the product “steel carbide”?
- (b) The amount of natural gas the National Gas Company expects to supply to NUCOR during research and development of the product mentioned in para. (a)?
- (c) Will the “steel carbide” product developed be patented?
- (d) If the answer to (c) is in the affirmative, could the Minister state who will be the holder of such a patent?
- (e) What returns, if any, do the National Gas Company expect to receive from the proceeds of the sale of the “steel carbide” by NUCOR for the period of one year after it embarks upon commercial production?

Unemployment Symposium

141. Would the Minister of Labour and Co-operatives state:

- (b) What was the cost of the symposium on unemployment held in April, 1992 at the Chaguaramas Convention Centre?
- (b) As a consequence of the said symposium, how many permanent jobs were created?
- (c) In what areas were these jobs created?

Questions, by leave, deferred.

**San Fernando Magistrates’ Court
(Uncomfortable Conditions)**

143. Mr. Subhas Panday (*Naparima*) asked the Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs:

- (a) Is the Attorney General aware of the insanitary, congested and uncomfortable conditions under which attorneys, police, magistrates and public servants work at the San Fernando Magistrates’ Court.
- (b) If the answer is in the affirmative, what steps are being taken to alleviate these problems?

The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (Hon. Keith Sobion): Madam Speaker, the Attorney General is satisfied that the San Fernando Magistrates' Court is spacious and provides adequate accommodation for attorneys, police, magistrates and public servants.

However, certain problems do exist which can adversely affect the functioning of those who work in or otherwise use these facilities.

In response to part (b), the Magistracy and the Ministry of works and Transport are at present holding discussions to determine the extent of the required refurbishment works to be undertaken on all magistrates' courts, including the San Fernando Magistrates' Court.

Consideration has been given to the following projects in respect of the San Fernando Magistrates' Court:

- Rectifying the defects in the electrical installation;
- the erection of a wall on the north and north-eastern perimeter to keep out vagrants;
- painting of walls; and
- the provision of additional toilet facilities.

Additionally, consideration has been given to the installation of air conditioning units.

The following question stood on the Order Paper in the name of Miss Hulsie Bhaggan (Chaguanas):

**Civilian Conservation Corps
(Recruitment)**

180. Would the Minister of National Security indicate the procedure and the criteria for recruitment of persons who will be or are involved in the Civilian Conservation Corps?

Question, by leave, deferred.

**State Lands
(Unauthorized Occupancy)**

185. Mr. Trevor Sudama (Oropouche) asked the Minister of Planning and Development:

Could the Minister state:

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- (a) What is the present position with respect to the government's undertaking to regularize unauthorized occupancy of state lands?
- (b) What is the basis on which the Inspector of State Lands institutes legal proceedings against unauthorized occupants who have been in occupation for over 10 years?
- (c) Whether the Inspector of State Lands has a discretion as to those who will be prosecuted and those, in similar circumstances, who will not be prosecuted?

The Minister in the Ministry of Planning and Development (Sen. The Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Madam Speaker, Act No. 20 of 1986, Regularization of Tenure State Lands Act, made provision for the regularization of squatters who had erected before the appointed day—in that Act, it is December 2, 1977—or were, on the appointed day, in the process of erecting on state lands any structure for use as a dwelling house.

The Act provided *inter alia* for the following:

- (1) the regularization of the tenure of state lands by certain persons in wrongful possession thereof;
- (2) the establishment of a tribunal to hear and determine applications for such persons for regularization of such tenured and for connected purposes.

Although the previous administration declared an intention to regularize residential squatting occurring prior to December 16, 1986, no legislation was enacted to give effect to that policy. Accordingly, the Director of Surveys has had to be guided by the provisions of Act No. 20 of 1986.

I wish to advise that:

- (1) a policy position on residential squatting is expected to come before Cabinet for consideration shortly;
- (2) the Ministry of Housing and Settlement, through the medium of the IDB financed programme is proceeding with squatter regularization, which will benefit approximately 2,500 families on 11 sites;
- (3) the National Housing Authority is implementing squatter regularization projects which will benefit 2,500 families on 23 sites.

The Transfer of Functions, Director of Surveys Order, 1980, Legal Notice No. 19, authorizes the Director of Surveys to carry out the state land administration functions of the Commissioner of State Lands.

Section 6(1) of the State Lands Act defines the duties and powers of the Commissioner of State Lands in the following terms:

“The Commissioner shall have the management of all lands of the State, and shall be charged with the prevention of squatting and encroachment upon the same and of spoil and injury to the woods and forests on such lands, and shall superintend the settlement and allotment of State lands and the laying out of village lots in such districts as the President from time to time directs.”

The Inspector of State Lands is an employee of the Public Service whose responsibilities include the monitoring and prevention of squatting on state lands. Among other things, this officer is expected to serve quit notices to squatters and to represent the state in court when squatting or breach of tenancy is involved. The work is carried out under the general supervision and direction of the Commissioner of State Lands and is reviewed and checked through analysis of report and field inspections.

The Commissioner of State Lands does not normally institute legal proceedings against unauthorized occupants who have been in occupation of state lands for over 10 years; that is residential squatters. Such squatters are monitored and are usually advised against upgrading any wooden structures into permanent, concrete structures. Where squatters refuse to heed cautions from the Commissioner of State Lands and persist with the construction of permanent structures, quit notices are served by the Commissioner of State Lands.

Legal proceedings are instituted against persons occupying state lands for over 10 years in the following circumstances:

- (1) that the buildings adversely affect public health and the condition of the environment of the area;
- (2) the site is required for public use by the state;
- (3) the squatter has proceeded to convert the building wholly or partially into commercial activity or where the squatter has erected a structure for the conduct of commercial activities; and
- (4) where agricultural squatters have occupied lands that are considered environmentally sensitive.

In other cases, Madam Speaker, legal action is instituted following requests from state agencies, such as the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources.

The Commissioner of State Lands has, for example, instituted legal proceedings against unauthorized occupants who have resorted to farming huge acreages in sensitive areas, especially areas which are environmentally sensitive.

It must be emphasized that the cut-off date in Act No. 20 of 1986 and the policy enunciated by the previous administration relate only to residential squatting and not to commercial or agricultural squatting.

The Commissioner of State Lands is, therefore, empowered to institute legal action against unauthorized occupants who are utilizing structures for commercial activity, and against agricultural squatters, even where the occupancy commenced prior to December 2, 1977.

Madam Speaker, since action cannot be taken simultaneously against a large body of illegal occupants of state lands, the Commissioner of State Lands invariably gives priority to those cases which reflect the conditions outlined at part (b) of the answer.

**Forestry Department
(Workers Assigned)**

190. Miss Hulsie Bhaggan (*Chaguanas*) asked the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources:

- (a) Would the Minister indicate the number of workers assigned to the Forestry Department in his ministry?
- (b) Would the Minister indicate the number of daily-paid workers presently employed in that department and the terms of their employment as far as the number of days worked and the rate of remuneration?

The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources (Dr. The Hon. Keith Rowley): Madam Speaker, there are 1,132 workers consisting of 304 monthly-paid employees and 828 daily-rated workers assigned to the Forestry Department of the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources.

Of the 828 daily-rated workers, 416 are classified as “permanent” and these workers receive 10 days work per fortnight. There are 351 workers classified as “regular”. Of this 351, 216 receive 10 days per fortnight; 112 receive five days

per fortnight; and 23 receive eight days per fortnight. There are also 61 workers classified as “casual”, of which 20 receive 10 days per fortnight; 5 receive eight and six days per fortnight respectively; six receive seven days per fortnight; 11 receive five days per fortnight; six receive four days per fortnight; four receive three days per fortnight; and three receive two days per fortnight.

The rates of remuneration of the daily-rated workers in the Forestry Division are outlined in the 1990—1992 Collective Agreement on Wages and Conditions as agreed to between the Chief Personnel Officer and the National Union of Government and Federated Workers.

WRITTEN ANSWER TO QUESTION

The following question stood on the Order paper in the name of Ms. Hulsie Bhaggan (Chaguanas):

**Caribbean Seasonal Programme
(Application for Employment)**

- 191.** (a) Would the Minister of Labour and Co-operatives indicate the number of persons who applied to the Caribbean Seasonal Programme in 1992?
- (b) Would the Minister provide a listing of the names and addresses of the applicants indicating those who were successful in obtaining employment under this programme in 1992?

Question, by leave, deferred.

ORAL ANSWER TO QUESTION

**Corn Production
(Ministry's Incentives)**

192. Mr. Krish P. Jurai (Nariva) asked the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources:

Would the Minister state:

- (a) What has been the success rate of his Ministry's incentives to boost corn production in Trinidad and Tobago?
- (b) How much subsidy has been paid to date with respect to the production of corn in Trinidad and Tobago?

The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources (Dr. The Hon. Keith Rowley): Madam Speaker, the subsidy programme for corn started in

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November of 1992. The incentive offered by the Ministry relates to a guaranteed price of \$1.10 per kilogram for dry corn purchased by the National Flour Mills according to a prescribed grading system.

Technical packages with all the relevant information about the programme were prepared and made available to the farming community at each county extension office.

In 1992, the Chaguaramas Agricultural Development Project produced 1,292 kilograms of high quality seed material for sale to farmers. The ministry also imported open pollinated corn varieties from Mexico in order to provide farmers with the highest yield corn variety. Viability and rigour tests are being conducted to determine their adaptability to local conditions.

Seventeen farmers, including Caroni Limited, with a total of 46 hectares are registered to supply grain to National Flour Mills. It is expected that for 1993 approximately 91,000 kilograms will be delivered to National Flour Mills.

National Flour Mills purchased approximately 3,200 kilograms of corn in November, 1992 at a total value of \$3,520.

WRITTEN ANSWER TO QUESTION

The following question stood on the Order Paper in the name of Mr. Krish P. Jurai (Nariva):

**Central Government
(Employment of Pensioners)**

194. Would the Prime Minister state the following:

- (a) The names of persons above retirement age or who are in receipt of pension and who are presently employed with the central government, the public service, state enterprises and state agencies in Trinidad and Tobago?
- (b) The position each such person holds and the remuneration paid to each person?
- (c) The contractual period for which they hold office?
- (d) Would the Prime Minister also give reasons as to why each of these positions in question cannot be filled by persons who are under retirement age or by persons who are not in receipt of a pension?

Question, by leave, deferred.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

The following questions stood on the Order Paper in the name of Mr. Mohammed Haniff (Princes Town):

**Ministry of Works, Victoria East Division
(Vehicles)**

200. Would the Minister of Works and Transport state:

- (i) (a) How many vehicles are attached to the Ministry of Works, Victoria East Division?
- (b) How many of these vehicles passed inspection for the years 1992 and 1993?
- (c) How many of these vehicles were licensed for the years 1992 and 1993?
- (ii) Will the Minister provide similar information concerning each of the other divisions of the Ministry of Works?

**Guaracara/Tabaquite Road
(Repairs)**

201. Would the Minister of Works and Transport state:

- (b) What steps are being taken repair Guaracara/Tabaquite Road, the area in front of the Williamsville Junior Secondary School where the roadway was dug up as a result of a change of water lines by WASA approximately one year ago?
- (c) When would Lothian's Road in Princes Town which was dug up by WASA approximately two and one half years ago be repaired?

Questions, by leave, deferred.

**Carlsen Field
(Agricultural Access Roads)**

204. Mr. Raymond Palackdharrysingh (*Caroni Central*) asked the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources:

- (a) Is the Minister aware of the deplorable conditions of the agricultural access road network in Carlsen Field?
- (c) Would the Minister state when last any repairs and maintenance works were carried out on the access roads network?

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- (c) What plans he has for the restoration of the access roads?
- (d) How soon would these plans be implemented?

The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources (Dr. The Hon. Keith Rowley): Madam Speaker, the Minister is aware of the condition of the agricultural access roads network in Carlsen Field.

Repairs and maintenance to this road network were last undertaken in 1991.

Generally, the programme of repairs and maintenance of rural access roads throughout the country continues annually, given the availability of resources allocated for this specific purpose.

La Republica Agricultural Access Road

205. Mr. Raymond Palackdharrysingh (*Caroni Central*) asked the Minister of Agriculture Land and Marine Resources:

- (a) Is the Minister aware of the deplorable condition of La Republica agricultural access road in Chickland?
- (b) Would the Minister state whether any IDB funding was allocated for its rehabilitation and how soon would such works begin?
- (c) If the answer is in the negative, why not?

The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources (Dr. The Hon. Keith Rowley): Madam Speaker, the Minister is aware of the condition of the La Republica Agricultural Access Road in Chickland.

On March 5, 1993, in response to House question No. 137, a full list of agricultural rural access roads to be upgraded in 1993 was presented to this honourable House.

The following question stood on the Order Paper in the name of Mr. Raymond Palackdharrysingh (Caroni Central):

Mormon Church (Work Permit Applications)

206. Would the Minister of National Security state:

- (a) The number of applications by missionaries of the Mormon Church for work permits and the number granted for the years 1990, 1991, and 1992 and 1993?

- (b) Its policy towards granting work permits to overseas missionaries?

Question, by leave, deferred.

WRITTEN ANSWER TO QUESTION

The following question stood on the Order Paper in the name of Mr. Krish P. Jurai (Nariva):

**Acquisition of Properties
(Outstanding Compensation)**

208. Would the Minister of Planning and Development state:

- (a) The names of persons from whom the Government compulsorily acquired properties and for which compensation is outstanding?
- (b) The expected date on which the outstanding payments would be made to the persons so affected?

Question, by leave, deferred.

**ADJOURNMENT MOTION
(LEAVE)**

Mr. Ramesh Maharaj (Couva South): Madam Speaker, the matter which I seek leave of this House to discuss, a definite matter of urgent public importance, concerns the rising tide of hopelessness, frustration, insecurity and despair now engulfing our society manifests itself in *inter alia* rampant sexual abuse, neglect of children, vagrancy, drug addiction, murders, suicide, robbery, other criminal activities, unemployment, poverty, destitution, all of which flow directly from the economic policy adopted by the government; And this Motion is, in effect, asking the Government to state to the nation what steps, if any, it is taking or intends to take to reverse this rising tide.

The matter is a definite matter in that it involves the rising tide of hopelessness, frustration, insecurity and despair which is engulfing our society. There can be no doubt that there is evidence of that when one picks up any one of the newspapers and sees what is happening in our society.

One sees that we have reached the stage where some members of the population consider that the only way to solve the problem of stress and depression is by taking their own life and sometimes taking other people's lives with them.

The matter is urgent because wherever human life is in jeopardy and suffering is involved, obviously, it is our feeling that it must be regarded as very urgent.

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There can be no doubt that the measures which have been taken—floating of the Trinidad and Tobago dollar, increase in rates, in prices, resulting in increased unemployment, poverty—are having a great effect on the population. Stress has reached very dangerous proportions and, although people may be emotionally stable to withstand some of that stress, are we sure that the population will not succumb? We are seeking signs of the population not being able to.

Madam Speaker, when one sees the effects of these measures, the crime, the social and moral wrongs, one would submit that the matter is very urgent. It is urgent, also, because in matters like these, it is important for the Government to try in some way to level with the population to say what it intends to do, if it intends to do anything. Because, by mere inaction, by not saying anything, there may be the added insecurity which exists in the society and it will add to the feeling of hopelessness, insecurity and desperation.

Madam Speaker, apart from the matter involving a substantial part of the public, it is of public importance—it is urgent and public and the same facts which are in support of “urgent” would also be in support of “public”—because it is well known that the mere perception in a society that government is not doing anything about it, or Government has no plan for it, can cause social unrest.

Therefore, I think that it is important at this stage for the Government to indicate to this population, to the nation, what it is doing or what it intends to. Madam Speaker, as you know, and I think you would agree with me, the whole purpose of this Standing Order is for the Government to be made to account on something which is important, which affects the national interest. It is either something which has developed suddenly, overnight, or the cumulative effect of which has caused a society to be explosive.

Madam Speaker, another purpose of this Standing Order is that the Speaker can see what is occurring in the society and can say, “Listen, this is something which the Government must tell the country about.” If one uses the other Standing Order, it can mean that the urgency of it can disappear because it is only if certain conditions are fulfilled that that matter can be debated.

I think that this is a national matter. It transcends political considerations, it involves our society and I think there are important issues in which the future of the society is involved. I think it is important and urgent enough for the Government to be asked to indicate what it is doing about this matter.

Madam Speaker: I advise the hon. Member that I am not satisfied that this matter is definite. As a matter of fact, the topic under consideration covers a very

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wide range for discussion. I think the Member would be better advised to choose another mode for bringing this matter to the House.

FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS BILL

Bill to provide for the regulation of banks and other financial institutions which engage in the business of banking and business of a financial nature, for matters incidental and related thereto, for the repeal of the Banking Act (Chap. 79:01) and the Financial Institutions (Non-Banking) Act (Chap. 83:01) and the re-enactment of certain provisions of those Acts in consolidated form. [*The Minister of Finance*]; read the first time.

2.15 p.m.

YOUNG OFFENDERS DETENTION (AMDT.) BILL

[SECOND DAY]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question [April 16, 1993]:

That the bill be now read a second time.

Question again proposed.

Miss Hulsie Bhaggan: (*Chaguanas*): Madam Speaker, the fact that the Young Offenders Detention (Amdt.) Bill 1993 is before the House today is a serious sign of the times. It is an ominous sign and clearly it is an admission by this Government that it has failed to address the issues and problems facing the young people of today.

It is my opinion that if the question and issue of Young Offenders were a mere minimal or negligible issue, then the need to bring this Bill before this House would not have arisen. As such, the issue of Young Offenders is becoming a serious one and, therefore, I believe this Government has brought this Bill to the House to facilitate the education of these young people who for one reason or the other would have committed an offence.

After 30 years of consecutive rule, after billions of dollars, today, there are thousands of young people who are hopeless and frustrated. I had the occasion to speak to a clinical psychologist who has been dealing with young people and I tried to get from him what are the reasons why these young people are embarking on these crimes. He says one of the major reasons has to do with the fact that the level of frustration is very high. As such, they express their anger through aggression and it is not something that is done in isolation, but it is reflective of the actual problem of young people in our society today.

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In effect, Madam Speaker, it is very clear that as a society we have failed to provide for these young people. When the Members on the other side spoke on this Bill, I got the impression that they were reading from some high school essay. I did not get the feeling that there was real concern for young people; it was highly theoretical, academic but not academic at a tertiary level, more at a high school level. I did not get the sense of the real status of young people in the society.

For example, when the Minister of National Security spoke, I would have liked him to have given this House some clear indication as to how this programme was going to work in a full sense, not just to expand educational opportunities, whether it is to do with academic or vocational training, but rather in selecting the schools, what criteria would be used in selecting the schools. Would all the schools be involved in this or would there be special schools involved?

The hon. Minister did not tell us, for instance, how the supervision of these young people would take place in these schools. We were not told about the teachers. Is there going to be special sensitivity training for teachers who are going to interact or interface with these young people? Are they going to be placed in a special classroom or location? If you look at the junior secondary or secondary educational system—in fact, in all the secondary schools system—we have a situation where for every subject there is a different teacher. If these students are exposed to all the various subjects, it means therefore, that all those teachers have to be prepared to deal with these young people.

We have also to understand that those young people who have committed an offence, having to come now to an educational institution where so-called normal children are, there will be conflict, there will be a certain lack of self-confidence on behalf of these young people and so there will be a problem arising within the school itself.

