

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES***Wednesday, March 16, 1994*

The House met at 1.47 p.m.

**PRAYERS**[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]**BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE**

**The Minister of Education (Hon. Augustus Ramrekersingh):** Madam Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order No. 94, I wish to move that in view of the passing of our colleague, and by arrangement with the other side, today's business be confined to statements by representatives of the three parties in the House in relation to the death of the Member for Laventille West.

**Madam Speaker:** I have received intimation of the agreement of both sides on this matter, and, I give my consent to the proceedings.

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**The Prime Minister and Minister of Public Utilities (Hon. Patrick Manning):** Madam Speaker, I believe that there are times in the lives of individuals, and indeed of nations, when events overtake circumstances and we are forced to stop and take stock. Such an event now faces us in the tragic striking down of the Hon. Morris Marshall, the Member for Laventille West, a member of the Cabinet and the Minister of Public Utilities.

As we come to accept the reality of our grievous loss and the significance of it enters our minds and hearts, it is no light task to rise in this honourable House to reflect upon the life and service of our departed comrade. It is hard to look at an empty space and to know that the mighty heart of conscience of the Member for Laventille West has ceased to beat.

Much has been spoken by way of tribute, eulogy and memoriam of our departed brother. A great deal more will be spoken. He will be remembered as the champion of those who lost their jobs, the defender of the jobless and the dispossessed, and he will be missed when there are marches and demonstrations for bread and justice.

History is likely to remember him as a man who fearlessly faced down the forces of negativity in the pursuit of a better kind of life for those who were

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unequal, not because of the circumstances of their birth, but because of the circumstances of their lives. That is the inequality to which he was implacably opposed, as you will find that the issues which he raised or in which he joined in this House could almost always be traced to this root principle.

In the late hon. Member's very last contribution to this Parliament, a contribution made in reply to a Motion on the Adjournment brought, somewhat ironically as it now turns out, by the Member for Siparia, the late Hon. Morris Marshall made the point that a certain public utility was not "in the business of denying community service." He went on to note emphatically in what was to be his last debate:

"...no attempt will be tolerated to deny, for any reason whatsoever, deliberately so, any community, whether it is Penal Rock Road, Laventille, Diego Martin or wherever, for any other reasons other than problems with resources. "

A short paragraph later the House adjourned on that afternoon of February 25, 1994 at 4.36 p.m.

It is with a deep sense of personal loss that I reflect now upon the fact that this House will not again in this life as we know it, hear that voice. Much was to transpire between that last contribution of the late Member and his maiden speech in this House when he rose to deliver as a Member of the Opposition on Monday, January 26, 1987. In that contribution to the Appropriation Bill our late colleague stated with clarity that he was:

"...concerned about the effect on the working class throughout the length and breadth of Trinidad and Tobago because while the more affluent members of the society would be able to take care of themselves, it is the working class people who are going to feel the brunt of the attack insofar as that particular Budget was concerned."

In these words, the late Member laid before the House his credo, his mission statement by which he would live his parliamentary and political life.

**1.55 p.m.**

It is a terrible irony that he was taken from us before we could all walk together in the promised land with all those whose cause he so ardently espoused. It is a tragedy for us all that he reached to the mountain top, but was denied the earthly fulfilment which should come to those who pursue a just cause with

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consistency, sincerity and, as was certainly the case of Morris Marshall, an unbelievable amount of hard work.

History is full of accounts of persons of similar zeal who believed that a new heaven and a new earth could be created outside what is sometimes spoken of derisively as "the system." This was not the Morris Marshall way. In this House in May, 1987, he was asserting that, "the most important institution in this country is the Parliament." He was of the view that "regardless of which party controls the country, the Parliament of the country is supreme."

I am submitting today, that while we shall remember our late colleague for many other virtues, these two: the rejection of inequality, together with his recognition of the Parliament as central to the articulation of the people's concerns, must make his memory especially significant. I make this point when so much of our population seems inclined to lose faith in this relationship and its accompanying processes.

