

Leave of Absence

Friday, October 28, 1994

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, October 28, 1994

The House met at 1.50 p.m.

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 Diego Martin West (Dr. The Hon. Keith Rowley).

PAPERS LAID

1. Report of the Auditor General on the accounts of the Agricultural Development Bank of Trinidad and Tobago for the year ended December 31, 1993. [*The Minister of Trade and Industry and the Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley)*]
2. Report of the Auditor General on the accounts of the Government Employees' Provident Fund for the year ended December 31, 1993. (*Hon. K. Valley*)
(Papers 1 and 2 to be referred to the Public Accounts Committee.)
3. Twenty-seventh Report of the Salaries Review Commission—Review of the Chauffeur Allowance of certain offices within the purview of the Commission. (*Hon. K. Valley*)
4. Report on the operations of the Road Improvement Fund Programme being undertaken by the Ministry of Works and Transport for the period January to June 30, 1994. [*The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Colm Imbert)*]

ROAD IMPROVEMENT FUND PROGRAMME

(First Bi-annual Report)

The Minister of Works and Transport and Minister of Local Government (Hon. Colm Imbert): Madam Speaker, the first bi-annual report of the operations of the Road Improvement Fund Programme covering the period January 1, 1994 to June 30, 1994 has been laid in this honourable House today.

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The report indicates that during this initial period of operations, expenditure of \$34.8 million was incurred in road repair and maintenance activities such as resurfacing, patching and levelling of roads, repair of landslips, bridge and culvert repairs and so on. The primary focus during the period, however, as indicated in this honourable House at the inception of the programme in January 1994, was the resurfacing of main arterial roads throughout Trinidad and Tobago.

The total equivalent length of roads patched or resurfaced in the first six months of the programme in Trinidad and Tobago was 258 kilometres, involving 250 kilometres in Trinidad and 8 kilometres in Tobago. In Trinidad, patching and resurfacing work was done on 68 roads, distributed throughout all the districts of the Highways Division. In Tobago, road resurfacing work was undertaken by the Tobago House of Assembly on the Milford Road and the Windward Road.

It should be noted that work was maximized during the dry season in order to achieve the highest level of productivity. Expenditure and commitments during the first six months of 1994, therefore, exceeded inflows into the fund, while the pace of work has been reduced with the onset of the rainy season as demonstrated in Figure 1 in the Report. The total expenditure for 1994 is thus expected to be in the vicinity of \$47 million, in line with the anticipated receipts into the fund.

Madam Speaker, as you may be aware, the Road Improvement Fund is the first dedicated fund in Caricom established specifically for road maintenance and improvement, utilizing the proceeds of a five per cent tax on petroleum fuels. Proceeds of the tax are placed in a special account and can only be used for road improvement work. In this way, taxpayers can be assured that the fuel tax is used for the purpose intended.

The Government is of the view that the first six months of this programme has been a resounding success. During the period under review citizens of this country have had the opportunity to witness and experience first hand, the benefits of appropriately dedicated taxation to a properly planned and executed programme of repairs to public roads infrastructure. There can be no doubt that the level of road repair activity during the period under review is unparalleled in our recent history. The feedback received from the public as a whole indicates general satisfaction with the manner in which the Road Improvement Fund is being utilized.

There are some aspects of the programme which need to be re-emphasized and clarified, however, in order to clear up some of the public misconceptions which exist with regard to the operations of the programme. You would recall,

when the Road Improvement Programme was first introduced in this honourable House earlier this year, the Government emphasized that during the first half of 1994, work would be undertaken only on main arterial roads in Trinidad and Tobago. These roads were considered the first priority for repair work since the vast majority of our citizens use these roads on a daily basis in their travels to and from the workplace, to and from schools, hospitals, public offices and other heavily utilized and important public facilities.

It was also clearly stated at that time that the focus would shift in the latter half of 1994, and continuing in 1995 and thereafter, to include secondary and local roads in the programme. It is expected, therefore, that in the near future, significant repair work will commence on important secondary roads, particularly in residential areas.

It is also worth repeating that the consultants engaged by the Ministry of Works and Transport for an IDB-funded study of our roads and highways have determined that due to lack of funding over the years there is a seven-year backlog of road repairs in Trinidad and Tobago. This projection assumes an expenditure of \$50 million every year for the next seven years.

It would appear, however, that the success of the first six months of the Road Improvement Fund Programme may have heightened some of our citizens' expectations to the extent that it is expected that repairs can be undertaken on all roads in the country simultaneously. Regrettably, this is not possible, and I wish to emphasize once again that due to the existing condition of our roads, a period of seven years is still required before we can clear up the backlog of road repairs in the country.