As the Member for Tobago West mentioned on the last day, the question of the whole school environment today is one which is highly volatile. Therefore, by having those young people there—I am not suggesting that they are the ones going to create more crimes in the schools, but let us face it, in the school today there are gangs of young people who roam the school compounds. As we said on the last day, they carry knives, sticks and all kinds of things in their bags. These gang leaders would challenge these young people who come from these institutions, because it is part of the culture of the young people, if you are a gang

member, to see who is worse than who; in fact, there would be taunting of these people.

I do not believe that young people who for some reason or the other would have committed an offence should be made to sit within a school environment where, presently, there are so many problems existing.

Another point, Madam Speaker, has to do with the fact that many of these young people may need counselling. As it is today, the school guidance unit is vastly understaffed. As a matter of fact, for hundreds and thousands of children or young people we may have one or two guidance officers and in some cases we have none at all. So how are we, therefore, going to be able to look after these young people who need special care and attention if they are to be rehabilitated?

Another issue, is that the school system is not a rehabilitation or a reform centre, it is one for education, and young offenders who come into that environment, are coming there, not only for education, but one would assume, some kind of rehabilitation and reform. Transferring those young people into that school system to become integrated into the regular school system means, in effect, that we are not helping these young people.

I would also like to know from the other side, what exactly is the status of the programmes in the various institutions which we have today for young people. What about the Youth Training Centre? We would have liked to get some information about the programmes being handled there, the number of people, exactly what the success rate has been, when young people leave what happens to them and so on.

Then the St. Michael's Home for Boys. There was a newspaper report which demonstrated that that Home for the boys definitely is not working as is being said. The St. Mary's Home, the St. Jude's Home for Girls, the St. Dominic's Home for Children; we have not had any indication from this House as to how these institutions are operating. And we know very clearly from what we have read, and from those, of course, who have interfaced with the system, that in these institutions there are many problems.

Therefore, if these young people who come from these Homes are transferred to the school system—at least to get an education—and their holistic development is not looked at, it means that they would not be balanced properly. The Member for Barataria/San Juan mentioned that some kind of assessment counselling would be done to differentiate those who should come to the school from the other, but the point is that many of those young people may pass that kind of assessment,

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but when they are actually transferred into that kind of environment, their behaviour may change because of the situation they might meet there.

Madam Speaker, we are very displeased with the way this Bill has been brought to the House and the lack of research, information and the lack of justification for its acceptance by this House today. I support the view of the Member for Couva South when he said that this seems to be an *ad hoc* measure. Because how could you speak about one aspect of the young person, that is to say, in terms of his having committed an offence, and not speak about the other aspect of this person's life in the whole system?

Many of these young people did not commit an offence because of a lack of educational opportunities. Many of them would have committed an offence for other reasons. And so, if we do not deal with the root cause of the offence, then it does not make sense bringing them into an educational system and saying well, we are going to give them an O' level or A' level and that sort of thing. It is important that they do get it. But when they go back out, are they going to be integrated; are they going to get a job in the market out there?

We know today there are thousands of young people who have gone through university level and they cannot get a job. So, are we not creating more frustration for these young people? Because the more you are educated, the more you would have aspired to achieve certain ends and it becomes more frustrating to you when you cannot get an opportunity.

Mr. Sobion: Do not educate them?

Miss H. Bhaggan: I did not say do not educate them because they will compete with others; I am saying that if you want to deal with the problem of young people in the society it has to be fundamental; you cannot say that you are going to deal with young offenders alone, you have to decide as a Government, what you plan to do about young people in this country as a whole. For instance, I have heard in the Minister's very much touted action plan in January, where he spoke about 5,000 young people becoming integrated and benefiting from the National Training Authority. Five thousand is a drop in the bucket. You have got to do something more comprehensive.

The other point I would like to make is the fact that the hon. Prime Minister, in his presentation spoke about the fact that his Government now has instructed the Ministry of Consumer Affairs and Social Services to do a survey as to the causes of the breakdown in family life. As I believe he was trying to make the point that by defining the causes of the breakdown in family life somehow his

Government would be able to handle the issue of crime among young offenders. He did not make that exact point, but I believe he was implying that.

I propose to this House that the crimes being committed by young people today, are not solely or merely attributable to the fact that we have a breakdown in family life because of abuse, violence and all those things. In many years gone by those were the major reasons, but today, it is my view that crime among young people has a lot to do with the fact that these young people feel the need to survive

2.25 p.m.

They feel the need to survive because the economic policies of this Government are such that it does not cater for the middle and lower income groups, and in particular, for children and young people. I find it very difficult to understand that this Government is saying, "Well look, let us provide education for those young offenders," which is good and commendable, but there are thousands of young people who pass common entrance examinations and yet cannot go to school simply because they have no money to buy school books, uniform or afford transportation. As Members of Parliament in this House, most of us here would be aware of that fact, where there are thousands of young people, children in particular, who cannot go to school because they cannot afford it.

Let us look at what is happening here. Young people who commit crimes are being well taken care of, but those young people who are out of the system, probably trying their best to live an honest life, somehow those people cannot get those opportunities. I want to ask this Government, therefore, what it is doing to help those thousands of children today who are at home and cannot buy books, uniforms and cannot afford transportation? Because if this Government says it cares about children and young people and it is making a start, I want to suggest that it continue and extend that start to those young children who have passed common entrance examinations and cannot attend school at all.

Secondly, I want to ask this Government to tell us what it intends to do for those young children who do not pass the common entrance examinations and who, year after year, have absolutely nothing to do and they have to stay at home. Eleven-year old and 12-year old children have to stay at home today because they have failed the common entrance examinations and there is no system to absorb them.

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The Government, therefore, is creating a situation here where it is becoming more attractive to commit an offence, because then you might be provided with an education. So, in effect, those young people who feel that they cannot get an education normally, may be tempted to commit an offence, because in that case, they are getting food, shelter, free transportation to school, uniforms and books and they are being treated nicely. So we are making the committing of an offence attractive to those young people who otherwise cannot get the opportunity to go to school.

So it is important to understand the thinking of young people. Sometimes when I come to this House and I hear the Members on the other side speak, it is very clear that they are thinking—as they should, I guess—like adults, but once you are designing legislation and programmes for young people, you also have to be able to put yourselves into the position of those young people. If you are too old to start to think like them, then, at least, speak to them and understand what their frustrations are, what their aspirations are, what their hopes are, what kind of dreams they have. It is very clear that this Government only intends to look after that aspect after they have committed a crime.

For instance, I heard the Minister of National Security speaking about the prisons being overcrowded, and I know they are building a maximum security prison. But I am not hearing the Minister speaking anything at all about the fact that today crime in this country is at the level where people can come and kick your doors open, rape your family, kill you in your home, and nothing is being said. But what we are hearing is that the prisons are overcrowded.

It seems to me that this Government is in the process of just covering up sores and wounds. They are not in the process of actually bringing any kind of comprehensive change, reform, or programme to be able to solve the fundamental problems of this country. We cannot look at this Bill in isolation and say, "Well, do you want young offenders to go to school or not?" If you are speaking about the young offenders, you have got to speak about the question of young people and why, in the first place, they are driven to commit an offence.

Recently there was an incident which, in a way, brought to the fore the frustrations of the people of this country. I want to suggest to you it has nothing to do with age. You could be an 11-year old boy who, for some reason, has to become a drug mule, or you could be a 45-year old man. The point is, if you cannot be provided for, or if you cannot access food, clothing and shelter, you are going to have a high level of frustration which could lead to anything. You can

commit a crime; commit suicide; kill your family; want to leave the country; become a vagrant—

Madam Speaker: I did not hear the other one, of values; food, clothes, shelter and human values.

Miss H. Bhaggan: Well, human values, Madam Speaker, you will remember that on the last occasion I spoke to this House I stated that the kind of economic model the Government is introducing is undermining the values of the system. I will speak a little more about it afterwards, but Maslow once said that when you look at the hierarchy of man's needs, the most basic need first would be the physiological needs, being food, clothing and shelter, among others. So I was merely using that particular model.

The point I am making, therefore, is that frustration knows no bounds in terms of age, sex, or anything at all. A young person can feel frustrated as well as a very old person. Those people who interface with the young people who are in institutions or in any environment, sense their level of frustration. I will give you an example.

One Saturday a constituent came to me. He was on the verge of committing suicide. He said that he had been registering to get a "10-days" on the URP for the past six months, but to no avail. He was told to go to a house in Felicity where he could give his name and he would get a "10-days." When he went there he was told, "bring \$40.00, because you have got to join the PNM party and you would be able to take your card and get a "10-days". He has been looking for a job for the past three years. His daughter passed for, what is called, a prestige school. She has to stay at home.

The next daughter is at home right now in a very depressed state. In fact, I had to get assistance for her for psychological counselling. This young child is so depressed because she knows her father is unemployed and if she were to pass her common entrance examination as her sister did, she would not be able to go to school. The father is extremely depressed because there is no food in the house; the electricity has been cut off; they cannot pay for water, so that, too, will be disconnected soon. The only clothes he had were what he wears all the time. So the whole family is in a serious state of depression. He is considering committing suicide. Of course, I tried to get some help for him.

The point I am making, therefore, is that today whole families are depressed because of the economic and social conditions they are in. Sometimes when we come to this House and speak about these problems, people say we are making

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joke or we are part of the problem. I want to suggest to this Government that what it is doing today is not making things easy for people but more difficult. By bringing this particular Bill to say it wants to amend this and help young people, but I am saying that if this Government wants to help young people, in the first place, it should help all those poor people who cannot afford to send their children to school.

Secondly, the Government spoke about public transport. I believe it is time that public transport is introduced throughout this country and not only in certain parts. It ought to reach to all corners of Trinidad and Tobago. As it is today, select areas have access to public transport.

Thirdly, in respect of books, parents today cannot afford to buy books. I hope that this Government will do something about providing books for children, whether it is the schools themselves having them and the children having access to them. So if they are serious about the young people, that is one aspect in which they can help.

Another aspect of concern has to do with those young people who have left school and have nothing to do. If the Government is serious about helping them, it would find ways and means of getting these young people to be gainfully employed in a productive and sustained way. I am not suggesting here, "10-days" and having six months in some training programme. It is important to have apprenticeships, but after that, I hope that there is something else for these young people.

2.35 p.m.

Another point I would like to raise has to do with the statistics of unemployed young people. Between the ages of 16 and 25 years we have 38 per cent of the unemployed population. When one looks at the young people—41,000 young people between the ages of 16 and 25 years are unemployed—they actually have no access to resources, jobs, the basic amenities in life and their parents are in a depressed condition. These young people would do anything. If you are a hungry young person, you would feel alienated and depressed; that kind of person becomes a very angry young person.

In that anger, they react against the society in which they live. When they see someone with a car, that becomes something to resent. Not because they are hankering after the person's car, but because somehow that person's success becomes a threat to them. For their minds become so disturbed, they can no

longer think logically. These young people are likely to fall into what we might call "the wrong side of society".

I know, however, there are many churches in our country that are trying to help with a certain amount of spiritual upliftment, but the reality is: how spiritually uplifted can you be when there is no food in the home, and electricity and water rates are going up extremely high? Now we have the so-called "floating of the dollar" where we can no longer afford food and so on.

The environment as it is today indicates that young people are going to become more and more frustrated. I, therefore, ask this Government: For those young people who do not fit into this category of crime, what are you going to do with them? I have not heard anything substantive from the Government on how it is going to help these young people. What we have to do is not just look at the present time and say, "Today we have so many unemployed people." We have to project ahead. We have to see that in five or 10 years' time, what is likely to be the number of young people who would be unemployed or who would be having the need to access certain facilities in the society. As such, in our planning, we ought to cater for that kind of growth among the young population.

From the Opposition side, it is very clear that the Government have not put their heads together and are not looking into the future, but are looking on a day-to-day basis to be able to solve day-to-day problems. There is no kind of long-term planning coming from the other side. What we have today is a kind of *ad hocism* that has been characteristic of this Government.

Another point I wish to make is a very important one which has to do with the value system. What I have found is that because young people cannot get jobs, they feel the only way to survive is to commit some kind of crime. One of the most lucrative things, in their view, is pushing drugs. If they are not getting money and cannot get any other kind of job, they tend to go for drug pushing. This is why the drug culture is flourishing in our society today: Because of this need to survive.

We may have some of our young people looking at the value system, but even the families are now disintegrated because of the need to survive and the pressures of economic hardships. When a family is undergoing economic hardships the whole environment or ambiance within that family becomes extremely stressful; people are on each other's nerves; you find that relationships break down. Husbands feel they are no longer useful to their families and as such, domestic violence increases and they turn to drugs and alcohol. There are various

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other things that happen, and all these are somehow part of the scenario that we are in today.

Pushing drugs, therefore, has not become something where one says, "It is against my values". In fact, it is very sad, but some people today, who are the biggest drug lords, are the ones making the biggest contributions to the churches. Whether we want to accept that or not, there are people, today, who are using drug money to make contributions to charitable organizations, to NGOs and so on, because they want to be perceived as a magnanimous character, and many of these drug lords are not known, at least, to most men on the street. They push drugs and literally kill people, but are supposed to be very good church-goers who give donations to charities and are upright in the society. This is what has been happening also.

I believe there is a law that prohibits the sale of alcohol to young people under 16 years of age. There are bars and pubs in the borough of Chaguanas where school children, in uniform, are actually purchasing beers in the day and are drunk. There are young people who go to shops or supermarkets to buy alcohol and there is no enforcement with respect to that law. We talk about young people, but what are we doing to actually enforce those laws that are in existence to ensure that young people lead a particular life?

Also, there is a problem in my constituency, where, for instance, they are speaking about affording young people who, for some reason or the other, made a mistake in their life, opportunities to go to school. The Charleville ASJA Primary School has been in existence for the past 40 years, but today, that school is closed because it was condemned 10 years ago. It was re-opened and has been closed again because the parents do not want their children to be in that very dangerous structure.

I understand there was a meeting today with the Minister of Education, but the point I am making, is that if one is talking about young offenders and transporting them to school and looking after them, one also has to look after those young children who want to go to school but who do not have a school building.

I hope this Government will also look into this problem. It is not just a question of looking after young offenders; it is a question of preventing the problem before it happens. It is not curative, we want a preventative kind of approach towards crime in this country. In other words, once more it is like building a maximum security prison but we are not doing anything to actually help those poor people who, today, feel they have to commit crimes or push drugs to be able to survive.

Madam Speaker, this point I want to reply, very briefly, to some comments made by the hon. Prime Minister when he spoke in this debate. He spoke much about his party; about the fact that whenever his party, he or his Government, has a policy, it is always discussed firstly at the party level and the party accepts it and promotes it, as if to say that the People's National Movement represents all the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, I suggest to this Government that the PNM is a minority Government, firstly. Secondly, the PNM is not, as far as I am concerned, a national party and, thirdly, if the PNM accepts that, that does not mean that the UNC or the NAR will accept it. I want to make it very clear that if the Government has policies, it is fine for the party to accept those, but to suggest to us that because the party accepts those policies, somehow they are good for all of us, I want to say that we take offence at that.

In fact, the only country I know where the party became paramount was in Guyana when the late Forbes Burnham was there. That was a paramount party; the People's National Congress. In that case, the flag of the party used to fly higher than the national flag. Once one had that party card, one could get any service needed. In fact, if there was a line for service, and you had a party card everybody who did not have a card was supposed to be ignored and you treated first.

I advise this Government, please do not introduce party paramountcy in this country. One only has to look at the history of that party today to understand what happens to that. Although my colleague at the back is saying it is already introduced.

The Member for San Fernando East also spoke about a vision. This Member is always speaking about visions. He has many visions. Here he spoke about a vision of social services. I wonder what vision he is having now with respect to the impact of this floating dollar? I see today, for instance, in respect of this vision of the—

Madam Speaker: I remind the Member that we are discussing the Bill to amend the Young Offenders Detention Act, maybe the Member can get back to the subject under consideration.

Miss H. Bhaggan: Madam Speaker, I am merely responding to the comments made by the Member for San Fernando East. I believe in that context I may be permitted to reply to what he was saying. I am referring to where he spoke about a vision for the country and as such, I feel I need to question that. He spoke about a vision to raise the standard of living of our people. I believe if he has

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raised that issue in this debate, at least we, on this side should speak about it, Madam Speaker, with all due respect to you.

I saw, for instance, where the Member for San Fernando East also spoke about raising the standard of living of our people. In that context, how then does the so-called "floating of the dollar" impact on raising the standard of living of our people?

2.45 p.m.

I heard, for instance, where prices are supposed to be controlled soon. How can that happen when the Members for Diego Martin West and Central always boast about being facilitators? How can you become a facilitator and become interventionist at the same time? If you are talking about moving into a free market economy, I cannot see how you could control prices with the floating of the dollar, and then speak about the vision of raising the standard of living of our people.

I am going to be very brief today. My vision under this PNM is that this country is going to become just like Guyana. I hope it does not become worse.

When I look at the particular crimes being committed today—'kick down the door banditry' as it is called in Guyana and it has reached here today. You are looking at television in your home, they are kicking down your door, raping the women and killing them; robbing and killing the men and they are leaving and somehow, nothing is being said about it.

I suggest to this Government that most of these crimes today are being conducted in the rural areas. I read in the newspapers today where three businesses in Penal were attacked. It is in the rural areas where people are under siege. If this Government has a vision, in fact, if the Prime Minister, the hon. Member for San Fernando East, has a vision about raising the standard of living of our people, I am hoping that vision includes security of our people, because we are not only talking about the ability to access food, clothing and shelter, but also security.

On the last occasion when the Member spoke with respect to "10-days" he said we in the rural areas could look after ourselves because we have agricultural lands. I want to know whether the Member is going to say the same thing about security and whether he is going to tell us that we could look after ourselves. I would not go further. Many people in the rural areas cut cane and a cutlass is one of the tools they use. I hope it does not come to that.

The point I therefore make is that this Bill is an important one. It is one that has a good intent but, when I look at the kinds of provisions made, and based on the inputs on the other side, it is very clear it is not well thought out in terms of ensuring that this particular measure is one which is comprehensive and one which, in effect, would be able to bring the kind of success rating we should like. Secondly, when we look at a Bill of this nature we ought not to take it in isolation. We have got to look at it in the context of the present educational systems.

Thirdly, we have got to look at this Bill in the context of the young people generally in our country, and what we are doing with respect to them and the future of our country. If the economic conditions continue to deteriorate, it means that crime at all levels will increase, and anger and frustration will reflect themselves in other kinds of ways. The most recent example is one which in another way can be reflected on. I am asking this Government, therefore, to take a serious look at its policies.

In fact, I heard the Prime Minister say that the floating of the dollar was the last major move and there is a little more coming soon. I hope "that little more" will not lead us further into frustration.

With that, therefore, I suggest to this Government that in implementing this move it has got to make sure that the machinery it is going to put in place is such that it will not create a problem but be able to solve part of the problem which is facing us with respect to the young people in our country.

I thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Minister of Education (Hon. Augustus Ramrekersingh): Madam Speaker, in making my contribution I want to look essentially at two things. Firstly, the relationship between the education system and the objectives of the Bill before us. Secondly, the approaches to penal reform, in particular the concept of punishment.

Let me start by dealing with some of the matters raised by the Member for Chaguanas. I think, as a general point, we all agree that the education system, as it now exists, is in need of reform. That is precisely why this Government had a comprehensive revision done and that document is now before the national community. May I take this opportunity to say that the months of May, June and July will be devoted to consultation with the national community on the Green Paper and, as I had indicated, it will be an exercise in participatory democracy.