On the one hand, the rich among us are barricading themselves against today's hordes of human predators, but on the other hand, there is another sector of the population which stands condemned and branded as the cause of social disorder long before they commit a crime. Many of the people whom Morris Marshall represented come from this sector. They too, live in fear of accusation and suspicion that to be poor is to be bad. If it is that their representative worked 14, 16, 18 hours a day or more in their defence, it is because he saw both sides of the coin.

The American poet, Maya Angelou says some comforting things:

"History, despite its wrenching pain, cannot be unlived but if faced with courage, need not be lived again."

I wonder whether the realities to which this House bears witness today can be set aside so readily. This is not to say that the poet speaks simplistically. She does not. But Morris Marshall's life, brief though it was, spanned what may well be a more significant period of political history than we can fully assess at this time, given the fact that we are ourselves part of its current processes.

Almost imperceptibly, before our very eyes, the role of the politician is changing in some very fundamental ways, and no more so than in the democracies the world over. In our own circumstances, the rise of nationalist government was ushered in upon the clarion call of the day that we should first seek the political

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kingdom and all else would follow. Our anthems, flags and even constitutions do not necessarily build nations; still less do they build civilizations.

Our founding fathers had hastened to redress the balance of history by binding upon old hurts, restoring lost dignity and making opportunity of all kinds available on an unprecedented scale. But even Oliver Twist asked for more, and our society is no different. Nothing is for free.

The brief Indian summer, the *petit careme* of the boom days, merely postponed a date which we as a people were bound to have with a rather sterner and unforgiving destiny. The issue goes further. Given the growing interconnectedness of the world, the fact is that in the matter of competitive advantage, it may not be fanciful to detect that companies and corporations may have already overtaken nations; not all nations perhaps, but in cases such as ours, small is not an advantage.

In such circumstances, the citizen is both shareholder and constituent, posing dilemmas for which few democratic leaders are prepared and from which few are exempt. In this regard, Morris Marshall's particular gift was his ability to take a side. He was very clear whose interest he represented; he knew his people and he went down fighting on their behalf.

His life thus became for us his colleagues, friends, brothers and sisters in this Parliament, an object lesson in political growth, with sensitivity to the people's interest as its centre and guiding light. I do not suggest for one moment that any of us on this side of the House have ever had any doubt that we have had and shall continue to make hard decisions. The loss of Morris Marshall has deprived us all of a rare and particular quality of overt and unrepentant humanity which we shall not easily replace.

We must remember that our fallen brother did not live solely in and for the Parliament. Despite the profound respect in which he held this House and the principles which it enshrines, his heart lay beyond its portals. The burden which he carried in his ministerial portfolio was perhaps one of those which speaks most profoundly to the fundamentals of life.

Now that I take up for the time being the responsibility for the Ministry of Public Utilities, I am acutely mindful that the provision of water and lights is among them. It is a developmental irony that in a land of too much sun, we often have the problem of too little light. I also sense the irony, that in a country in which so much rain falls, so many taps go dry. There are fundamental challenges

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in this apparent dichotomy, challenges with which the late Minister grappled with all his will and determination which I too must face with courage and resolution.

The light of progress must shine and the darkness of underdevelopment must never be permitted to extinguish it. What is required is the urgent construct of new and radical developmental paradigms in which the primacy of the people must become more sharply focussed. If Morris Marshall taught us nothing else, it was that the people must become the subject, and not the object, in political sentence.

At the same time, the late Member for Laventille West gave us yet another legacy, and this may be the most potent of all, for it is this one which he personally paid the highest price. That legacy is the example of his total devotion to hard work as the means to self-reliance, self-determination and the creation by one's own efforts of one's place in the sun. This was the ultimate Marshall example.

I submit this day, that if all of us did half as much, and worked half as hard as Morris Marshall did in his short life, then Trinidad and Tobago would swiftly and certainly become the land which we all know that it can be.

As I look around this august Chamber, I may perhaps be permitted to reflect upon the loyalty of the late Minister of Public Utilities to the party which brought parliamentary democracy to this country and which has defended it throughout our post colonial history.