This week, members of the task force outlined the schedule of consultation and included in that schedule of consultation are meetings with the various

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political parties including the Opposition parties. So that those arrangements will be made. The consultation will be a little different from those we have had in the past. Instead of large numbers, we shall concentrate much more on intensive two-way discussions with the major stakeholders in the education system. I make this point, quite clearly: Because of deficiencies in the education system we have had certain consequences. One of the objectives of reform of educational change is to remedy those deficiencies and to take us along a new path preparing for the future.

There are many reports of indiscipline in schools, even acts of violence by young people in the society. Those things are, in fact, true but it is only part of the story. Do we really hear about those thousands of young people, whether they are in school or have left school, who are achieving? You see, the misdeeds of a few are obviously more sensational and more newsworthy than the unobtrusive activity and achievement of the vast majority. I remember the expression 'what makes news is not the dog bites man, but man bites the dog'.

Madam Speaker, at this very moment thousands of our secondary school students are at the National Stadium taking part in the National Track and Field Secondary Schools Competition, which started yesterday afternoon. I had the honour to be there. Earlier in the week, I opened the Port of Spain and Environs School Sports. Much activity is going on. I just mentioned sports, but there are many achievement days, many projects on. We hear very little of them. I make the point that whatever our problems in education, the vast majority of our students are trying to achieve something, to use the educational opportunity. Nevertheless, we must pay some attention to certain consequences of the deficiencies.

2.55 p.m.

I have heard that we are operating as a government in an *ad hoc* manner. Sometimes, when I hear certain criticisms, I get the impression that it is felt that tomorrow morning we can solve the problems of the world. I am afraid it takes a little more time than that. There is need for thought, analysis and planning before action. It is always dangerous, simply, as they would say, 'to wet your foot and jump in the water, just like that'. You may find yourself going into depths that you had not anticipated. So we must plan properly.

Yes, we want to solve the problems, but good intentions by themselves, are not enough. We need thought, analysis and planning so that we can get it right insofar as it is possible to get it right. In terms of education, that is the approach

we have been taking—a comprehensive attack on it. We are going to have our consultation; invite the views, and then seek, hopefully, to achieve some national consensus, and we move on a concerted, well-planned and well-thought-out approach to the problem, rather than *ad hocism*.

Mr. B. Panday: Bring the Bill after you have done all that.

Hon. A. Ramrekersingh: I will deal with that in due course.

Mr. B. Panday: You are putting the cart before the horse.

Hon. A. Ramrekersingh: We will see, for the benefit of the Member for Couva North, how we will put the horse where it really should be, in front of the cart. It just calls for a little patience. We recognize problems and that is why we are approaching the issue of education reform in a particular way. I repeat, thousands of our students are making a serious effort and achieving, but their efforts are so often unheralded.

Just to make a passing reference, the Member for Chaguanas made the point that many students fail the common entrance and have nowhere to go. In the first place, it is not really a question of failing. However, of those who do not get places, some of them repeat; some go to private schools if they can afford it, and others go to post primary centres or post primary classes in schools.

In the post primary system, they do the School Leaving Examination Certificate after two years, and based on their performance, they can rejoin the conventional system. Quite clearly, we have to do much more in that respect, but as I had pointed out in my contribution during the budget debate, we have to take a very close look at the whole concept of secondary education, or education after that primary phase, to make sure we are very clear on what we want to do, otherwise some of the problems I pointed out in that debate would be compounded, rather than alleviated.

In terms of those young people, there are the youth camps. Perhaps, I can take the opportunity now to say a few words on the youth camps, since they have come under the Ministry of Education during the course of 1993. We have examined the activities and development of the youth camps. We have seen where certain objectives have not been achieved, and in some instances where the youth camps have strayed from the original intention. We are putting a programme together that will re-direct the youth camps, so that there will be places where you get not only training in skills; we also seek to inculcate a certain orientation, sense of values and attitudes.

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In fact, we are not particularly happy with the name "Youth Camp". I could say here, that the Government, as part of the re-orientation of the youth camps has taken the decision to rename them to give an indication of the new direction in which we want to go. For certain people who have not made it in a particular area, the youth camps with the new orientation will be taking care of them.

I come now to the National Apprenticeship System. I said in this House that we hoped to have by the end of 1993 at least 5,000 persons. Our vision for the next year is that we would increase to about 10,000. The number is small. I simply wish to remind the House that about 2,000 years ago, one person and a group of 12 started a particular enterprise, which today embraces something in the order of 1 billion persons.

Today, I wish to take the opportunity to announce that the official launching of the National Apprenticeship System will take place on Friday, May 7, 1993. During that launching, certain information will be made public, so that one will see that while we were planning during the course of the last three or four months, we were also doing another kind of work. We are quite well advanced. I had given the commitment that by the beginning of May the National Apprenticeship System will start. On Friday, we will do the official launching and bring the national community up to date.

I just mentioned the youth camps and national apprenticeship as areas and opportunities for the development of our young people. Obviously, there are more areas but I do not wish to dwell on all of them today. What I want us to see is that we are seeking to integrate all the training opportunities in the country in the Ministry of Education, so that we can have a certain focus; so that its administration can be streamlined; that some of the duplication of the past would be eliminated, and the differing and sometimes conflicting standards, when there is training going on all over the place, will also be eliminated.

So that in terms of training for young people, we are putting certain programmes into place, and revising others. On one hand, we are attempting education reform and putting in programmes of training. There is a relationship between the two. A national apprenticeship system has implications backwards to the school system and, therefore, education reform will take that into consideration. There is a certain mutuality, a certain complementarity in those efforts. It is a holistic approach.

3.05 p.m.

So when we look at some of the phenomena that are referred to in our schools, indisciplined environs, I think we need to look at the issue fundamentally to seek to locate the causes. As I have said, there are problems in the system itself which have consequences for indiscipline. But it goes far wider than that. We can do whatever we want, Madam Speaker, with the education system; have it perfect, but once certain other factors are present, we will not reap the benefits that we set out to do.

We have to look at family life. We have to look at attitudes in the society and standards in society. We have to look at certain influences, not only nationally, but internationally. We are in the global village, as the cliché goes. The point I am making is that in looking at certain phenomena in the schools, we must go beyond the school system into the wider national society and even outside the national society.

I come now to the whole question of prison or penal reform. It is being said that this activity is piecemeal. This bill is simply a first step in the process of overall penal reform. In looking at this, I simply want to say a few words on the whole concept of punishment. I want to look at it from the point of view of punishment as retribution, punishment as a deterrent and the more important aspect, punishment as rehabilitation.

I do not particularly wish to talk about punishment as a form of retribution. There are some people who argue that the principal objective of punishment is retributive. I do not want to get into that today, Madam Speaker. I am not a vengeful person. It is the rehabilitation I want to look at before I come to the deterrent aspect.

In looking at rehabilitation, we recognize that people, for one reason or another, transgress and they are punished. But at the end of the punishment, we hope that they would be such persons or so oriented that they would not commit such transgressions again. In which case, in organizing our system of punishment, we seek to make them better people.

The best reference I could find is to go back to Greek tragedy. Aristotle, in looking at the functions of Greek tragedy, made the point that at the end of the performance we ought to have undergone—I will use the original word—a catharsis and perhaps the best explanation of the word “catharsis” is given in Coleridge’s *The Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner*, “a sadder but wiser man”.

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In other words, what Aristotle was saying was that the effect of tragedy, and we are speaking about literature, should be to make us sadder but wiser men. That, to me, is the approach, or the philosophical underpinning of rehabilitation and punishment; That at the end of it we must be sadder but wiser persons, determined to move on another course of action which will not lead us where we had been led before.

There are many things we have to do in penal reform, many things we have to do in rehabilitation, and the objective of this Bill is one of the things we need to do.

In seeking to make certain opportunities available to young people who are, unfortunately, in prison, we are seeking to create conditions or to offer opportunities for those persons to use certain skills and abilities in order to chart a new course after they have been released.

In fact, when we look at the whole question of punishment, one of the things we need to look at is whether young persons who have been found guilty of minor offences, especially for the first time, should be put in prisons next to hardened criminals. The effect tends to be that they come out hardened criminals themselves or, at least, with a tendency to it.

There are many reasons why young people commit crime. I do not want to go into them, but I think we must take the approach that something went wrong and let us seek to put things in place which will make them better people. This Bill has as one of its objectives, seeking persons better, to rehabilitate them and to offer opportunities. There have been examples in the past where prisoners have studied on their own and done examinations and correspondence courses. If we can allow opportunity for some of our young people who have unfortunately transgressed, if we can give them that second chance, I think every support should be given to it. It is a question of sin and repentance, not sin and condemnation; but sin, repentance and salvation, if we may look at it in theological terms.

Now, it is said that you could create a problem by taking such persons out of the prisons at least temporarily and placing them in the formal education system. As the Minister of National Security said when he was moving this Bill, there are certain conditions and you are going to have to make judgments. There are going to be criteria. Someone on the other side made the point: would we put a young person convicted of rape or some serious crime of violence? Obviously, we have to make a judgment about the person. We have to set certain conditions and criteria. I cannot claim, nor can any of us as Minister of government or Members

of Parliament, to have that technical expertise. There are people, whether in psychology or trained in criminology, who have that kind of expertise to make the judgment. Obviously, considerable care will be taken, and I know the Minister will respond to some of those concerns when he winds up. So it is going to be carefully done. It is not going to be “an anyhow thing”: conditions, criteria, method and so on.

It is the first step towards overall prison reform. Here we are isolating, not in a vacuum, but just taking one part of it as the starting point to the young people to give them certain opportunities so that they could go on the right path. Obviously, there are other areas in which you have to go, and ultimately the goal is to make the prison environment different and to look, in particular, at rehabilitation. On the question of prison or of punishment as a deterrent, the theory goes that if you have certain sanctions in place, it would prevent persons from committing crime or it would prevent some persons from committing crime. I do not want to get into that argument.

I want to look at another aspect of the deterrent approach to punishment. In a sense, it is visionary, but in the Old Testament, it is said, “where there is no vision, the people perish.” We need to look at the underlying causes of crime and seek to come to terms with them, to create conditions where crime will at least be considerably reduced, and that takes us into the whole socio-economic environment. It takes us even further into the socialization of our children, in the way we bring up our children. I know it may sound utopian, but achievement has always come in the wake of utopian dreams. Somebody has to have that vision. It may take time.

It was some of the painters or some of the Renaissance men who visualized the idea of the airplane, and they were looked upon as being quite crazy. That was the vision. It came to pass when the physics, mathematics and the technology were in place.

What I am saying, Madam Speaker, is that ultimately, we must seek to go to the causes of crime and seek to change those conditions. But as a first step—

Mr. Humphrey: Madam Speaker, I want to thank the hon. Minister for giving way. Would he agree that a stated vision of the society of Trinidad and Tobago as contained in the Constitution, which is the supreme law, is that the material resources of the community should be so distributed as to subserve the common good, that there should be adequate means of livelihood for all? Would the hon. Minister indicate whether he is satisfied, as a visionary, as a utopian

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thinker, that the economic policies being pursued by his Government are offering any hope of attaining that vision?

Hon. A. Ramrekersingh: Madam Speaker, it is precisely because we share that vision that the policies are being pursued. Sometime in the early stages it is difficult to see where the benefits would come. It calls for a certain amount of patience.

If I may use a cricket analogy, we must be careful not to go “vooping”, because there is always somebody on the boundary and when you lift it, you will be caught. So we play our strokes on the ground and in the open spaces.

The point is, ultimately, whatever we do, whenever we talk about penal reform and punishment, we also need to look at the socio-economic and the psychological conditions and do something about it. What we have to do is to take remedial action and at the same time deal with the problem fundamentally. Because the fact is, there is a situation which exists and there is a backlog and it has to be dealt with. While that is being dealt with, you also seek to go to source. At some time, if it is properly implemented, you will find that the backlog becomes smaller and as we narrow that gap, we would get there.

Madam Speaker, I want to lend my support to this Bill, moved by the Minister of National Security. I see it as a step in the right direction, as a first step in the direction of overall penal reform, a concrete example of a new approach to punishment, an approach which stresses the possibility of rehabilitation and seeks to put in place certain opportunities where, in a concrete sense, there can be rehabilitation.

I want to end, Madam Speaker, in looking at this matter, by making reference to the Roman, Seneca, who, in speaking about slaves made the point: “There but for the grace of God go I” are talking today about young people, we, too, should say, “There but for the grace of God go I.”

Mr. Subhas Panday (Naparima): Madam Speaker, I am deeply saddened by the contribution of the Member for St. Joseph, because for all the vision he spoke about, he has not said yet how this fits into the education plan which he has produced. There is no nexus between what is before the House today and that education plan which is out for comment.

However, we on this side of the House believe that true and meaningful penal reform is laudable and commendable in any society. We on this side of the House acknowledge that the human resource in any society is the most vital and

important resource, and that any attempt to better equip that resource should be supported.

Madam Speaker, generally, and in particular, the rehabilitation of our young offenders, those who have not yet blossomed into adulthood, is most important and vital. However, what is before the House today can be viewed merely as a farce, merely as tinkering with the problem and not really dealing with the root causes. We predict that if this Bill is passed in its present form it would create chaos both in the gaols and in the schools. We shall end up with a comedy of errors.

What is before the House today is merely placing a small plaster on one of the many large sores on the prison system. The Member for Caroni Central, the Member for Tobago West and the Member for St. Joseph, himself, have described what is taking place today as mere *ad hocism*. He, however, says that it is the initial stage of penal reform, but we will show—

Mr. Ramrekersingh: Madam Speaker, I do not mind being quoted, but I would prefer to be quoted accurately. On the question of *ad hocism*, I made two points. In speaking of educational reform, I spoke about thought, analysis, planning and implementation. In terms of penal reform, I did not speak about *ad hocism*, I said it is the first step in the process of comprehensive reform.

Mr. S. Panday: Be that as it may, Madam Speaker, I shall attempt to show that this amendment to the Young Offenders Detention Act has not been properly thought out and it will be unworkable. It will lead, as I said, to confusion and chaos. Further, I will attempt to show that no great impact will be created upon the prison system or on prison reform.

All the contributions coming from the benches on the other side have been very superficial; they have not really analysed the problem. As a matter of fact, the presenter of this bill has treated the subject matter in a very flippant manner. His contribution was very superficial and bereft of facts.

One would have thought that for a Bill of such significance the Government and the presenter would have supplied this honourable House with sufficient data so that our discussions and deliberations would have been well-informed. At least the presenter of the Motion—

Madam Speaker: Presenter of the Bill.

Mr. S. Panday: Presenter of the Bill, Madam Speaker, could have given us some data as to the number of inmates at the YTC, the number of inmates who

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would benefit from such an amendment, the academic or other qualifications of those inmates, the academic requirements of those inmates, the subject areas which we hope to target. That is information which had it been given to us, we would have been able to debate this issue much more efficiently. They could have told us which schools have been targeted for these students. How does he expect these inmates to fit into the mainstream of the education system?

The hon. Minister has indicated in his presentation that the regulations are already drafted and that they are waiting to be put into use. One would have thought that he would have given this honourable House some sort of insight into those regulations so that we could see how this amendment would work. Because, as you are fully aware, the regulations are the mechanisms by which the Act is implemented.

What is happening here is that we would have liked to know, for example, what the regulations say about the method of transportation of the boys from the YTC to the various schools. Who will supervise these boys during the day? What special system is being put in place to take care of those boys during the day? Are the teachers, as the Member for Chaguanas has indicated, at the schools where these students are to be placed, specially trained to deal with special cases? Or are we going to put them in a system where the teachers are not qualified to deal with these types of students?

We also ask the Minister to tell us in which subject areas he intends to put these boys. Because if one looks at the school system—and the Minister of Education will tell you—one will see that the school infrastructure has been developed to fit snugly the number of students being placed in the schools. For example, in the junior secondary system, each class, maximum 40; those classes are usually filled, 20 boys, 20 girls. When you go to the labs and you are going to do science, there are 40 circuit boards for the students. When you go into the industrial arts area, there are 40 jack planes, 40 saws.

We ask them to tell us how they will be placed in the system. Will the Government give these schools more money so that they may buy extra equipment? Or, as the Member for Tobago West has asked, would the principals have to carry out private fund raising activities to raise this money? These are the questions which we must really ask; these are the mechanisms which we must look at. Merely to say that they are going to pass a law to amend the Act so you put boys in school is not enough. We want to hear how that will happen. Tell us if the infrastructure in place can accommodate these boys.

Further, we ask which schools they will target. Are they going to target the schools on the East-West Corridor? Because those schools which are in close proximity to the gaol, have severe disciplinary problems. If one reads newspapers, one will see on Friday, April 23, 1993, two school boys, and I do not intend to read their names into the record, were arrested on Thursday with homemade shotguns and rounds of ammunition in their school bags. These are boys who are attending schools in the East-West Corridor. So we are asking the Minister to tell us how these problems will be dealt with.

Madam Speaker, the other question is: Let us take the whole penal system and see what they are doing here. This is a Bill to amend the Young Offenders Detention Act, Chap. 13:05. Let us look at Chap. 13:05. One would see that Chap. 13:05 deals with the Young Offenders Detention Act and deals merely—and I read from section 2, of the said Act:

“2(1) It shall be lawful for the Minister by proclamation to establish an Industrial Institution * (hereinafter referred as ‘the Institution’) ...”

There is an asterisk, and the institution which we are speaking of is the YTC, Golden Grove. So we are merely speaking about one institution in the whole penal system as far as it relates to juvenile offenders—YTC.

Let us look at those offenders. You will see, the offenders whom we are speaking about, and I now quote from section 7 of the Young Offenders Detention Act:

“(1) Where a person is convicted before the High Court on indictment of any offence other than murder, or before a Court of Summary Jurisdiction of any offence for which he is liable to be sentenced to imprisonment, and it appears to such Court—

(a) that the person is not less than sixteen nor more than eighteen ...”

then that person shall be sent to the YTC. So we are only looking at boys between 16 and 18 years, those offenders.

The Minister said that they are going to put them into the mainstream of education. The hon. Minister of Education will surely know that in our education system, secondary school after which you move on to the senior comprehensive or the composite schools and by 16 you have finished O’ levels.

3.35 p.m.

That is why we made the request before: Tell us what are the educational requirements and the qualifications of these boys? Madam Speaker, in the normal run of things, between the ages of 16 and 18 you will be doing A' levels. So that, these boys we are going to put out there, are they to be doing only A' levels?

These are the issues which we would like the hon. Minister to tell us how he intends to deal with them. Or will you be taking boys between the ages of 16 and 18 and putting them in form three or form four in primary schools? Okay, if you say so, probably that is the vision the Minister of Education was speaking about. I am sure, that this thing has not really been properly thought out. We want to know, where are you really putting them?

Madam Speaker, if one looks at the amendment:

"Section 5 of the Young Offenders Detention Act is amended by adding immediately after the words "employed at", occurring in line three the words 'or the academic or vocational training they may receive'."

So vocational training, we ask: Which schools are you putting them in? Are you putting them in the senior comprehensive school? There are no subjects at A' level in the vocational training area. Or are you going to put them in John Donaldson Technical Institute? These are the areas where we thought that the hon. Minister would have told us how he is going to deal with the problem.

They would need to tell us what mechanisms are put into place to deal with these boys when they go from the prison to the schools. Because if one looks at the newspapers one would see, unlike what the hon. Minister of Education said, that crime is rampant in the very schools. The type of crimes which we hear are taking place in our schools today have never been heard about in the past. Apparently more crimes are taking place in the schools than in the prisons.

To substantiate that point, if one looks at the *Trinidad Guardian* of Monday, April 26, 1993, under the heading of "Flogging of young offenders not new, say legal experts" one would see in that report that apart from the 11-year-old boy who was charged for cocaine, it says:

"Two weeks ago, a 13-year-old was before the court charged with possessing 100 hand-rolled marijuana cigarettes..."

"Last Friday, a 15-year-old boy appeared in the same court charged... with armed robbery"

This boy absconded.

"Another 15-year-old boy also appeared before the juvenile court last Friday charged with larceny of a motor-car"

Fifteen year old boy charged with larceny of a motor car!

"A 13-year-old recently appeared charged with robbing and wounding a maxi taxi driver".

"That same week a 14-year-old boy was before the juvenile court charged with possession of a sawed-off shot gun near a secondary school".

"One student allegedly whipped out a piece of broken bottle and slashed the other pupil in the classroom. At the time the teacher was in front the class".

That is the type of indiscipline which occurs in the schools. These boys who will come from the prison system, when they come to the schools, what safeguards do you have to protect them from being used by other people?

Many of those boys who are in prison today are really mules who have been used by outsiders. I know of a case where a drug lord in South, plays loud music and has a "dandy-up" car, and carries boys for drives and blows their minds, then hands them guns and encourages them to commit robberies. What prevents him, when he realizes that those boys are being sent to school to come and interfere with them again?

We ask: What preventive measures do we have to protect those boys? Also what sort of counselling do we have for those boys who will be stigmatized as being inmates of the prison, when they attend school and all the children are jabbing them? What sort of counselling will be put in place? Do we have our counsellors in place, do we have our teachers trained to deal with those problems? These are the things that should have been put in place and should have been told to this House before we embarked upon this type of legislation.

The Members for St. Joseph and San Fernando East profess to be visionaries. As a matter of fact, the Member for San Fernando East said that the party to which he belongs, in their 31st convention discussed the issue of penal reform as far as it pertains to juveniles. But it seems to me that they probably only discussed, but they never really thought out their plan. Because you will be shocked to hear that while they come to this honourable House and boast—this is the first stage, this is the initial stage of penal reform, other things to follow—

Madam Speaker, do you know that there is no place in this country for girls who are convicted and are between the ages of 16 and 18? That is the place

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where they should have started. We have St. Jude's which was started in the last century, and when girls who are one day above the age of 16 are taken to St. Jude's, they are refused entry. St. Jude's say one day past the age of 16, and out you go. Girls—the same age as the boys the Member for St. Joseph was speaking about who need this chance—have to go to the adult prison and mingle with the hard criminals there, exposed to all the vices of the adult prisoners at the Golden Grove Prison.

One would have thought, that if the Government were really interested in penal reform, the place that really hurts is our young girls, our first-time offenders, the future mothers of the citizens of this nation, those are the people who are more important. And if they were really interested in penal reform as far as it pertains to young offenders, that is the place where we should have started.

As a matter of fact from South alone, there are about 15 girls like that in the big jail. The magistrates are laughing at us in this House. They are saying "we kiksing", we do not know what we are doing. Because a certain magistrate told me that since we have the law which protects boys between the ages of 16 and 18 from hardened criminals above the age, he believes that there must be equality before the law and he said "I am setting her free".

One would have thought, that the Member for Baratavia/San Juan, being a lady herself, would have identified that problem. I am certain the Member for Port of Spain South, when she comes to speak on this Motion, would certainly deal with this issue of our girls—in this society. This is a state which needs immediate attention.

They come and tell us, "Oh, we are on prison reform; it is a first step!" It seems to me it is not the first right step.

3.45 p.m.

Another point is, we have the Boys' Industrial School. I feel that Chap. 13 must be read in conjunction with Chap. 46 of the laws of Trinidad and Tobago. Because Chap. 13:05, the Young Offenders Detention Act, deals only with boys between the ages of 16 and 18, but Chap. 46:01, the Children Act—I think it is section 7 of the Act—deals with both boys and girls below the age of 16. I think it is at section 43 of Chap. 46:01 which is very similar to section 7 of Chap. 13:05—It says in section 43 of 46:01:

"Where a youthful offender is charged before the High Court or before a Magistrate with an offence punishable in the case of an adult by

imprisonment, and in the opinion of the Court before which he is charged such youthful offender is ten years of age or upwards but less than sixteen—"

So you are seeing the spectrum now? This Bill covers only 16 to 18, but I am putting the whole thing in perspective now. This Children Act speaks of upwards of 10 but less than 16 years of age:

"the Court, if satisfied on enquiry that it is expedient so to deal with the youthful offender, may order him to be sent to a certified Industrial School."

In this case, the Boys' Industrial School.

One would have thought that if this Bill were properly thought out, an amendment would have taken place in Chap. 46:01 also, because we are speaking about younger children there, who are at the Boys' Industrial School. What about them? Those are younger flowers; younger trees; younger plants, which could be bent easily, those between 10 and 16. They could be incorporated in the education system much easier and simpler than those boys who are between the ages of 16 and 18. Those are the formative stages of these children's lives and a greater impact could be had on them than the older ones.

So I ask, did the hon. Minister not look at Chap. 46:01 when he was looking at Chap. 13:05? Was there no vision? We are in a position here now, where we are dealing only with one set of boys and leaving the other set, when one simple amendment to both Acts would have taken care of the whole situation. That is why we are saying here that, indeed, this amendment is shortsighted and not well thought out.

Coming back to this Young Offenders Detention Act, it says:

"Subject to regulations, the Commissioner of Prisons may grant leave, by permit to an offender to be absent from the Institution for such periods and subject to such conditions as are specified in the permit for the purpose of attending any educational or vocational institute."

It seems to me that these boys will have to be assessed at the Youth Training Centre. Who are the people doing the assessment? Because if one looks at the Prisons Act, one would see that the qualification to join the prison service as a prison officer is a school leaving certificate. I ask, since the Commissioner will be acting on the advice of the officers who are in day-to-day supervision of these boys, are these people qualified and competent to assess these boys to determine whether they should be given this option? We want to know who will be assisting

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these boys. What are their educational qualifications? What is their competence? Because we know what goes on in prison.

The Member for Barataria/San Juan will surely agree with me that when she was a member of the Death Penalty Commission, she visited the prisons, and she surely would have heard of the corrupt practices—homosexuality—which take place in the prisons between both officers and inmates. So we ask, suppose one of those boys is not a blue-eyed boy of any of the officers—*[Interruption]* Those are reports. I will come to the report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Prisons, so I will substantiate all the allegations.

If a person is competent and he is not a blue-eyed boy and he is not selected, what system of appeal do we have? To whom can he appeal? What system do we have in place to deal with boys who have been discriminated against in the prison? Unless you have a system like that, you will have discrimination and alienation.

Those are some of the issues which we would like to have dealt with.

Sen. Huggins: Madam Speaker, my friend made a comment just now, suggesting that prison officers were involved in certain acts, and he said he was going to use some report to clarify it. He seems to be winding up. I just want to remind him that I am waiting on the clarification.

Madam Speaker: May I just warn the hon. Member that those officers who are serving the nation in one form or another, that we be a little careful—

Mr. S. Panday: Madam Speaker, having regard to my own experiences, I humbly withdraw the statement. They do not know that we go back a long time, in that the type of punishment I got on the last occasion was very minor compared to what I used to get when Madam Speaker taught me at school.

Let us look at some of these solutions. I thought that the hon. Minister would have looked at the regulations, because the regulations of Chap. 13:05 tried to deal with some of these—

Sen. Huggins: Madam Speaker, if I may again intervene, do I take it that the hon. Member has withdrawn the statement he made?

Madam Speaker: I heard him say that.

Sen. Huggins: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mr. S. Panday: The reason I did not research it is that I never thought that such a puerile question would have been posed to me.

3.55 p.m.

Madam Speaker, as the Member for Chaguanas has stated, the school is not really the place for the rehabilitation of offenders. When one looks at the Young Offenders (Male) Detention Regulations, one would see that provision is made for the disciplining of those inmates. It also makes provision for the question of parole on licence. What probably could have been—

Madam Speaker, before I go on to that point, I want to ask the hon. Minister to look at this issue. The Minister of Education would agree with me that the school terms are fixed—January, March and September. These boys at the YTC are between the ages of 16 and 18 years—a two-year period. We ask: What would be the situation when a boy comes into the detention centre in the middle of a term? How long will it take to assess him? In that short space of time can he really make use of the advantage which this Bill gives him? We ask those questions because the stay at the YTC is for two years and if it takes a term or two to investigate him, then tell us whether he can benefit from this.

In that regard, I humbly suggest that rule 12 of the Regulations seems to be one step ahead of this amendment when it says that the Commissioner of Prisons has the authority to release the offender on licence. The question is, suppose the offender goes to prison—

Madam Speaker: Not to "release", to "be absent from".

Mr. S. Panday: To be "absent from". Same thing, Madam Speaker.

Would it not be better after you have assessed this boy, to permit him to be absent from the prison, so that he may go back to his environment and his school; accustomed to his teachers, he may fit into that school system and the amount of work which he has lost in his class which was going along a steady stream, he may be better able to pick up at that school rather than going to a new environment where he would be at a loss for some time before he settles down? Maybe, that is something we could look at.

Because, if you are saying that you have assessed him, he is a good boy and he deserved a chance, possibly this is a way to look at it rather than putting him in a new environment; putting him in a place where the school might not be able to accommodate him, putting him in a place where he might be the object of ridicule of the other home-grown students. This might be one of the areas which we could deal with.

Madam Speaker, I also humbly ask the hon. Minister to look at the final report of the Commission of Inquiry appointed to enquire into the existing conditions at

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the prisons and to make recommendations for reform in the light of modern concepts of penal practice and rehabilitation. In that report, it mentions the report of various commissions of enquiry which were held in this country. It goes back to the Simey Report of May 1944. I humbly submit that the recommendations of the Simey Report—I am quoting from page 14 of the Abdulah Report—are very pertinent even today.

Madam Speaker, I would come back to that. I also wish to look at the Wright Report and the Garratt Report—the Seemungal Report and the Procope Report do not really address this issue.

Madam Speaker, it says in the Abdulah Report at paragraph 3.8(1) that:

"Modern penal systems should come to depend more on keeping offenders out of prison and the development of new ways of training delinquents than on the reorganization of the prison service."

It goes on to say at paragraph (vi) that:

"In order to ensure that contamination by the old of the young does not take place classification is necessary...training the offender."

It goes on, to say that the incarceration and detention should be used as a last method; and that an alternative to imprisonment should be provided. For example, the probation system. I want to add that Government should encourage the NGOs to play a more active role in the rehabilitation of offenders.

This Abdulah Report, in its recommendations at page 35 states that these young boys should not be treated as prisoners. It also recommends, at page 35 paragraph 5.141(1):

"The Youth Training Center should be sited away from any prison and so avoid any physical contact or influence from the adult prisons;"

That is an area which we should look at.

I have thought about an area. We have the Mausica Training College which has been closed down; it used to house 240 people; it has a kitchen and all other infrastructure. After that we had the Aviation Institute housed there too, that has since been closed down. So we have the infrastructure in place. There is a vast acreage of land and that is an educational setting that can be used.

Madam Speaker, the Abdulah Report makes several recommendations, for example—

"(iii) Accommodation should be of the cottage type, rather than in the form of dormitories."

Most important, is this one which I want to concur with.

"(iv) The institution should be removed from the Prison Authority and placed under a special Board of Management within the proposed Department of Correctional Services."

Maybe we can put it under the Ministry of Consumer Affairs and Social Services headed by my learned friend the Member for Barataria/San Juan. It further recommends that:

"Specially trained persons should be recruited to serve as officers, Counsellors, Teachers and Trade and Vocational Instructors."

So all the problems and all the points which my friends on this side of the House were speaking about, this report has addressed them.

The Commission further recommends that:

"The staff of the Institution should wear civilian clothes;"

Do you know why, Madam Speaker? They want to prevent them being thought of as prisoners.

"The Trade Schools and Workshops should be geared, equipped and staffed to train the boys in trades along modern lines and in fields which would ensure ready and meaningful employment on their discharge."

I want to go one step further with respect to penal reform. The Government should develop an aftercare system. Because, when a boy leaves the YTC trained, after such a short time, he goes out there and no work at all, and the pressure of society will surely push him to go back into that situation.

What the Government should really do is to set up placement officers for these boys who would try to place them in jobs. Because they do it for boys in the youth camps. Boys in the youth camps are being given special consideration when they apply for Government jobs. I humbly suggest, that the same aftercare should be given to these boys from these institutions.

Further to that, these boys, while they are being rehabilitated in the prison, should be put to productive use, and whatever they produce could be sold at, probably, Piarco, and the moneys obtained put into a fund in the prison so that when they come out, they would have something to start life, they can probably

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buy tools. Those who probably want to further, because books are very expensive, can use the money to buy books to further their education.

Madam Speaker, the issue of merely saying that we are going to send them for vocational training without these back-up systems, we feel, is really tinkering with the problem and that little or nothing will emerge from it.

4.05 p.m.

Madam Speaker, my friend the Member for Chaguanas asked whether the curriculum in the schools is tailor-made or suited to these inmates? But this report addresses the problems when it says 'special care'—and I wish to emphasize—

"Special care should be taken to ensure that the curriculum is designed to meet the needs of the inmates."

Madam 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. S. Panday: Madam Speaker, it goes on. Because these boys are special cases it says:

"Where necessary, part-time teachers should be employed to teach special subjects."

The regulation makes provision for both religious and moral education in the prisons, for vocational education. It says:

"Evening academic classes should be introduced so that the boys who are engaged in trades during the day time, can pursue their formal education."

I am certain that if the PNM government had read this 1980 report, which was commissioned by them when they met at the Thirty-First Convention of their party they would not have come to this honourable House with such a simplistic amendment in dealing with the problems. They know the problems because these are very well documented.

I also would like the hon. Minister to look at the book *Criminal Justice and the Treatment of Offenders* written by J.D. Mc Clean and J.C. Wood (First Edition) (1969). It is a Sweet and Maxwell publication. In that book it makes the same point which was made here: That the aim of penal reform should be to keep the offenders out of prison. The Member for Ortoire/Mayaro will surely

understand when in this book it says that we should not apply the criminal jurisdiction to juvenile offenders but shift it along the civil line where the welfare of the child is of paramount importance. That is, of course *vis-a-vis* the positions of the society. That book also goes on to say that if you say that the welfare of the child is of paramount importance, then, rehabilitation will be one of the first steps which you would embark upon

They have also said the way to deal with the problem is that, first of all, the juvenile courts must be reorganized in that you must not try cases in juvenile courts which are housed in the national courts. The room itself should be designed differently so that the offender will feel that he is undergoing an inquiry and not a trial. They also went on to say that even the terms which you use should not be the terms which are used for adult criminals. For example, when you read the charge you must not ask him if he is guilty or not, you must ask him: is it true or not? These go to great depths to create impressions upon the minds of offenders.

I inform this honourable House that in our present system we could make use of parole and community service. We could even send these children back to their homes and have them supervised by the probation officer and other people in the society; for example, NGOs. We feel that if you want to punish the offender you could even impose a fine upon him. And when you do so, if the parents have to pay it, the pocket change that the parents give to the child, they could put some pressure on him by withholding it in whole or in part to let him know that he is paying for the wrongs he has committed.

We must try all other probation services, NGOs, remand homes which are run by the NGOs, and the church. Get everybody in the society involved in the rehabilitation of the young in penal reform. We must utilize all those avenues before we embark upon Borstal training. It is only when we have exhausted all other avenues and this person is found to be someone who is highly irresponsible and needs to be detained, then we would use that system.

Having said that, I am certain Members on the other side will agree with me that the nation will laugh at us having heard how severe the problem is for us merely to come with this cosmetic amendment. I humbly advise the hon. Minister that he is not dealing with the most important and crucial issue as far as it pertains to penal reform and that this Bill should be withdrawn and we come back with comprehensive legislation to deal with penal reform from the age of 10 on to 18.

I thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

The Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs (Hon. Jean Pierre): Madam Speaker, I stand in support of this Bill to amend the Young Offenders Detention Act, Chap, 13:05, piloted by my colleague, the hon. Minister of National Security, Sen. The Hon. Russell Huggins.

As the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs, Members of this House will appreciate my special interest in and commitment to our young people, since I am responsible for the development of youth policy and programmes. I take this opportunity hon. Members, particularly my colleagues on the opposite side, to accept this amendment because it represents a positive step to request in the lives of our young offenders, who will need to readjust—I want to stress that word—to readjust to society and to live with us in Trinidad and Tobago.

4.15 p.m.

The purpose of this Bill, is to increase the resources available to the Commissioner of Prisons to discharge the rehabilitation function within the scope of his statutory responsibility under the Act.

The contributions made by the Members on the other side are all pertinent to the concept of the amendment itself, but their comments seemed to be concerned particularly with the control and regulation of the support systems. I could well understand their concerns; but as you know, the Commissioner of Prisons is charged with the responsibility of providing rehabilitation services to young persons who have been committed to the Youth Training Centre.

The Youth Training Centre does provide a range of constructive, vocational and training opportunities to all young people under their care and control. Therefore, we give support to this Bill to further empower the Commissioner of Prisons to use all available approved community resources which can assist him in effectively discharging his responsibilities. In so doing, we would be achieving one of the most important goals of youth rehabilitation, which is to keep our young people who have gone astray in touch and harmony with the social system, so that the transition from institution back to community would be more effectively accomplished.

May I take the opportunity at this time to congratulate the Commissioner of Prisons on the rehabilitation programmes which have been developed and implemented within the last 10 years by his dedicated and well-trained staff of prison officers.

Coming on stream, in addition to the different support systems that are already in place for our young people, are the Apprenticeship Scheme, the Conservation

Corps which would expose many young people to a variety of lifelong skills. As my friends on the other side and I would say in our day, they should have a trade. The Government would also like to go on record as acknowledging all those non-governmental organizations and individuals who have contributed to the improvement of the educational and social development of our young people in general, and our young offenders in particular.

This honourable House needs as well to recognize the fact that within the past 10 years several new opportunities and programmes have been made available to young persons in our country, through the persistent efforts of the Government, the non-governmental organizations and the private sector. Let us recognize that great strides have been made both in the areas of prevention of crime and rehabilitation of young people over the years.

In seeking to support this Bill, I wish to make an appeal to the national community to pay greater attention to the needs and aspirations of our young people. Let me share with you this quotation:

"Train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not depart from it."

That training needs to be shared by all the responsible citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

I can say without fear of contradiction that most young people in Trinidad and Tobago are law abiding and deplore deviant behaviour. Somehow, this fact does not always receive the attention of the media. And this can easily be seen if one does a content analysis of the media reporting on our youth. The time has come for us to correct this imbalance with the greatest possible haste. I therefore appeal to the media to also highlight the good news of our young people.

When we speak of deviant behaviour, we are also concerned about the increase in emotional and sexual aggression, culminating in crimes of assault, rape and other attacks on persons. I wish to go on record as expressing my abhorrence of the situation and to urge all Members of this House to come out strongly against this trend. Our society needs to re-establish its moorings.

Trinidad and Tobago is a multi-religious community and we must seek to rediscover the role of spiritual values in human development. We must restore certain fundamental and basic values. My earlier quotation is also very relevant at this time. Traditionally, the concept of punishment has been such that very little emphasis, if any, was placed on the importance of reformation of the young

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offender and the preparation of such offender for the period after serving time in an institution.