**2.05 p.m.**

Morris Marshall received his political education within the bosom of the PNM Youth League, where he was to rise to become its principal spokesman and activist. The democratic process held pride of place in the scheme of political education which he received and he died as he lived, utterly PNM to the very core and centre of his person. Such loyalty is chastening, but it is also a source of pride as I say farewell to one who must surely be recognized as a child, a man and a potent symbol of all that is best and finest in this party, which I have the honour to lead.

Two months before his death, Martin Luther King, Jr. preached a highly prophetic sermon. In it he said certain things which I should like to share with the House on this sorrowful occasion:

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"If any of you are around when I have to meet my maker, I don't want a long funeral. And if you get somebody to deliver the eulogy, tell him not to talk too long..."

That was Martin Luther King. Dr. King went on to say:

"I'd like someone to mention that day, that Martin Luther King, Jr. tried to give his life serving others."

I believe that we can say the same today of the late Member for Laventille West. Dr. King went on to say:

"I want you to be able to say that day that I did try to feed the hungry. I want you to be able to say in that day that I did try in my life to visit those who were in prison. And I want you to say that I tried to love and serve humanity."

I think that we could say that about our departed parliamentary colleague and former Minister of Public Utilities.

Now, I want to paraphrase that sermon a little. In Dr. King referred to himself as being a drum major. I want to substitute the word "panman" for "drum major." The instruments are similar enough and as the former Public Relations Officer of the Amoco Renegades Steel Orchestra, I believe that Morris Marshall would have approved.

And so, with your permission, Madam Speaker, let me say for him: Yes, if you want to say that I was a panman, say that I was a panman for justice. Say that I was a panman for peace. I was a panman for righteousness, and all the other shallow things will not matter.

No Member of the House and no member of Renegades, Tokyo, Desperadoes, Casablanca, Sound Specialists, All Stars and the numerous other pannists who were his brothers and sisters will deny that Morris Marshall's life was devoted to the pursuit of justice, peace and righteousness.

So, I shall not stand in this House today and intone a mournful dirge for Morris Marshall. I shall mourn his passing. We shall all grieve for him. We share the sorrows of his family, for their pain is ours, but we shall also play, as All Stars once did, a proud fanfare for the common man. We shall say instead with Miss Angelou, the poet: and I quote:

"And when great souls die,  
after a period, peace blooms,

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slowly and always  
 irregularly spaces fill with a kind of sooths electric vibration  
 Our senses, restored, never to be the same, whisper to us.  
 They existed. They existed.  
 We can be. Be and be  
 Better for they existed."  
 So:  
 Morris Marshall we will always remember,  
 Smiling when a steelband pass...  
 Sugary, peppery, he was never, ever one for class  
 Morris Marshall, wherever you are my friend, just for you  
 Just for you...  
 I thank you.

**Mr. Basdeo Panday** (*Couva North*): Madam Speaker, death is the most common phenomenon known to man; yet, it is the least to which he has grown accustomed. Indeed, from the moment we are born, even as we think we are growing, we begin to die. In our living consciousness there are two things of which we are absolutely certain: that we were born and that we shall die. The inevitable consequence, I am told, of birth, is death, and we can do nothing about it. I suppose what really matters is neither birth nor death, but what we do in the in-between.

In ancient Greece there used to be a practice the purpose of which seemed to be to remind men and women of that very fact. When a person died the villagers would put the body in a coffin that was so constructed that the deceased's arms were hanging outside so that everyone could see them. They would then parade the dead body through the streets of the village so that all the living could be reminded that as ye came so shall go—with nothing in thy hands.

The salutary effect of this ceremony was to remind the living that despite all thy greed and all thy lust, all thy craving for power and prestige, for influence and wealth, all thy finery and all thy glory, all thy pomp and all thy ceremony, shall be of no avail when death comes knocking at the door. The only thing that will live on is the good that you have done.

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Shakespeare was wrong, when he said that the evil that men do lives after them, and that the good is oft interred with their bones. On the contrary, it is the good that really lives after them. In the case of Morris Marshall there is much good that will continue to live long after he is gone.