The success of the education system at many of these institutions is largely due to the creativity of persons who work at these said institutions. The present-day statistics show that there is an increase in the number of crimes, particularly violent crimes, being committed by young offenders. At present, a large number of crimes committed are by persons under the age of 14 years.

This Bill seeks to equip the young offender with the tools necessary for him or her to re-enter society and make a worthwhile contribution. Statistics have also shown that a large number of young offenders who enter institutions, subsequently become established criminals. Our Government therefore feels that an appropriate system of education would reduce the likelihood of persons moving from young offenders to adult offenders.

One has only to visit the juvenile court in Port of Spain on a Friday and one would be in a position to appreciate the importance of implementing this Bill as soon as possible. I am sure my colleague the Member for Caroni Central would agree with me. I see him smiling.

Madam Speaker: The hon. Member has made very copious notes and is referring to them. I have noted that. That is against the Standing Orders, but, I will allow her to continue on this occasion.

Hon. J. Pierre: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mr. B. Panday: This charming Member can get away with anything.

Hon. J. Pierre: As far as I am concerned, no society can make the necessary progress except its people are disciplined, and our young people are no exception to this rule.

4.25 p.m.

Madam Speaker, hon. Members of the House, in their contributions, have shown a sensitivity to and an understanding of the circumstances and events which cause young people to be vulnerable to deviant behaviour. It is neither right nor fair to refer to our young people as "problems". The problems are social and the young people are victims of social forces which they have not created and in most cases over which they have little or no control.

Moreover, if we are serious about our expressed concern to develop our vital human resources, then we cannot, we dare not throw up our hands in despair and

allow a situation to develop in which a large percentage of our youth population is imprisoned and is in no position to make a positive contribution to the development of their country.

Our young people should be given the chance to make that contribution, and this Bill is an avenue which can assist them. In this honourable House, I am sure, some of us have had our own experiences with young people who have had a run-in with the law or, if not that close, may know a friend or neighbour who has had similar experiences. This, of course, could have some influence on our reactions, but, remember, there is nothing to be gained by apportioning blame.

I hope that gradually these constraints will be removed, barriers will be broken down and we shall strive at the point where adults and young people will appreciate that the problems will only be solved through a sympathetic understanding of each other's plight and through a united effort.

Mr. Robinson: Madam Speaker, would the hon. Minister do us the honour and pleasure of laying the paper on the Table when she has concluded?
[Interruption]

Hon. J. Pierre: Madam speaker, one would expect the older Members to lead the younger ones. But, anyway I will continue.

Madam Speaker: I noted that the Leader of the Opposition gave you his full support.

Hon. J. Pierre: Madam Speaker, the conditions under which youths engage in deviant behaviour appear to be predominantly driven by socio-economic forces, hopelessness and despair. We, therefore, must develop strategies which will meaningfully involve our youth and restore hope—and I would like to quote here—“In all things, it is better to hope than to despair.”

The Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs, under my direction, acknowledge its responsibility to provide the policy direction and support to the development of young people throughout Trinidad and Tobago. The Government is also pursuing policies of prevention and early intervention and these will be further elaborated on in the new policy direction for our youths currently being developed by my Ministry.

Madam Speaker, we need, however to generate increased investment in youth development activities. The banking and business sectors are encouraged to take the initiative by providing funds and technical support to maximinze this

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tremendous economic and entrepreneurial activity. Indeed, some corporate citizens are doing their part.

The fundamental question before this House is: Do we want these young offenders, our young people who have gotten on the wrong side of the law, back in society, rehabilitated and well-adjusted, or do we want to reject them as life-long outcasts and condemn them to a life of heinous crime?

Clearly, as hon. Members, we must redouble our efforts in prevention and early intervention type programmes at the community level.

In my view, we must decide:

- (1) whether the general policy, as outlined is sound;
- (2) whether we agree with the basic concept that young offenders in the institutions should be rehabilitated;
- (3) whether this honourable House is prepared to support legislation which will improve the opportunities for the rehabilitation of young offenders who will be returned to society anyway, after approximately five years at YTC.

Madam Speaker, these are some of the concerns that we must address.

I wish to extend my contribution by appealing to hon. Members to give full support to this Bill and to continue to commit themselves to supporting youth development.

As Minister of Youth, I am available to meet with any Member of this honourable House who wishes to collaborate and work with my ministry.

Madam Speaker, we need national consensus on the business of youth development. Public opinion must be generated on youth issues. It is our responsibility to provide significant opportunities for your youth. Total national support and participation is the only way forward.

Madam Speaker, I thank you.

4.30 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.10 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Mr. Trevor Sudama (*Oropouche*): Madam Speaker, today we are discussing a measure which, in an indirect way, is a very fundamental issue that we have to confront. However, I am afraid that when I listen to the speeches on the other

side, I get the feeling, that when we come into this Chamber, the other side, insulates itself from the sentiments, the feelings, the trauma and the anxiety, which people outside there feel about the crime situation and particularly, about crime perpetrated by young people in this country.

From time to time what has happened in this debate is that an attempt has been made as a public relations exercise to state that the problem is not as grave as it really is, and try to move away from the reality. The Member for St. Joseph said that it is only a minority of young people who are involved in crime, and that by far the vast majority of young people are decent, law-abiding, disciplined and progressive people. Therefore, the insinuation was that there is nothing much to talk about with respect to the crime situation and the indiscipline among the young people.

Madam Speaker, as I said, that is merely a public relations ploy. If you have a substantial minority—

Mr. Ramrekersingh: Madam Speaker, the point I made with respect to the school system was that the vast majority of students were trying their best to get their work done, but there were some who were about other pursuits and that it was not insignificant, but a problem that has to be dealt with. I did not attempt to wish it away.

Mr. T. Sudama: Madam Speaker, I am not really confining my remarks only to the school population; I am also talking about the large majority of youths, young people, not necessarily those who are in educational institutions.

Mr. Ramrekersingh: Madam Speaker, I was simply referring to his reference to what I said.

Mr. T. Sudama: Madam Speaker, this looks like a question and answer session. I do not want to take up the Parliament's time in this way, because I have some important things to say here this afternoon in this debate. I will come to the question of indiscipline and criminal orientation within the school system in a little while.

What has happened in the school system is that there has been a total lack of supervision and control in certain sectors of the educational system, where today it appears to a large majority of the population, that certain sectors, are indeed breeding grounds for criminals, and criminal activity.

The measure before us attempts to tackle this problem in a very insignificant way. Nevertheless, it is here and we have supported the rehabilitative concept of

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the principle involved. But, I make the point that they are talking about rehabilitating a fraction of the young people who had been engaged in anti-social activities.

You have a large number of youths, a significant proportion of young people—certainly not in the majority—who seem to have the law-abiding citizens of this country under siege. That is the sentiment I am expressing; that is the anxiety, the trauma, the fear under which people live today. Of those engaged in anti-social activities, only a fraction is apprehended; out of that fraction, a fraction of that is then convicted; and from those who are inmates, it is a fraction of that you are attempting to rehabilitate.

Do you understand the magnitude of the problem that we are dealing with? And while this is a measure, we hope can tackle the problem, though in a very limited way—Madam Speaker, I am trying to put this issue in that perspective. There has been much talk about issues of going to the root of the problem; issues of crime prevention—and the Prime Minister talked about visions, but, I do not know if he really has a vision about what Trinidad and Tobago would be like in 10 years' time, at the rate at which criminal activity is being perpetrated by young people in this society. What is that vision? He said that they have a vision for Trinidad and Tobago. This is not an *ad hoc* measure, this is not piecemeal legislation, but that fits into the vision from Trinidad and Tobago.

The Prime Minister articulated so many visions here, that I think he is suffering from multiple vision. And when you suffer from this you are likely to be, in local parlance, "cokey-eyed". And I think that the way he sees the problems of this society is in a very "cokey-eyed" fashion. This is why he cannot offer any realistic solutions to these very urgent—and if there is anything urgent in Trinidad and Tobago today, it is the extent and intensity of criminal activity in this country. This is a problem that we have to address, because we all are in it. As a law-abiding Member of the Opposition, I am subject to attack—I do not know. Law-abiding citizens in the so-called security of their homes are now being attacked with impunity by roving gangs of young people.

Later I want to ask about how we reached this pass that we are in today, because surely, something must have gone wrong in the immediate past for us to be in this situation that we find ourselves today. If we look and see what went wrong, then we would have a better appreciation of what to do about this problem. As I said, we are all in this together.

If we want the society to survive as a civilized society, then something must be done urgently to tackle a problem in the framework of a longer term solution in order to restrain the level of crime in Trinidad and Tobago.

5.20 p.m.

As I said, the Prime Minister spoke about a vision, various visions he had. I do not know which is the vision that he wants this House to adopt. Anyway, as I said, he has multiple vision and probably he is in a state where he cannot look at the thing properly.

The Member for St. Joseph has a vision of 2000 years. Not many of us will be here 2000 years from now. He went back to 2000—

Madam Speaker: I think he said 2000 years ago. He was referring to Aristotle.

Mr. T. Sudama: Therefore, he used what happened 2000 years ago to predict what happens today. Therefore, he will use whatever is happening today to predict 2000 years hence. So I am afraid, I do not have that kind of vision. Two thousand years from now we do not know what their situation would be like, but one thing I would assure the other side is that 2000 years from now they would not be in Government. In fact, next five years they will not be in Government, let alone 2000 years. That is a vision I have too.

Mr. Manning: I cannot resist it, Madam Speaker, that is a "cokey-eyed" vision.

Mr. Ramrekersingh: I will let the distortion pass, but I assure the hon. Member for Oropouche that in 2000 years from now we will be in different places and, fortunately, I shall be in the better place.

Mr. T. Sudama: It does not mean by quoting the Good Book, he will get to where he wants to get, because he has to pass judgment, the judgment sect, and the first hurdle is that he was a member of the PNM.

So the Government may have multiple vision, but they have no credibility. Nobody believes what they say. Nobody believes in their plans, in their programmes. Whatever programmes they may have, they have absolutely no credibility in Trinidad and Tobago.

You have a Prime Minister, for example, who told this country that he had a certain report and that the report was sent back to correct typographical errors, when we came to understand later that he sent back the report for censoring so

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that the public would not have the benefit of the original report and, therefore, tried what is called a cover-up. That became public knowledge. In any other parliamentary democracy of the Westminster type, of which tradition they claim in this House that their government is part, where a Prime Minister was guilty of such behaviour, he would have had to resign. He misrepresents the situation to the House and to the country, and, in fact, browbeats a retired judge into doing something which he was not supposed to do. He has no credibility.

We have another one here, the Member for Arouca South, the Minister of Health, whose only claim to fame is that he used his office to have a free prostate operation at the Mount Hope Medical Sciences Complex. But in April last year 14 people died in the St. Ann's Hospital under his stewardship and it is as if nothing has happened. He blames the system.

Madam Speaker: You were making some very good points on the matter at hand, so probably we can get back to that.

Mr. T. Sudama: The Prime Minister talked about a vision. I am saying, you can have vision, but if you have no credibility, that vision is merely "ole talk" and hot air and froth. When I come to look at his speech, I want to make certain references and to ask him certain questions on the basis of what he has said and the vision he has projected to this House. He is quoting from some speech that he had made to some party and so on. He said this on April 16 in this House:

"To this end, systems will be properly devised to ensure that prisoners receive classes in subject areas which will lead toward the attainment of CXC, GCE 'O' and 'A' level Certificates and proper skills training which will in both instances, equip them to return to society as an asset. With special regard to skills training, it is proposed that work centres be established—"

Madam Speaker: The Member is asking you to give way.

Dr. Rowley: Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. Member for giving way. I was trying to get clear what he said. When he said that the Government's credibility was at stake, he stated—if I did hear him correctly—that the Member for Arouca South had a free operation at the hospital. Is the Member for Oropouche implying that a member of the Government, having access to and availing medical institution is, in fact, an improper act?

Mr. T. Sudama: For free? I do not know what are the terms and conditions. But, certainly, if members of the public have to pay for the facilities of the Mount Hope Medical Sciences Complex, I do not see why Ministers of Government and everybody else cannot pay.

Dr. Rowley: Madam Speaker, I ask the Member for Oropouche if when he was a Member of the Cabinet, it did not apply, as part of his terms of engagement, spelt out under the provisions under which he was hired, that the state is to provide free medical attention at state institutions to Members of the Cabinet. Did that not apply?

Mr. T. Sudama: I was not aware whether that was part of the terms and conditions.

Dr. Rowley: No wonder he was fired.

Madam Speaker: That is the problem when we stray too far. It has nothing to do with the subject matter of the debate.

Mr. T. Sudama: He talks about dishonesty. I will come here one day and talk about him and National Quarries.

Madam Speaker, I was referring to the Prime Minister's contribution where he was talking about what the Government had in place and what was being done. I will continue:

"With special regard to skills training, it is proposed that work centres be established in prisons where the goods produced would be so well crafted that they could generate income for the state and for the prisoner, part of which he would receive when he returns to society, thus giving him income to assist in the resumption of life productively."

This is what they said they were doing.

Mr. Manning: This is the vision.

Mr. T. Sudama: This has not been done yet.

Mr. Manning: No.

Mr. T. Sudama: Is the vision 2000 years or a nearer vision?

Mr. Manning: Nearer.

Mr. T. Sudama: This is the vision. You see, the point I am making is, that if you have vision and every time you come and you say you have a vision and nothing is being done, nobody would believe you. You have little or no credibility because you are doing nothing.

5.30 p.m.

"It is often said that the prison system tends to be a burden on the state but we intend to develop a system that is self-sustaining and income generating.

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Rather than the state feeding the prisoners, they, through training in proper agricultural techniques and animal husbandry will to a large extent be able to feed themselves and other citizens of this country."

Madam Speaker, that is another vision. Why do they not try to assist the farmers and the agriculturists in Trinidad and Tobago so that Trinidad and Tobago could feed itself? He is talking about farmers and giving them skills and making all these nebulous promises. This has no bearing on the reality of Trinidad and Tobago. It is merely "ole talk" and this is why I am trying to point out to this House. The Prime Minister spent a lot of time on the last occasion engaging in a public relations exercise of "ole talk".

He continued:

"We have talked about academic skills training to prepare prisoners for life on their return to society, but we also recognize that without psychological preparation for their return all that training will go to nought."

Madam Speaker, we need psychological training, not only for the prisoners we intend to rehabilitate, but also for the society outside in order to have them receive these people, given the sentiments and anxiety and insecurity which are affecting the vast majority of citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. Given the experience of crime in this society, they need to be psychologically oriented to be a receptive community to people whom the Government wants to rehabilitate. Why does the Government not try to do that and reassure the vast majority of our citizens that something concrete, urgent and immediate is being done about crime prevention in this society and give them a greater sense of security.

I do not know if the Member for San Fernando East, apart from talking to his party-faithfuls, goes around this country and finds out exactly what—

Mr. Manning: Madam Speaker, at least there are party-faithfuls with whom I can speak.

Mr. T. Sudama: Madam Speaker, the next time he gets up to make a comment, I have to know what he intends to say in advance before I give way.

Madam Speaker, hear this unrealistic, euphoric—I do not know if it is even euphoric. He continues:

"In that regard therefore we intend to establish programmes throughout the prison system specifically designed for instilling discipline..."

Why do you not try to instil discipline before the people get into the prison? Why do you not have a programme to instil discipline so that that would be a

preventive measure before people get into the prison system itself? Given the indiscipline in this society and given the role of his party, 30 years as a governing party, they have set the pattern and the tone for this country over a whole generation. You have done so, and now you are talking about establishing programmes throughout the prison system specifically designed for instilling discipline. If the Government has such programmes, would he give us the benefit of its thinking on the establishment of such programmes etc?

He further stated:

"...without paying due cognizance to the role of the education system in the shaping of the character and personality of individuals and in determining the kind of individuals that the society produces."

Madam Speaker, that is a large question as to how society moulds character in the individuals and so on. Again, I tell the other side that there is a malaise in this society and out of that malaise we have coming out, a large number of individuals guilty of anti-social and deviant behaviour. If it is one area in which the education system of this country has fallen down, it is in that area of moulding character and personality in our young people.

I do not want to put the blame on the Member for St. Joseph, because, he is a well-meaning Minister. He has just come into Government. I remember the days when we were colleagues together in the ULF or the Tapia, but we were in the alliance. Do you remember those days, Madam Speaker?

Madam Speaker: No. I do not.

Mr. T. Sudama: Madam Speaker, I do not want to blame him for all the sins of the PNM. He has come in lately so he must bear only part of the blame for what has happened to this society and the educational system and where it is today.

When I go through this contribution of the hon. Member for San Fernando East, to say I am disappointed is an understatement; to say that I can get some kind of reassurance from what he said, would be untrue. All he seems to be engaging in from day to day is propaganda exercise, talking about, if it is not floating exchange and what the benefits would be, how they are dealing with crime; having so many investors coming to Trinidad and Tobago; how much employment is created and so on, all of it is in the same vein in which he spoke on the last occasion in this House.

Mr. Palackdharrysingh: And do not buy chicken.

Mr. T. Sudama: And do not buy chicken, Madam Speaker. He did not grow up on chicken.

Mr. Panday: If food is too expensive, do not buy it.

Mr. T. Sudama: Madam Speaker, as I said, I do not want to take up too much time with the contribution of the Member for St. Joseph, who took us back to Greek tragedy and from Greek tragedy he came to PNM tragedy. He made that jump.

I was making the point that he tried to indicate that even among the school population there is a small sector involved in anti-social criminal activities. But, on the other hand, the Minister of National Security goes throughout Trinidad and Tobago to talk about the deluge of crime among young people; "tidal wave"—I think those were the words he used in San Fernando—among youths in Trinidad and Tobago. Yet, the Minister of Education is trying to tell this House it is really no big thing, most of the youths are good, progressive and law-abiding.

Madam Speaker, then we had my good Friend from Port of Spain South. She had offered an invitation and I do not want to say anything so that she might withdraw that invitation. She did say that rapid strides were made in rehabilitative measures. She did not speak for very long, but she might have spent some of her time telling us what these rapid strides were in the course of PNM administrations. If rapid strides were made, why have we reached the situation in which we are today? Why the high incidence of recidivism if rapid strides have been made in rehabilitation of young offenders?

She then made a very significant point that what has happened is that this society has moved away from spiritual values to a concentration on material values and that seems to be part of the problem which we face today. I ask: Who presided over this emphasis on material values, high and nice easy living in Trinidad and Tobago from 1956 to 1986? When we sow the wind, we reap the whirlwind, and we are now reaping the fruits of that kind of orientation which the society was given.

At one time money was no problem—the Member for San Fernando East was a Member of the Cabinet then—and everything, therefore, was reduced to a “gimme gimme” handout syndrome, trying to buy patronage in order to win votes and stay in office.

5.40 p.m.

Regardless of what has happened to the society, those were the trends which were taking place in our country over those very critical years. Today, yes, we do

need discipline, we do need a return to moral and spiritual values, we do need a sense of cohesiveness in the society; we do need to give guidance and direction to the young people of Trinidad and Tobago, but I ask the question: Are they capable and qualified, having that experience of 30 years in Government, to give that guidance to the population of Trinidad and Tobago? My unequivocal opinion is that they are not so qualified to bring this society out of the morass in which it has today found itself.

I will now put this measure into a little perspective to see what we have before us today, how it will help, if help it will, in dealing with this larger problem of crime and criminal activity among the youth of Trinidad and Tobago. The Minister says in a report in the *Sunday Express* of April 4; 80 per cent of crimes are committed by the youth. What does that tell you about the prospects of the future? He said some of them are nine-year-olds and it is heart-rending to go to the youth training facility to see little children behind those walls.

These children are there not for stealing sweets, he says, some of them are there for armed robbery, using some of the most sophisticated hand weapons. Others are there for larceny and assault occasioning actual bodily harm. So these are the problems we are up against when we are talking about rehabilitation. Not that among that population who come within the purview of the Young Offenders Bill, there are not those who have the potential to be rehabilitated. It is a big problem. Let us be realistic with what we are doing. Because if in any given year you rehabilitate five or six people, then you have thousands and thousands out there engaged in criminal activity; and hundreds in the prison population.

What are we really trying to do? How are we really trying to tackle this problem in an effective and meaningful way? That is why I fear that while the measure itself is commendable in principle, all we are doing is passing laws and providing legislative framework which will have absolutely no effect in dealing with the problems in any substantive way.

Others have spoken about the lack of resources for implementation of what we are trying to pass today. If we had the resources, what are the numbers involved that we are trying to bring under the purview of the legislation? The pool of offenders is so large that the Government are not going to reduce any backlog in the present situation. Many young people are inducted into crime on an increasing scale. Some of them will be caught, apprehended and sent to jail, but even while that is going on and you are trying to rehabilitate a small fraction of those who are in the prison institutions of this country, the pool of young offenders at large in

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the society is growing larger and larger. How are you going to deal with reducing a backlog? There are no comprehensive measures in place to deal with that.

Madam Speaker, I think, on the other side it has been acknowledged that there has been no serious attempt to understand the problem because, there has really been no in-depth analysis as to why the problems have reached the proportions they have. People have come up with reasons. Unemployment and broken homes are reasons why young people get into crime.

I ask the Government: If it goes a little further into the analysis, why is it some who are unemployed do not get into crime but others do so? Why is it some from the same type of homes get involved in crime? You need to go further down into the analysis and thus come up with reasons as to why we have the level of criminal activity in Trinidad and Tobago today. There could be a number of reasons for it.

Has there been an increase in permissiveness among parents? Has there been a decrease in supervision, discipline and control in the educational system in Trinidad and Tobago? What have been the values promoted through the media especially? It has been established beyond doubt that violence on television is one of the major reasons why violence is perpetrated and accepted among the youth.

There is no attempt to deal with that problem at the level of the media and how they portray violence and the hero image which is given to criminals. Therefore, people in our society use that as role models. We import these television series and wholesale films from America and elsewhere, and show them to our young population; many of them with idle hands. They have a level of frustration and they say to themselves, this is the way to go, this is the in-thing to do.

Also, I ask: whether there is a feeling among those people, particularly the large sectors of perpetrators of crime, that look, the police in Trinidad and Tobago are not too keen; perhaps indifferent and even, condone their behaviour.

I will relate to you an incident. The person came and informed me that they were robbed and assaulted and went to the police station and reported the matter. The policeman asked him if he would be able to recognize the person if he is apprehended. The man told him yes, he could and if asked to give a description, he could. After having given the description, the policeman turned and told him, "Well, it seems that is a case of income redistribution." You understand the problem, Madam Speaker, the lack of control and the perception of the police.

5.50 p.m.

I am not saying that all members of the police service are engaged in this type of behaviour, but the perception is that a significant sector of the policemen out there do not care a damn about whether you are robbed, raped or killed. They are indifferent to your plight. It is the behaviour of these people, minority though they be, that gives the impression to young people that if they go into a life of crime, the police would not take them on. Given that impression, they go out and become bolder and bolder, and commit more crimes with impunity.

On a daily basis, I have people coming to me, not only from my constituency but also from other constituencies, and people in business, complaining about the violence directed against them. These people are being attacked even in the so-called security of their homes.

I am not saying that this is a problem that can be dealt with overnight; I want the Minister to understand that. Surely we must understand how we reached to this point, and we must give some kind of assurance that in the short-term something can be done, at least, to allay some of the fears of the citizens at large, that the Government is attempting to put some measures in place as some kind of deterrent in the framework of a larger and more comprehensive programme to deal with this question of crime in Trinidad and Tobago.

If the Government does not understand the anxiety and fear under which so many citizens in this country live—it may talk about bringing investors and trying to revive the economy—and it does not understand that if the social framework, infrastructure and psychological consciousness are not there the economy would not be revived. The citizens would not be motivated to engage in economic activity. If a businessman is under threat of robbery and violence every day, would he invest? Or would he try to sell his business, and try to secure his life in any way which is feasible?

Many persons have come to me and said that there is no point in doing business. They are not making much money these days due to the recession, but every day they face the threat of either being robbed, chopped or shot at. It is a daily and hourly fear among substantial sectors of the population. Of course, we have been told that most of these crimes are being committed by young people. What do we do? Surely we have to look at the problems and analyze them.

The question of crime is a national issue. Everybody is involved and at risk. The entire society, more or less, is under siege and particularly certain sectors of Trinidad and Tobago. That opinion is expressed day in and day out. A certain

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sector of the community has been targeted for this kind of crime. They see themselves as sitting ducks in a situation where they feel that the Government is not doing anything.

Madam 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*]

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. T. Sudama: Madam Speaker, when as a representative of the people I have to talk to them and give them a view as to what they ought to do, I have been advising them that the issue of self-protection is a constitutional and human right. Self-protection is a natural right, because without that, there is no life. People have been expressing the view that the state cannot protect them; the policemen are indifferent; they complain of a lack of resources; they do not have vehicles and manpower; the management of the police service is something that has come in for adverse criticism.

I know the Minister is trying to solve the problem by throwing away the baby with the bath water, but we will deal with that on another occasion. I understand his urgency to get things done, but there is a certain framework within which he must operate to get things done and he must also have the confidence of the citizens at large, and not just a public relations exercise, where he goes and talks with his party groups and faithfuls and gives them the impression that he is moving ahead, when in truth and in fact when you look at the statistics, crime is escalating and there is further disenchantment among the average persons in Trinidad and Tobago.

The best advice that I can give people is that the right of self-protection is a basic right. If you are attacked, you have the right to protect yourself. How do you protect yourself in this society? I said it can only be done on a community basis. Many persons have tried to do it on an individual basis by putting burglar proofing. Do you know what the bandits are doing today? They are breaking down the burglar proofing and knocking down the walls, so the last sanctuary that you thought you had in your home, under this PNM regime, is no more.

I advise people that they have to come together as a community to protect themselves; have a system of communication, whether it is with the police and other members of the community, so that when there is suspicious activity, they organize to protect themselves. Even if the police is contacted and they do come,

by that time someone could be killed, raped, robbed or chopped. Preventive action is what I am trying to get people to be involved in.

I see the *Express* newspaper says: Crime is something that we all have to fight against.

Mr. Manning: Is that today's editorial?

Mr. T. Sudama: No. Today's editorial has to do with your betrayal of Winston Ali.

6.00 p.m.

We must all fight crime, it says, and I agree with that. The responsibility of doing this is not that of the policy only. We all agree with that. If we are going to establish a system of community activity in being alert to fighting crime, in securing crime protection and crime prevention, then we have to operate in a different syndrome with a different orientation and a different security structure, where policemen have to be integrated in a way into wider security mechanisms which the citizens may attempt to establish on their own.

I do not know whether the hon. Minister has a vision. He is not a man of vision. If he has a vision, I hope it is not the vision that the Member for San Fernando East has, because that vision would not lead him anywhere. He would not move a step with that vision.

Therefore, if he is trying to reform the security system in the police service, the structure in which we operate, I think he should have a vision of how that fits into the larger security system in which the society is involved. Security, as I say, is not merely a matter for the security services or the Minister of National Security.

Now, I know he is referred to these days as the biggest crime fighter in Trinidad and Tobago, he is the super commissioner, has taken over the role of Police Commissioner and so on, that he is moving headlong, crime buster—Kojak is the television personality. *[Interruption]* I cannot fault the Minister for his enthusiasm, but I think the matter needs to be a little more thought out. I think he has to get a certain measure of consensus not only by talking to the party faithful—although I notice that when he goes to talk to them, not many of them turn out to the meetings. That is another matter. But we need to get a national consensus on this issue.

I have been advising people who come to me, to form themselves into community watch groups. *[Interruption]* Call them what you will. Here is someone who has been in Government for 18 years—

Mr. Manning: Twenty-two.

Mr. T. Sudama: —twenty-two years in Government, who has presided over this deterioration in the security situation and who has presided over the escalation of crime in our country to be proposing vigilante groups for people to protect themselves in Trinidad and Tobago. Is this all that we can expect from him?

I just want to quote from an *Express* editorial dated April 24, 1993, which was referring to a case where villages got together and prevented a crime from taking place. It says here:

“Crime, we have repeatedly said in this column, is not merely a matter for the police. Every citizen has to join in the fight since it is the combined eyes and ears of the population that will help our policemen do the job of serving and protecting that they have sworn to do.”

It is the combined eyes and ears of the population that will help our policemen to do the job. Well, let us hope that all our policemen also have eyes and ears I order to respond to the complaints of the citizens.

“The capture of three bandits on Thursday by villagers who had teamed up with a party of policemen is a case in point. The bandits were about to flee in their getaway car after committing a series of robberies in Arima when they were confronted by the villagers.”

Now, as I said, Madam Speaker, there has to be a level of impunity with which they operate where bandits could go and commit a series of crimes within a matter of an hour or two, if there is no law and order in the society. How is it that they have come to the conclusion that they can go there and rob five or six businesses in one shot, as if they are collecting tax or tariffs. They do not think that that is a reflection on the government and the manner in which they have handled the crime situation. They do not think so.

“The bandits were about to flee in their getaway car after committing a series of robberies...when they were confronted by the villagers. The bandits, seeing the angry crowd between them and their getaway car, split up in different directions in an effort to escape. By then, the police had arrived on the scene.”

Well, this is quick action on the part of the police.

“The villagers, far from leaving the search to the policemen, themselves became part of the search party and eventually the crooks were held. We must commend the villagers who stood up to the bandits and refused to be intimidated, even though the criminals were armed.”

Now, I am not advocating that we stand up to bandits on all occasions, because it may result in the loss of life. These were rather brave villagers who got into this act.

“But citizens do not have to wait for the drama and excitement of a chase to participate in anti-criminal activity. How long would a ‘pusher’ be able to continue his nefarious trade in a village if his neighbours were to decide they were not going to put up with it. They would have to draw police attention to his wrongdoing and insist that the police do something about it.”

Now, how do we insist that the police do something about a report somebody has made? What recourse do the villagers have in order to insist that the police do something?

“If the police were to do a proper surveillance job they would soon catch him with the goods, assuming of course he was foolish or brazen enough to continue trafficking.”

Now, while I wish to commend this editorial, I think they are being a little unrealistic in terms of trying to assign responsibility to the average citizen of Trinidad and Tobago.

My concern is that community action is necessary in this situation, but that is an immediate kind of measure in order to try to control the crime situation and for the purposes of self-protection. The larger issue we have to confront in this debate is, what do we do about a significant sector of the young people of this country?

If we were doing a proper analysis of the situation, we would have known where the vast majority of those with a propensity towards crime come from, what areas, what locality. Maybe it would have been necessary to increase security measures in those areas to start with.

Secondly, the question of their mobility; How is it that they are able to get vehicles so readily in order to go and do their nefarious acts?

Thirdly, as a preventive measure, how are they getting these guns, sophisticated weapons, when law-abiding citizens of Trinidad and Tobago who need protection, who need to have a gun as a kind of deterrent, are not able to get them?

I am not here advocating that you give guns to all and sundry; that is the response that comes from the other side. After a person’s background is checked out, the

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need for him to have a weapon for the purpose of self-defence has to be established, his training in that and so on.

But while the police and the Ministry of National Security are clamping down on the number of licences they are issuing, guns are illegally available to every shade of criminal in the country to terrorize the law-abiding population. And this government seems to sit back and look on as a referee while this match, this contest is going on between criminals on the one hand, and the majority of law-abiding citizens on the other who are trying to maintain their lives and their property.

That is an area I think we have to look into with respect to the preventative aspects of crime. But there is the longer-term problem as to what we do with the youth of this country, because this is what this Bill is all about. If I were to read clause 2 of the Bill, it says here:

“(1) It shall be lawful for the Minister...”

which gives the objective, really—

“by proclamation to establish an Industrial Institution (hereinafter referred to as ‘the Institution’) in which young offenders whilst detained may be given such industrial training and other instruction, and be subject to such disciplinary and moral influences as will conduce to their reformation and the prevention of crime.”

So all this activity is intended in the final analysis to induce the prevention of crime. That is why I have taken much time in speaking about the preventive aspects of criminal activity of course, this is merely a small, limited measure towards that larger objective of crime prevention.

Madam Speaker, the other question I want to ask is: Do the prison and industrial institutions in Trinidad and Tobago have access to resources and expertise so that they would be able to put their charges under disciplinary and moral influences? Is the Commissioner of Prisons, and whatever resources he may have access to, or the head of an industrial institution, qualified to promulgate disciplinary and moral influences on the people who come under their control?

I should have thought that the Minister of National Security would have elaborated on these matters. Because it is one thing to put something in law, in writing; it is another thing to have it implemented effectively.

Furthermore, Madam Speaker, you know, in fact, the Young Offenders Detention Act was proclaimed on November 6, 1962. We are 31 years away from

the proclamation of this Act, and my question is: Has there been a review of the operation of this Act in the last 31 years to see whether, in fact, the provisions here could be implemented and have, in fact, been implemented?

What is the effectiveness of the legislative framework that we have had in place? Has there been any such review over these last years? Or is it just a question of adding to the laws and giving the country the impression that you are trying to deal with that situation, you are trying to put in place rehabilitative measures and so on, and in the end there is no real particular action being taken by the state?

Today, I had to plead in this House on behalf of the law-abiding citizens of Trinidad and Tobago because of what I hear on a daily basis about the level and intensity of crime in this country. I also have to make a plea for the youth of Trinidad and Tobago, badly misdirected, given the wrong signals both by the Government and by the population at large, and particularly by the Government which has the resources to direct the educational system in a way to have rehabilitative measures for the large number of youths. This can be done through the media and other means of community involvement.

The greater responsibility for what is happening today in Trinidad and Tobago among the young people, and particularly that sector of the young population that is heavily engaged in crime and criminal activity, has to reside with a government of a party which has been there for 30 odd years. In that space of time we have moved from a relatively law-abiding society in the 1950s to a society in 1993 without law and order. We seem to be in the wildest part of the Wild West. That is what Trinidad and Tobago has come to today.

What I cannot understand is the smugness of the other side, whether it is the Prime Minister or the other Ministers, as if everything is all right. Everything in this country is hunky-dory; it is only the Opposition. They sit down in their smug little caucuses and go and talk to their faithful and try to give the country the impression that everything is all right.

Madam Speaker, I am saying today that they are living in a fool's paradise if they think that the population believes that they are serious about solving the crime problem or that they are doing anything effective to deal with this escalating and frightening problem in Trinidad and Tobago.

Thank you very much.

The Minister of National Security (Sen. The Hon. Russell Huggins):
Madam Speaker, I will try to be brief and relevant, I never cease to be amazed at

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the type of grandstanding that comes from the other side whenever they rise to participate in any debate. The only thing, that they achieve as far as I am concerned is using the time allotted to them.

The simple amendment before the House is to facilitate the continued education of young offenders who are housed at the Youth Training Centre. I have heard all sorts of questions asked about how they will be transported and what time they must go and what kind of subjects, but I am not surprised that these questions came from the Member for Naparaima.

Nor was I surprised at the black-jacket white-jacket approach of the Member for Couva South who all of a sudden found that inmates at the Youth Training Centre do not have human rights, they should not be allowed to mix with citizens out there. But when they commit their crimes and we seek to deal with them effectively, he runs from Port of Spain to London to make sure—

Mr. Maharaj: Madam Speaker, I think this is important. Is the hon. Minister saying that Sir Ellis Clarke, Sir Hugh Wooding, Mr. Theodore Guerra, Mr. Desmond Allum all of whom appear for accused persons charged with offences, are wrong to do so?

Sen. R. Huggins: I was not mistaken, Madam Speaker, when I indicated that I was referring to the Member for Couva South.

Be that as it may, let me advise this Senate that the Youth Training Centre is governed by a board of management which is comprised of persons who possess certain skills required to deal with the type of inmates that you have at the institution. There are psychologists, psychiatrists, educators and social workers on the board, and they are the ones who are principally responsible for running the institution and reporting to the Commissioner of Prisons. So it is quite incorrect to say, as has been suggested, particularly by the Member for Couva South, who seems to have the feeling that the Commissioner of Prisons wields this big stick over the lads at the Youth Training Centre—

Mr. Sudama: Would the Minister, for my own information, tell me how often this board meets? How are its decisions implemented?

Hon. R. Huggins: If my friend reads the legislation, he would see it all set out there.

The type of subjects that will be offered to these inmates are subjects for which they display a propensity for further education. I have no intention, whatsoever, by way of regulation, of limiting the type of subjects which these

inmates may pursue. It is the Government's intention that they be given as wide a scope as possible to further their education.

The intention, also, is not that these students would be let out at six o'clock in the morning, the gates of the YTC open, they be dressed in a uniform and told go to Curepe Junior Secondary School and come back at four o'clock. That is not the intention. These students will be accompanied. If, for example, one is going to further his education in Mathematics, he will be accompanied to the school, he will sit in the maths class, after which he will be taken back to the institution. It is in this respect where the youth training facility receives a lot of assistance from friends of the institution who provide transport where the prison authorities cannot so provide.

It may be important for those who profess ignorance on the other side to know that the objective of the Youth Training Centre is to repair the physical, education, psychological and social deficiencies of young offenders during their period of detention. The programmes pursued include work, vocational training, academics, physical training, cultural, religious, social activity, health care and recreation.

These programmes are in most cases carried out by officers of the institution and, in some cases, they are carried out by persons from ministries, in particular the Ministry of Agriculture.

Under the academic programme, you have one principal attached to the institution and two teachers. Classes are done in maths, English Language, West Indian History, Commerce and Art. That is at the secondary level. At the primary level, you have maths, English Composition, General Paper.

In 1991, some 44 inmates sat the 1991 primary school leaving examinations and 35 were successful, gaining in the process a total of 16 distinctions in English Composition, Arithmetic and General Paper.

In 1992, 34 boys sat the examination, eight received full passes in all subjects, that is English, Arithmetic, Composition and General Paper. All of the others were successful in Arithmetic and gained distinctions.

Three boys took the GCE examinations in 1993 and two were successful in human and social biology. Four took English and only one was successful.

What one has to understand is that most of the chaps that come to this institution come in most cases with a very low level of education. I must say, it is a credit to the officers attached to the institution that quite a few of them leave at

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least learning to read, write and to do mathematics. I am certain that most of them understand much better than those on the other side the concept of floating the Trinidad and Tobago dollar.

Mr. Mohammed: would the Minister give way to a question, please? Madam Speaker, during the contribution of the Member for Barataria/San Juan, I had cause to get up and ask a question, and she indicated that the hon. Minister will respond to the particular question that was asked. Now that he appears to be closing off his contribution and he is dealing with the academic aspects of the inmates and so on, I really want to know, because this is a serious point: What is proposed to deal with the situation where these people who may get their qualifications need a certificate of character. Now, we have an instance where someone in 1948 was convicted of larceny of a bicycle bell and two years ago when he went for a police certificate of good character the conviction was recorded. So I am wondering what is being done to create mechanisms where, after a number of years, a conviction will be removed from a person's record. That is the point.