In the few years that I have known him in this House, I got the impression that, in many ways, he was a rather sad and lonely man, given to much introspection and self-criticism. His desire to serve his constituents and his ministry was so intense that he seemed always to be dissatisfied with his own performance.

It was during the two weeks that we spent together attending the Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference in Cyprus in September last year that I became excruciatingly aware of the pathos that had engulfed this intensely loyal man. Outside the glare of publicity in Cyprus and far removed from the political arena, where it was not necessary for either of us to gain political points on each other, we were able to discuss freely our social and political philosophies, and lay bare to one another our fears, our hopes and our aspirations.

It is a pity that his Cabinet colleagues did not appreciate the likely consequences to his fragile health of the weighty burden of the Ministry of Public Utilities, the conflict between his loyalty to party and country, his intense desire to take his constituents out of the dependency syndrome, and the foreboding sense of hopelessness that sometimes ensues from office without power.

Had they been a little more sensitive to the nature and character of the man, he may have been alive today. His repeated requests to his constituents to relieve him of his cross, should have alerted even the most insensitive. It is this sense of foreboding that attracted me to him during our trip abroad, and I deliberately set out to do something about it.

When Miss Cox called me yesterday evening to inform me of the agenda for today's proceedings, she began by saying: "Mr. Panday, so our friend is gone" In that short sentence she said everything. You see, Madam Speaker, Miss Cox had accompanied us to Cyprus; and for those two weeks she had never seen or heard Morris Marshall laugh so loudly, so heartily, so long and so many times. And she realized that I had embarked upon a deliberate campaign to make him as happy as I possibly could. I think I succeeded; because when he returned to Trinidad and came to the House for the first time, he told the Member for Couva South that those were the two happiest weeks he had spent in a long time.



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Earlier this year, I think it was January, he came over to our table and jokingly told the Chief Whip: "Why don't you fellas find somewhere that your boss and I can go away again for a short while."

I recall these incidents because I thought to myself: Here was a man silently crying out for help, and no one was listening.

**2.15 p.m**

But in spite of all his trials and tribulations, he did not whimper. He knew what they were doing to him, but he did not falter. When asked to produce a plan to supply water to the country in one and a half weeks, he did not complain; instead he delivered.

It is said that Almighty God does not place on the shoulders of his devotee a cross heavier than he can bear. Often, while he lay in a coma, have I asked myself: Did not Morris succumb to the heavy cross that was placed on him? I should not have doubted. I should have remembered that Almighty God moves in mysterious ways his wonders to perform. By placing this heavy burden on so physically fragile a man, an opportunity was presented to Morris to demonstrate to his friends and foes alike, his family and his well-wishers, the strength and fortitude, the courage and determination, the grit and the guts of which he was made, so that his name would be remembered with honour and dignity.

It is not only important how you live; it is equally important how you die. Some men die like heroes; others die like cowards crawling on their bellies like some slithering political worm. Morris Marshall was spared that. The Member for Laventille West, like the true soldier that he was, died with his boots on, fighting for the things in which he believed—the caring and well-being of the poor and the powerless, the unemployed and the homeless, the destitute and the oppressed.

It is to Morris's credit that he was able to carry on that struggle without the arrogance and pettiness that is too often evident in this honourable House. His sincerity of purpose was clearly evident when he answered questions posed to him by Members on this side during question time. He would face with equanimity the persistent supplementary questions, genuinely trying to provide the information sought by Members.

I shall never forget that soon after he assumed office, he sent out a circular to all Members of this House informing them of both his office and private telephone numbers at home, inviting them to call him at any time if they had any

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complaints or any grievance. It mattered not that he may not have been able to help, but at least he was willing to listen and try.

We, on this side of the House liked Morris, and the record will show that we said so on several occasions. We shall miss him. This House will miss him. But even more he will be missed by his family and friends in his constituency. We wish him Godspeed.

On behalf of my colleagues in the Opposition, and on my own behalf, and on behalf of my own family, I extend to his wife and children, to his mother and other members of his family who are left to mourn their loss, our heartfelt sympathy and our sincerest condolences.

We pray that Almighty God will be pleased to receive our brother Morris into his kingdom, where his blessed soul shall rest in peace.