Hon. R. Huggins: Madam Speaker, to deal briefly with the point, my ministry is at this point looking at the whole situation whereby convictions recorded after a certain period particularly in respect of young offenders will be erased from the recorded so that they would not be tainted for the rest of their lives. I know they are surprised to hear that. They are of the impression that this Government is not working.

Mr. Mohammed: why did he not say this in his presentation? This is a fundamental point. He should have said it in his presentation, not to come after the horse has bolted from the stable to make points. This is the House, you know.

Hon. R. Huggins: I will forgive my friend, he is surprised to know that the Government is looking at all these things. I excuse his behaviour.

Mr. Mohammed: The Minister could not answer me. Madam Speaker, to put the record of this House straight, when I questioned the hon. Minister of Social Services, she made a categorical statement that that response would come from the Minister of National Security. The conclusion that I drew then was that she did not even know and could not have assured the House that it will be considered by the Government.

6.30 p.m.

Hon. R. Huggins: It seems to me, Madam Speaker, that the hon. Member was the one who suggested I was winding down, he never gave me an opportunity to—*[Interruption]* Well, it is a credit to wind up.

This is all part of the Government's thrust towards rehabilitation of the young offender. I have always made it clear that the Ministry of National Security views the whole question of rehabilitation of offenders very seriously. As a matter of fact, one of the mandates given to the contractors who are at present constructing the new Maximum Security Prison is that part of their brief be the production of a report that will deal with the whole question of rehabilitation of prisoners. That will be paid for by them and I am happy to say that I am in receipt of the first draft which the ministry is now looking at.

At such time, Madam Speaker, when the Cabinet has looked at the document, I am certain it would be sent out for public comment so that the country at large would be aware of where the Government is going insofar as the rehabilitation of offenders is concerned.

I feel confident that this amendment will assist those inmates who show that they have the ability to go further. And it is the Government's feeling that, notwithstanding the fact that they are incarcerated in this institution, they should not be deprived of the opportunity for further education.

I give this House the assurance that we feel confident that this system will work. I can only hope—because I have no control over that whatsoever—that when these young people come out with their qualifications, the business community would play their part in the whole rehabilitation process and see it fit to offer them jobs; even as law clerks in some of the more prestigious criminal firms.

Miss Bhaggan: Could the Minister say whether a professional opinion has been sought with respect to the fact that you may have someone standing outside a classroom while a student is escorted to a school, and that student is expected to study, and then to leave. I would like to know whether a report has been made and what has been the recommendations of the professional?

Hon. R. Huggins: Madam Speaker, I am not aware of any professional opinion sought on anything.

Mr. Maharaj: Could the hon. Minister tell this House whether his ministry has conducted some research as to about how many security officers they would have to employ to do this?

Hon. R. Huggins: Madam Speaker, this is all part of the responsibility of the existing officers at the Youth Training Centre. I also give the assurance that it is not a case where every inmate is going to be let loose on the society. A proper assessment will be done of the inmate who shows the propensity to go further in his academic life. He is going to be psychologically assessed before any decision is taken to send him out there amongst the law-abiding citizens.

The important thing is that the inmate is given the opportunity to further his education. He must not feel that having been detained at the Youth Training Centre, he is a forgotten individual. As you would know, Madam Speaker, this Government cares and it is on this basis that my ministry saw it fit to move apace with this amendment so that we could facilitate the rehabilitation of young offenders.

Without further ado, Madam Speaker—

Mr. Maharaj: Bearing in mind the commitment that the Government says it has to educate these offenders, why is it the Government could not continue having them educated in the institution and improve the resources of the institution?

Hon. R. Huggins: Madam Speaker, the Government have certain resources and we have to use those resources to the best of our ability. We have the school system out there, we have looked at it, we find that if the assessments are made properly, there is no problem putting them out there, and that is the bottom line. At the end of the day, that is where they have to go.

Madam Speaker, I indicated I would have been very brief and to the point, and without further ado, I beg to move.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a second time.

Bill committed to a committee of the whole House.

House in committee.

Clauses 1 to 3 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Question put and agreed to, That the Bill be reported to the House.

House resumed.

Bill reported, without amendment; read the third time and passed.

Adjournment

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ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Education (Hon. Augustus Ramrekersingh): Madam Speaker, before moving the adjournment, I wish to inform hon. Members that at the next sitting we will be taking the Transfer of Prisoners Bill, the Land Acquisition Motion and Motion No. 10 by the Member for Tobago East, all of which are on today's Order Paper. The order will be the Land Acquisition Motion and then the Bill.

Madam Speaker, I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to Friday, May 07, 1993 at 1.30 p.m.

6.40 p.m.

Madam Speaker: We have three motions on the adjournment. We will take the Member for Nariva's first.

Sangre Grande Police Station (Dilapidated Condition)

Mr. Krish Jurai (Nariva): Madam Speaker, I am grateful to this House for allowing me to highlight the dilapidated condition of the Sangre Grande Police Station. My concern is to put the Government on alert. Here we have a very dangerous situation and unless the Government acts very quickly, grave consequences may arise. You see, the building that houses the Sangre Grande Police Station also accommodates the Eastern Divisional Headquarters, both the Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent's office, a traffic branch and a motor vehicle repair garage. At any given time there are about 100 officers at that station, in addition to members of the public who frequent it to conduct business.

The building is of a very beautiful architectural design, but as one gets close, one can see huge cracks in the building. It appears from a distance to be a sturdy one, but it is over 100 years old. There is no proper steel structure to support it, and what appears to be concrete is very porous and brittle and parts of it fall off from time to time. I, myself, have seen bits and pieces missing from the walls of the building.

The wooden structure has been destroyed by termites and the floor boards are broken and squeaking, and officers have to tread very carefully in order to avoid going through the floor. If you look at the floor upstairs you can actually see where the floor boards have been broken where officers have trod.

The building is also a full-fledged nesting ground for birds: you have black birds, blue birds, grey birds, pigeons in their hundreds, and they are

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undaunted by the presence of the police. As a matter of fact, it appears that the birds have acquired more rights to the building than the officers who work there. The walls and floors of the building are covered with bird droppings. It is a sickening, depressing and disgusting sight. It is no point trying to clean it because in a very short space of time it is all covered and messy again.

The building is a natural habitat for rats, roaches and other vermin. Stray dogs and cats live under it. The roof is like a strainer; when it rains, officers have to run for cover. I was there only last week and saw what took place when it was raining. One has to see it to actually believe. I am sure that the Minister of National Security will not agree with what I am saying here today, but I would advise him to go there as soon as possible and take a very close look at the dilapidated conditions which exist at that police station.

Madam Speaker, all it would take is a very strong wind and that building would be no more. As you know, the hurricane season is approaching and unless action is taken, we can have very grave consequences. In addition, the building is stacked with bundles of official papers. This is a potential fire hazard. Even a small spark can ignite them and the building can be a towering inferno in a split second.

We have to thank the officers for working there; they have the courage and the stamina, but I fear they can take it no longer. They have been complaining time and time again and all their pleas have been falling on deaf ears. Sometimes I wonder whether the Minister of National Security hears at all, because several pleas have been made by these officers, even through their association, and still there is no response.

What is heartening is that recently the Minister of National Security made a statement in this House to the effect that he has the funds available for rebuilding the police station. Since the funds are already available, I would urge him to take the necessary steps immediately to rebuild that station. What is urgently needed is the immediate relocation of the officers attached to this station. Once this is done, steps can be taken to rebuild the Sangre Grande Police Station.

What I would like to urge is that the architectural design of that building be maintained and it be reconstructed on that majestically outstanding site. I think it is one of the best sites in Sangre Grande for housing a police station and I am sure the Member for Toco/Manzanilla will agree with me on that score.

What I find at times is that the Member for Toco/Manzanilla should lend me his support on these matters, because he is one who knows this police station

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better than I do. He knows the cells also, because it was reported in a newspaper recently that he went and released a prisoner from the police station. But that is beside the point—

Mr. Casimire: Madam Speaker, I crave your protection from the onslaught of the—I was going to say, dishonourable Member for Nariva, but I will still say—honourable Member for Nariva.

Mr. K. Jurai: Madam Speaker, I withdraw the statement.

Madam Speaker: He has withdrawn the statement—

Mr. Casimire: I want more than that. I not only want a withdrawal, I also want an apology from him.

Madam Speaker: I am sure he will be gracious enough to apologize.

Mr. K. Jurai: I was just quoting a newspaper article. I withdraw the statement.

Madam Speaker: So far as this House is concerned, he has withdrawn the statement.

Mr. K. Jurai: Maybe I read the wrong newspaper—

Madam Speaker: Sometimes you have to remember people in their professional capacities. Gentlemen, I urge you, remember you have a life outside that you live, and surely, when you feel to make these statements, think twice or thrice, because people in their professional capacities can be injured. The Member has withdrawn the statement. I think the Member has done the proper thing. Please, proceed.

Mr. K. Jurai: Madam Speaker, sometimes when I see the behaviour of the Member for Toco/Manzanilla, I wonder whether—he is like a bull in a china shop, because he has a tendency to pull down everything. Why I say this is that, recently he pulled down the Matura Government School, which is one of the oldest buildings—

Madam Speaker: You are speaking on the Motion, the Sangre Grande Police Station. This is a Motion on the adjournment. You cannot refer to anything else but the specific point in question. Please, proceed on the Sangre Grande Police Station.

Mr. K. Jurai: Madam Speaker, I was talking about the preservation of architectural design—

Madam Speaker: I am allowing the Member to speak about the architectural design of the Sangre Grande Police Station. Will he please comply and proceed.

6.50 p.m.

Mr. Jurai: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I will abide by your ruling. As I said, the Sangre Grande Police Station is located in the Toco/Manzanilla constituency, but I have to stand and speak on it. The Sangre Grande Hospital is in his constituency, I have to stand and speak on that. He does not lend me his support, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Casimire: Madam Speaker, please. The hon. Member must not be allowed to mislead the House. The market is not in my constituency, it is in his constituency. He does not even know his own constituency.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, I am going to be very strict in my interpretation of the Motion on the adjournment of the House. Will the Member stick to the item in question which is the dilapidated condition of the Sangre Grande Police Station.

Mr. K. Jurai: Madam Speaker, I will abide by your ruling.

Madam Speaker: You are abiding in one breath and in the other you are doing the opposite.

Mr. K. Jurai: Madam Speaker, as I was saying, the building needs to be vacated immediately; it is in a very dangerous state; it can collapse at any time; it is a potential fire hazard and we need to protect the lives of police officers and other members of the public who frequent the building. I, therefore, urge the Minister of National Security and the Government to take immediate action to resolve this problem.

Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Is the Minister replying?

The Minister of National Security (Sen. The Hon. Russell Huggins): Madam Speaker, I have said enough on that issue and I have no intentions of saying any more. I have answered the questions and I think it is really of nuisance value now. That is all I have to say.

Mr. Jurai: Madam Speaker, I have made my point in this House today, and I am urging the Minister to listen carefully and to take immediate action. Should anything happen, the Minister and the Government will be responsible.

Mr. S. Panday: Tell the police that.

Mr. Mohammed: Madam Speaker, on a point of order. I feel that the dignity of this House which comprises Members, elected by the electorate, the sovereign will of the people, has been attacked by the hon. Minister of National Security. He has treated with virtual contempt a motion on the adjournment which you, as Speaker of this House, have permitted. If the Speaker had found that it was irrelevant, the Speaker ought to have properly ruled it out of order, that it was dealt with in various quarters. I think the hon. Minister should apologize to this House for the attack that he has made on the House and on the Chair.

Hon. R. Huggins: Madam Speaker, let me assure you that I meant no discourtesy to you or to the House. However, I will make my point again. I have said all that I intend to say on that matter pertaining to the Sangre Grande Police Station. Questions have been asked in this House and in the other place. I have given the answers to the best of my ability in respect of what the Government is doing about the Sangre Grande Police Station. I am aware of the problems and we are working assiduously to address them. That is all I intend to say on that matter.

Mr. Maharaj: Madam Speaker, I think the hon. Minister should tell this House, what steps the Government took in relation to this matter since the last time he spoke about this issue.

Madam Speaker, if the Minister does not respond to this Motion properly, I would ask you to consider referring this matter to the Committee of Privileges.

Madam Speaker: What is the Minister's reply to that?

Hon. R. Huggins: To what, Madam Speaker?

Madam Speaker: You have replied, but do you have anything to say to the hon. Member's comments? He is asking, since your last report to the House on the matter, whether anything further was done?

Hon. R. Huggins: Madam Speaker, as far as I am aware, I have dealt with the Motion on the adjournment.

Mr. Humphrey: Madam Speaker, might I refer to Standing Order 11(2), particularly to:

"... and the Minister responsible for the matter raised shall reply."

Madam Speaker: What I interpret the Member's reply, which was very brief, to be is that the government is working on it. I think that is all he is prepared to

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say. For purposes of the record, that was his reply. The hon. Member for Princes Town must know that, I cannot tell the Minister how to reply, that is not my domain. I can only urge the Member to reply, and the Member will determine, in his own discretion, whether to do so. I will not have any debate or argument on this point.

The Ministers should know their duties and they should know how to conduct themselves in this House and in what manner they should reply. If they fall short, then the Members of the Opposition should also know what they have to do. The Member for Fyzabad may now proceed with his Motion on the adjournment of the House.

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Mr. Chandresh Sharma (*Fyzabad*): Madam Speaker, perhaps, in the interest of time, I should enquire whether the response would be similar.

Madam Speaker: I do not see that that is relevant. Would the Member please proceed on his Motion on the adjournment.

Mr. C. Sharma: Madam Speaker, the other House is the Upper House and if that is the pattern that is being set—

Madam Speaker: I am not dealing with the other House. I am in control of this House and I will express my views with respect to Members' conduct in this House, whether they be Ministers, ordinary Members or Senators. As I said, Ministers ought to know—they have a discretion—and if they do not want to exercise that discretion in a manner that they see fit, I cannot be responsible, but I would hope that Ministers observe their duties under the Standing Orders. If they do not, they will just reap the consequences.

Mr. C. Sharma: Madam Speaker, the Motion deals with the very unfortunate and terrifying situation of the fishermen in the community of Cedros.

Since the beginning of this year more than forty fishermen have been arrested by Venezuelan National Guards. They have been beaten, put in prison, fined; no due process of law. More than ten boats, to date, have been seized by the Venezuelan guards, with no kind of compensation. In addition to that, the fishermen's nets, fishing gear, boats and pans have been taken away. And this has been happening on a very frequent basis.

At the present time, most of the fishermen are very scared to go back to the sea. One must remember that in Cedros the entire community depends on two

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things, copra and fishing. The copra industry is dead. The Cedros population is close to 16,000 people; men, women and children. In addition to that, the fishing industry generates in excess of \$240 million per year. If they seize 10 per cent of our \$240 million, at the exchange rate, we would be losing 300 million bolivars per year, and that seems to be the case.

My main concern, today, is that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has not, in any way, attempted to assist these fishermen; not at all. I was mandated by my party to go to Venezuela on a fact-finding mission. I held various meetings there on Monday and Tuesday of this week. The only communication the Venezuelan authorities have is newspaper clippings that were sent to them from Trinidad—I do not know by whom.

There is a treaty signed between the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and the Government of Venezuela, dated April 18, 1990, that indicates very clearly, the conditions under which the fishermen from both countries would operate. Article 2 of that agreement indicates that at no time would firearms be used against each other's fishing vessels.

7.00 p.m.

On a particular day a fisherman, Bhagoo Persad, was shot at. Immediately this Government should have communicated with the Venezuelan government and indicated that that was a violation of the treaty. To date, not a single official report has been made by this Government. You must take into consideration that for the Government of Venezuela to respond, there must be official communication from this Government. Actually, newspaper reports indicated that the Minister of Foreign Affairs stated that our men were in prohibited waters: that is before finding out what their story was.

Secondly, that they were involved in illegal activities. My meetings in Venezuela indicated that very clearly: If it is your Government is saying your fishermen are involved in illegal activities, what are we to do? Here, indeed, is a very disgusting situation. It is life threatening. Those fishermen live in fear. There has been a high level of discrimination in this particular instance, and I want to illustrate that statement.

In Port of Spain recently, there was an explosion with URP workers.

Madam Speaker: I am afraid the Member must confine his contribution only to the situation of the fishermen with Venezuela. We have to stick to some kind of order. Please proceed.

Mr. C. Sharma: Madam Speaker, with your guidance can I qualify my statement as to how these fishermen are discriminated against?

Madam Speaker: You may say that they are discriminated against but you cannot allude to any other incident. Just proceed now with the matter in hand.

Mr. C. Sharma: In this instance, the fishermen are bringing in \$240 million with no input from the Government. In another instance we are seeing the Government pumping \$105 million elsewhere and responding almost immediately to arrive at some kind of solution.

Six fishermen were beaten and received medical attention at the Point Fortin Area Hospital. I happened to be at the hospital at that time. Among the fishermen were young people. If we are going to prevent persons from becoming young offenders, action must be taken almost immediately.

There are a number of articles in the newspapers, one indicating: "Fishermen: soldiers use our boats to fete." The Government must state, and I hope the Minister would indicate today, what action is being proposed. What kind of compensation is going to be made available to the fishermen? I understand that the present situation as it relates to the Constitution of Venezuela does not permit joint patrols. What machinery is going to be put in place immediately with our own local coast guard to assist these fishermen in going back to sea?

The other area is that the fishing permits are valid from December 1 to June 30. This year the fishing permits were given in the third week in March. The question is: Why were they so late? To date, no officials have met with the fishermen to find out their story. At this time there is a joint select committee meeting in Trinidad. One of the purposes of that meeting is to re-negotiate the treaty. What input have the fishermen been able to make at that joint meeting? Absolutely no input at all.

Madam Speaker, the situation is: Fishermen are nationals of this country and must be assisted in their time of need. The Government has a moral obligation. The Constitution permits that. The fishermen at this point are very scared. They do not know where to turn and if this Government cannot meet their needs, it means that they would have to go outside. The courts are one place they can go. They have considered writing to the Caricom Secretary. They have thought of writing to the United Nations. I am raising it here in the hope that a meaningful solution will be arrived at so that incidents of this kind will never occur again.

Thank you.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs (Hon. Ralph Maraj): Madam Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to respond to the Member for Fyzabad. I welcome his concern. Madam Speaker, as you know this fishing problem is something that has been plaguing the otherwise harmonious relationship between Trinidad and Tobago, and Venezuela. But, whilst I welcome the Member's concern I am really amazed at how astoundingly ill-informed he is. He has said certain things to which I must respond. The joint commission, which met for the last three days in Trinidad, was not for the purpose of re-negotiating the treaty at all.

This joint commission came about as an inter-governmental mechanism between Trinidad and Tobago, and Venezuela. It was signed in 1990, under a Memorandum of Understanding for the Prevention and Investigation of Fishing Incidents. This is the fifth session of the meeting, and really it was fortuitous in a way that this fifth session came during the time when these incidents were taking place. I want to make that position very clear. This joint commission for the Investigation and Prevention of Fishing Incidents between Trinidad and Tobago and Venezuela has not been mandated to re-negotiate the fishing treaty which was signed in 1985 between the two countries.

The hon. Member also said that no official of the Government met with the fishermen. That is also not true. I met with a very strong delegation of fishermen, headed by Mr. E. Ali, and some others who came to my office in Port of Spain accompanied by Mr. Errol McLeod. We had very extensive discussions on the matter. The meeting was very harmonious and productive. Indeed, it was part of a number of things we were doing: Finding the information, having discussions, getting a clearer understanding of what was taking place in preparation for this meeting, so that when our side met with the Venezuelans, we would be able to negotiate and to deal with the matters from a point of strength and from knowledge and understanding of what actually took place.

The Member also talked about the fishing permits being given late. That is very true. That happened this year and the Venezuelan authorities have assured us that they are going to make every effort in the future to ensure that the fishing permits are given in advance so that the fishermen will have the permits for the entire fishing season. Madam Speaker, after that initial contact I had with the delegation of fishermen, I have been in contact by telephone with the situation in Cedros and have been informed by a senior member of the delegation who came to see me that things are fairly normal and that the people are out at the sea and they are fishing.

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I intend to keep up that dialogue. I am informed that as a result of the initiatives that we have taken, there has been a virtual absence of any potential for recurrence of these incidents, and that there is a normalization—indeed, when I called on one particular day, the person with whom I usually speak was out at sea. He called me when he came back.

7.10 p.m.

Some people are seeking to give the impression that there is a virtual standstill. They are sensationalizing the whole situation. It is mischievous and inaccurate to suggest that Cedros is at a standstill. My impression and information from the fishermen themselves is that these things are normalizing. Let me say, I use normalization very guardedly. It is a situation, as we say, that has the potential for a recurrence and we are seeking to prevent this.

It is also not true to say that there has been no contact, complaint or discussion with the Venezuelan Government. When this incident occurred, I immediately got on the phone and started doing a number of things to help secure the release of our fishermen. That is one of the first things that we did. One day shortly after the incident, the pro tem chairman of our side of the commission, along with legal people from my Ministry went to Tucupita by helicopter, and had very detailed discussions arising out of the report which they were hearing and the complaints by the fishermen. They had all these discussions with the Guardia Nacional and they got a feedback from them as to what their side of the story was.

There has been official contact. This is an inter-governmental mechanism that has been put in place. The commission is meeting in Port of Spain at this point in time. I find it very strange that one can know all that is taking place and say that there has been no contact, complaint or discussion and seek to give that kind of impression.

Mr. Maharaj: I wonder if the hon. Minister would give way? Can he state whether up to today the Government of Trinidad and Tobago made an official protest to the Venezuelan Government about the treatment of the Trinidad and Tobago fishermen?

Hon. R. Maraj: That is an interesting question. The whole problem that you face in the Gulf of Paria, as far as these incidents are concerned, has to do with verification. The fishermen say one thing and the Guardia Nacional says another. The Government is not in a position to complain, because there is no real strong process of verification as to exactly what took place.

I am sure that there is a lot of truth on both sides. We are not in a position to protest. You cannot call on a government to apologize, as I heard someone say the other day. We heard what the fishermen said about being beaten and I think a Member of the Opposition said that we should call on the Government of Venezuela to apologize. You do not conduct diplomatic relations in that way at all.

Mr. Palackdharrysingh: Would the hon. Minister give way? Madam Speaker, let me thank the Minister—

Madam Speaker: This is forbidden. I am allowing one more question. Questions are not permitted on Motions on the Adjournment of the House.

Mr. Palackdharrysingh: Yes, Madam Speaker, but this is important and I want to thank you. In view of the fact that the Minister has stated that the commission is an instrument for investigation and prevention of incidents of fishermen, and that the Gulf is a very narrow piece of international water where you do not have the normal amount of 250 miles economic zone and so on, has there been any sort of joint approaches to avoid incidents on the border line of each other's territorial waters?

Madam Speaker: I find the Member is being very long. No debate shall be permitted on a Motion. You have outdone yourself.

Hon. R. Maraj: Madam Speaker, I get the gist of what he is trying to ask. He is a bit confused.

This is what the whole question of the Fishing Agreement is all about. The Fishing Agreement—and this is why the situation is so potentially volatile—essentially, allows fishermen of each other's country to fish in each other's waters; that is part of the agreement. Then, you have this Memorandum of Understanding, mixed commission, which is the mechanism that seeks to regulate the situation, investigate and prevent incidents.

I have challenged the commission because this is what I want to see happen. I want to see this mixed commission work. I am not satisfied that it has been working. I have made that point over and over to them. I have challenged them at this meeting to come up with very concrete, practical and applicable proposals for the elimination of these incidents. I have spoken about buoys in the sea. I do not know what they would come up with. I await the report which would be on my desk. When I get to it, I would see. It is their responsibility, because there has to be demarcation so that there is a very clear idea as to what is taking place.

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There is the proposal as well to bring the administrative office from Tucupita, which is far away and inaccessible to Pedernales which is more accessible to Trinidad and Tobago. The hon. Minister of National Security and I have already stated that we would be stationing a coast guard vessel in Cedros which would help the whole question of verification and prevention.

I know someone said today—I ask hon. Opposition Members, please be informed correctly. A reporter called me today and said that a comment was made by a Member of the Opposition that the Memorandum of Understanding is no longer in force. Now that is not true. The Memorandum of Understanding was signed in 1990 for two years; it expired and it was renewed last year, and is in force until 1994.

I am saying that if we really want to help, we must avoid paltry politicking and move away from scurrilous sensationalizing. We must be very careful and try genuinely to help, rather than seek to say all kinds of things that are not true. We have a very clear line of action.

There is this whole question of joint patrol which the Memorandum of Understanding did mention, but as the hon. Member said—

Mr. Mohammed: That is not working. You know that.

Hon. R. Maraj: If he would just hold on a little while.

As the hon. Member has said, and I have said it too in the newspaper, there is a constitutional problem. The Venezuelan law and the Constitution do not allow foreign security people on their vessels, but there is the possibility of co-ordinated surveillance. We are looking at a military arrangement and I am expecting that his commission would come up with a particular mechanism to effect this co-ordinated surveillance.

Indeed, on the very weekend that this incident took place, there was an exchange of personnel between the Guardia Nacional and our coast guard. There has been this process in motion and I have challenged this commission to expedite it and for it to grow. There is a very clear idea, in terms of exchange of information. There is a possibility and we have already explored it, and I expect that it would come out of having journalists from Trinidad and Tobago go to Venezuela, and have journalists come from Venezuela, to Trinidad and Tobago, to give the correct information, so that the whole community can be sensitized and be fully aware of the entire situation.

7.20 p.m.

As the Minister of Foreign Affairs for Trinidad and Tobago, I have said before that I am not prepared to throw my hands up in the air and say that this is an age-old problem which will not go away. I am prepared to grapple with it until it is eliminated.

Some people have said that I have accused the fishermen of all kinds of things. I have never done any such thing. You hear one story from the fishermen. I see the Venezuelan authorities have said this, that and the other. I have never accused anybody. I have never said that the fishermen were fishing in illegal waters. I said that it is alleged and that the Venezuelans have given us this information. So you have to balance the thing. You have to look at it objectively.

As the Minister of Foreign Affairs, I am in the position that, whilst I have to seek to protect the interests of our fishermen, I must also ensure that the diplomatic relations between Trinidad and Tobago and Venezuela remain on a sound footing and continue to grow. I want to assure this honourable House, I want to assure the hon. Member—I want to thank him for bringing the matter to the House—that we are in full control of the situation.

I am not saying that tomorrow morning you will not hear that there is some other incident in the gulf where another fisherman has been held and so on. But as far as the situation exists at present. I am informed by the fishermen at Cedros that the situation is back to normal, they are out at sea, fishing. We have had the commission meeting for three days, and I expect it to come up with practical proposals. I expect it to do their job. I want them to do their job and I will do my part to ensure that it is done.

I want to say one other thing, Madam Speaker. As part of the discussions that I held with the fishermen, it came to our attention, and the fishermen themselves agreed, that not all of the fishermen at Cedros or in Trinidad and Tobago are aware that they must have fishing ID cards. As a result of that meeting, I got in touch with the Ministry of Agriculture. We took the machine down there. On Wednesday of this week 60 fishermen were given ID cards.

I am informed that they are going to go back again, because I have spoken to the fishermen and they told me they need about 150 more, because we have a situation where newer fishermen are emerging on the scene. So that action is on. We are taking action all around. I am not going to rest until this problem is solved.

Madam Speaker, thank you very much.

**Inadequate Water Supply
(Siparia)**

Mr. Sahid Hosein (*Siparia*): Madam Speaker, the matter I wish to raise is the failure of the Government, through the Water and Sewerage Authority, to provide the residents of the Siparia constituency with a reliable supply of water and of its continued neglect and discrimination in this matter.

If one assumes that a Government collects taxes to provide certain basic services, then one of the first priorities should be the provision of an adequate supply of water to its citizens. Because as you would be aware, Madam Speaker, without water, life simply ceases to exist.

For a citizenry under siege economically and socially, by the criminal element, by a caring Government, a society that is on the boil, the final frustration for most is the inability to source an adequate supply of water.

A rage swells inside you when you have to go and look for a standpipe miles away that has water before you go out to work so that you can provide for your family; a rage that boils over when WASA insists that you must pay your bills for a commodity that you are not in receipt of; a rage when you stay up all night expecting that some water will flow through your taps; and then you are advised by so-called exemplars that you should not protest, you should not moan and groan, translated to mean that you should roll over and die.

One associates the word “penal” with punishment. I want to ask: Is this the reason why WASA is not providing water to the residents of Penal Rock Road, of Lachoor Road, Dabedial Road, of Mohess Road, of Digits and Transfer Villages, of Katwaroo Trace, of Penal and environs, of Siparia? Year after year, we have had to endure this psychological violence, and year after year all we get are promises. Whenever residents get totally fed up and resort to protest, as if by magic, water appears for two or three weeks in the very areas that did not have water before and then it disappears again.

The Siparia constituency—and I have made this point before—is an area which has contributed enormously to the development of this country and continues to do so through its contribution to the oil and gas industry. Residents continue to see resources being pumped from under their feet with very little in return, a continuation of the PNM’s policy, it seems, of naked discrimination—urban versus rural.

I want to ask: Does it have any relationship to the statement made by the Prime Minister that because of their cultural background, people in these areas are not treated equally under the Unemployment Relief Programme does the same principle apply to the provision of water? We must be told that.

All we are asking for is a reliable supply of water one day a week. Not every day, one day a week, a reliable supply of water, It seems to me that WASA has now embarked on what can be termed state-sanctioned banditry in that you are forced to pay your bills under threat of sale of your property. This, despite the fact that you do not receive water. We have been told in this House in response to this problem, that affected areas are served by truck-borne water.

If this does happen, because of the widespread nature of the problem, many areas are simply ignored and those which are fortunate enough to receive this truck-borne water get it once a month.

What worsens the situation is that in order to get this single tank of water, this 400 gallons of water, your bill has to be up to date. So that you are paying rates to WASA on a quarterly basis for possibly three tanks of water, also on a quarterly basis. You pay them, because, as I said, your bills have to be up to date.

The horror story has become more macabre in that residents will now be called upon to pay a further increase of 50 per cent. In fact, I want to inform this House that on Wednesday of this week, for the first time in five weeks, I received water through my taps.

Right now, WASA personnel are going around seizing people's pumps. It has to be one of the most stupid and insensitive actions of the Authority. If people have to resort to the use of pumps, how much water can they extract from the system? The amount extracted is in relation to the storage capacity they have which, in most cases is two or three tanks to store water. In any event, one has to ask: Why would a person want to spend approximately \$1,000 to buy a pump in the first place?

I want to ask the Member for Laventille West, when is he going to direct WASA to give a rebate to persons who have not been getting water? When is he going to put them on a special rate? The Member has indicated to this House previously that the demand outstrips the supply. But would he say that there is no control over WASA in order to ensure that they deal fairly with affected citizens and give justice in dealing with these cases on the merits of a situation?

I want to make a case that the whole of Siparia constituency deserves to be placed on a special rate. I know that the Minister will indicate that there are

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mechanisms in WASA to deal with these situations. I just want to tell him that they simply are not working. WASA is a mad house! There is no redress from WASA for aggrieved persons unless they have a contact. I can cite numerous cases. One I want to cite—and I hope that the Minister will address it.

We were fortunate to get a self-help project at Mohess Road and for the past two months I have been trying to get WASA to prepare the legal document so that the Debe/Penal Corporation would sign, stating that they will restore the roadway.

For two months now, a simple thing like the preparation of that document cannot be done. I have been to all the engineers: I have been to WASA, St. Joseph. Today I passed a note to the Minister to please assist us in getting this project going. Two months! A simple thing like that document, and there is no progress in the matter. One has to wonder whether this is deliberate. I cannot, for the life of me, understand how any institution would take two months on a simple matter like that.

We have also been told in this House about the St. Patrick Water Project. When it comes on stream there is going to be an improvement. I keep making the point over and over—the St. Patrick project is an extension of the Caroni/Arena system. If today the Caroni/Arena system cannot meet the demands on it, where are they going to get the additional bypasses the Siparia constituency, as well as the Oropouche constituency which has a similar problem.

I want to ask the Minister if he would meet with the elders of the Siparia constituency and indicate to them when his ‘caring’ Government intends to refurbish the Penal Water plant and the Siparia water plant. When will the undersized transmission mains at Cottage Road and Lower Barrackpore be changed? When will the old cast iron mains be replaced, especially those at Katwaroo Trace? Would he tell them when will the water wells at Clarke Road, at Platanique Trace and Scott Road be refurbished and brought on stream? Or is his Government going to ensure that the representation of the Member for Siparia, on behalf of his constituents, falls on deaf ears, as has been the case in the past, where, for over 30 years my predecessors’ supplications have been callously ignored.

I wish to wind up by saying, Madam speaker, that the resolution of this issue should have nothing to do with whether the people of the constituency of Siparia are NAR, NJAC, UNC or indeed PNM. It has to do with citizens of this country, human beings, all created in the image and likeness of the Almighty God.

Thank you.

The Minister of Public Utilities (Hon. Morris Marshall): Madam Speaker, I am always in a position to reply, and I take the opportunity to respond very briefly to my colleague the member for Siparia on this particular matter.

He cannot be more annoyed than I am about the problems at the Water and Sewerage Authority. I have said in this House before and I have made the point elsewhere that there are deep-rooted problems at the Water and Sewerage Authority, and that by no stretch of the imagination would we be able to deal with them overnight, not even in five years, I have said that before.

There are very serious problems at the Water and Sewerage Authority. It is not really any major interest of mine, and I am certain not of the Government, why those problems, are there and who is responsible. The fact of the matter is we are now in control of a situation, there are serious problems and we are seeking in a very organized way to deal with them.

I have water problems as well in my own constituency. I have been down to my colleague's constituency, Ortoire/Mayaro and many constituencies across the country. Very serious problems exist, and we are seeking to deal with them: The whole financial situation, the whole structural problem and so on. We are seeking to deal with the problems in a very systematic manner. If the Member wants to be honest, he would admit that I have been seeking to liaise with him as often and as honestly as I possibly can, to deal with the problems.

The only thing I want to object to very strongly is the impression he gives that there is some deliberate attempt on the part of the Government to discriminate against the people of Siparia. I take strong objection to that. No Member on that side can watch me in the face and say that I, as Minister, on behalf of this Government, have sought to discriminate.

In fact, the point can be made that I spend more time seeking to address problems raised by the Members on the other side than even problems raised by some of my colleagues on this side. I go out of my way. I have made it clear to the Water and Sewerage Authority that every single Member of this House is a Member of Parliament and they must be treated with respect. I take strong objection to any official in any part of my ministry treating with anyone in this Parliament in a certain way because the person might be a Member of the Opposition. I take strong objection to that.

I have told the functionaries at WASA and T&TEC in the presence of Members of the Opposition how I feel about the type of behaviour and I had reason to write

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to the Co-ordinator of WASA only recently, when the Member for Oropouche raised a similar concern with me. So I do not joke with that. I do not play politics with the affairs of the utilities. I want to make that point clear.

Madam Speaker, I do not want to spend time tonight outlining where we are, and how we are addressing the problems. Most of us are aware that we are dealing with the whole question of the labour force, the question of rates, the inefficiencies at WASA. Right now we are making an attempt to source a loan from the World Bank of approximately US \$60 million because we need the money.

Most of the problems in his constituency relate to encrusted lines which have been there for 50 to 60 years. All over the country—I said so myself in this Parliament that it is a scandal in my view that you have almost 50 per cent of the water which WASA produces going down the drain. But let us not fool ourselves in believing that we are going to change that overnight. Let us not fool ourselves about that at all.

There are plants which are, in fact, outdated, worn out, they must be replaced and the money is just not there to do it. We are seeking a loan right now from the World Bank, and once we are able to obtain it we would be able to confront quite a number of problems that we are, in fact, facing not only in the constituency of Siparia, but also in other constituencies across Trinidad and Tobago. That is our commitment.

I am giving this Parliament the assurance that once I am there and once I have health and strength, we are going to see the kinds of results in due course at the level of the Water and Sewerage Authority, because that is my commitment and that is the commitment of this Government. But it will not happen overnight.

I have no problem coming down to Siparia to speak with the elders. I have no problem with that. I have been down there on more than one occasion. Whenever he has asked and the others have asked, I have always gone. That is my responsibility.

As relates to his situation there, we have to get certain wells rehabilitated. My information is that very shortly, contracts will be awarded. I expect that those wells will be back in place in another month, month and a half.

As regards the issue relating to the self-help project at Mohess Road, when I checked with the Self-Help Commission today, they informed me that the problem is not really WASA, but it is the need to ensure that the corporation is prepared to assist with the resurfacing of the road. The money has already been made available. WASA is ready to go. I spoke with them today from my office and

they are ready to move. This is the information coming through and I will verify it. If they are deliberately holding back the work, I will not tolerate that, and they know it. But I am going to check on it myself. I have been given the assurance by Self-Help that the money has been made available in excess of \$100,000 for the Member's constituency.

The point is that the Self-Help Commission has already made the funds available. WASA is ready to move. We need to get the Corporation's support in order to get the road resurfaced.

Mr. Hosein: If the Member would allow me, just on a point of clarification. The problem is that the Corporation is ready and willing. In fact, there is a senior officer standing by who has been calling WASA, St. Joseph twice a week asking them if the legal document is ready for signature. So the keepback is not at the Corporation, it is at WASA.

Hon. M. Marshall: What I will ask the Member my friend, the hon. Member for Siparia, to do is to get the Penal Corporation to send me an official letter indicating that they are ready, that they are prepared to resurface the road. If he sends that to my office, I would deal with WASA.

The major approach that we need to take rests on the completion of those two major projects, the St. Patrick Water supply Project and the Point Fortin Water Supply Project, and notwithstanding the Member's view, it is my information, coming from the engineers of WASA, that when those two projects are completed, it will assist substantially in treating with the problems in your communities.

I am not an engineer and I can only go along with that. That is what they have told me. I have talked to them repeatedly and they have told me. I have talked to them repeatedly and they have assured me that once those two projects are completed that would help significantly in treating with the problems there. I have been speaking with him and he knows that.

I am saying a few things—that it is not only a problem in his constituency; it is a problem across the country. The problem has been there for some time. It requires much funds to be able to deal with it. It requires a great deal of restructuring and reorganization at WASA and we are, in fact, doing just that.

It was this Minister, with the support of the Government early in its life, who instituted very significant changes at the level of management because we were not very satisfied with what was happening there. We put in a new board, we gave them a mandate to clean up the place and the work is proceeding. It is not an easy task. It is a very difficult task because we have deep-rooted problems which have

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been there for many years. But I feel assured that with God's support we shall be able to get behind those problems and begin to see the kind of things we want.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 7.45 p.m.