**Mr. A. N. R. Robinson** (*Tobago East*): Madam Speaker, it is very fitting that Members of a democratic Parliament should regret the demise of a colleague, pay tribute to him and observe due respect to his memory. This would be all the more so if the Member succumbed in the line of duty. In the case of the late Morris Marshall, Member for Laventille West and Minister of Public Utilities, not only did he perish in the line of duty but the tragic circumstances in which his term of office was truncated and in which he prematurely departed from us could not fail to arouse our sorrow, our regret and our deep sympathy.

It is traditional for Members of the Opposition to see most things differently from the Government. If this were not so, they would be in the Government and not the Opposition. And it is not infrequent that some members of the Government see some things in the same way as the Opposition, and this is why Prime Ministers sometimes find themselves in prolonged states of anxiety. Whatever may have been the differences and anxieties of Members, however, it is on occasions such as this that we representatives of the nation, must speak with unanimity.

I came to know the late Member for Laventille West when he entered this Chamber as a Member of the Opposition. I was struck in those early days by his complete self-confidence, his passionate delivery and his unshakeable faith in the political party of which he was a member.

On his attainment of ministerial office his reticence in this honourable House became somewhat noticeable. Nevertheless, his public duties were, for the most part, performed with undiminished zeal. What became clear to me over time,

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however, was his commitment and his sincerity. Ironically, these admirable qualities appeared to have contributed to the agony which he endured and to the circumstances which may have led to his untimely end.

The example which the honourable departed Member set to all of us is, I believe, his heroic struggle to maintain his integrity. As the Parliament and the nation mourn our loss, may God grant that we may also learn the lessons of his life.

I join with the hon. Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition, in extending on my behalf, and on behalf of my colleague the Member for Tobago West, our condolences to his widow, offspring and his bereaved relatives.

May he rest in peace.

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Members, I, too, join with you in expressing heartfelt condolences to the family and friends of the late Member for Laventille West, the Hon. Morris Marshall.

As I listened to and contemplated all that others have said about our late brother, I cannot but come to the conclusion that this was a soul that fulfilled its destiny. Each soul that incarnates on planet Earth has an allotted span of time on earth. And so what is important is not how long one has lived, but the quality of life lived. Hardly anyone would disagree that Morris Marshall's life was of prime quality.

I heard Fr. Harvey on the television a night or two ago say that Morris Marshall refused to massacre another person's character at all times, and that, to me, is certainly one of the strongest signs of a refined spirit.

**2.25 p.m.**

This quality was displayed in his contributions to debates in this House. For the past two and a quarter years as I sat as Speaker, I saw him strive on all occasions to stick to the issues under consideration, and I could not but admire the manner in which he dealt with questions asked by Members of the Opposition. A true politician he was.

If we, as Members of Parliament, are impressed with the manner in which he executed his role as a politician and a Minister, then hon. Members, the greatest tribute we can pay to him is to emulate him, and assimilate into our own consciousness those qualities and traits of character that endeared him to us.

Undoubtedly, he will be missed in this honourable House. The nation has lost a dedicated servant, but let us fervently hope that his spirit and all that he stood

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for will infuse the being of the one who takes over his constituency and his responsibilities. In this way, such a one will certainly make a positive and dynamic contribution to nation building. Beloved brother, wherever you are, I know that the light of God surrounds you; the love of God enfolds you; the power of God protects you. Wherever you are, God is, and I have faith that all is well. I have faith that all is well. Amen.

Thank you, hon. Members.

At this point, may I ask hon. Members to stand, and as a sign of reverence we will observe a minute's silence as we send out a prayer for that soul which is on its journey onwards.

*The House stood in silence.*

#### ADJOURNMENT

**The Minister of Education (Hon. Augustus Ramrekersingh):** Madam Speaker, I beg move that the House do now adjourn to Friday, March 18, 1994, at 1.30 p.m. During that sitting, Madam Speaker, the items of business which were listed for today's sitting will be taken.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*House adjourned accordingly.*

*Adjourned at 2.29 p.m.*