In addition, in order to ensure that the Road Improvement Fund Programme proceed in an orderly, disciplined and equitable manner, certain internationally established scientific criteria have been prescribed to guide the priority ranking used in the selection of the roads to be repaired. These criteria include the average daily traffic on the roads, the existing condition of the roads, population density, and the level of residential, commercial, industrial or agricultural development in the area. Consideration is also given to the importance of roads in terms of access to population centres.

Before I conclude, there are two other aspects of the operations of the Road Improvement Programme which need to be clarified. The first is the quality control systems which are being employed by the ministry in the execution of the programme, and the second is the selection process of contractors for the supply and placement of asphalt.

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With regard to quality control systems, the Ministry of Works and Transport has made a decisive effort to ensure that road repair work is done to the highest standard. A new updated specification for asphalt works has, therefore, been prepared and submitted to the Central Tenders Board.

2.00 p.m.

In addition, independent testing laboratories have been contracted to monitor asphalt mix design and to test the materials actually placed on the roads. These laboratories are Cariri, Geotech and the Road Materials Laboratory at the University of the West Indies. In particular, the Highways Division has established a working relationship with Road Materials experts at the University of the West Indies to advise on the most appropriate work methods and materials specifications.

With regard to the contractors, a systems analysis approach has been used to select contractors for the award of road paving contracts. Contractors are, therefore, assessed and awarded points under five main categories, namely:

- (1) their technical ability;
- (2) type and standard of asphaltting plants;
- (3) equipment availability;
- (4) price;
- (5) workmanship.

In this way, all aspects of contractors' operations and resources are thoroughly and carefully examined to determine their suitability and eligibility for road-paving works.

In conclusion, Madam Speaker, the first six months of the Road Improvement Programme has demonstrated that through innovative and properly planned and executed programmes, our citizens can receive immediate and visible benefits in terms of the improvement of their quality of life.

The report laid in this honourable House today deals only with one aspect of the Government's work—that of a new approach for improving our road infrastructure. In similar fashion, the Government has laid the foundation for improvement in all areas of life in this country. Through a systematic process of planning, modernization and improvement of the methods of delivery of services to the public in areas such as health care, social services, education and so forth, I

am confident that our citizens will experience all of the benefits of this Government's hard work in the years to come.

I thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Maharaj: I wonder if the hon. Minister, since he is so confident of the success of the programme, would agree to move a Motion to have the report debated as "Public Business".

Hon. C. Imbert: Most assuredly, I would move it at the appropriate time.

LAND ACQUISITION BILL

Bill to govern the acquisition of land for public purposes [*The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources*]; read the first time.

ORDER OF BUSINESS

The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley): Madam Speaker, you will remember that in accordance with Standing Order No. 90, at the last sitting of the Parliament I gave notice that after discussion with the Chief Whip, the Government would like to move a Motion to suspend Standing Order No. 24(2) to allow the first Private Member's motion on the Order Paper, standing in the name of the Member for La Brea, to be debated today. I so move.

Mr. B. Panday: Madam Speaker, I understand that the Member is saying that he is moving that the Standing Orders be suspended so that the Motion of the Member for La Brea, which is on the Order Paper, under "Private Business", may be taken.

Madam Speaker, as I understand it, historically Private Member's Day is an opportunity for the Members of the official Opposition and other minority parties, or Independent Members of Parliament to raise matters for debate which require the Government to respond and account to the Parliament for their policies and practices.

Since my Friend has taken it up, *Erskine May's Parliamentary Practice*, page 200 of the 21st Edition states:

"The importance of the Opposition in the system of parliamentary government has long received practical recognition in the procedure of Parliament. ... Since the strength of modern party discipline makes a Ministry largely invulnerable to direct attack in the House of Commons, the criticism of the Opposition is primarily directed towards the electorate ... or with the

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aim of influencing government policy through the pressure of public opinion. The floor of the House of Commons provides the Opposition with their main instrument for this purpose. Accordingly, the Opposition has acquired the right to exercise the initiative in selecting the subject of debate on a certain number of days in each session."

Our Parliament, like many other former parliaments of the Commonwealth, is derived from the Westminster system, which by its own Standing Orders prescribes the Private Member's business and sets the agenda for debate on 20 days' process. At Westminster, Members who wish to move a motion on one of these days put their names forward and are selected by ballot, thus guaranteeing them partiality of selection.

We do not have such a system of ballot here. In fact, our own Standing Order—and I refer to Standing Order No. 21, says:

- "(1) Public Business shall consist of Motions and public Bills.
- (2) Subject to the provisions of those Standing Orders, Government Business shall have precedence on every day except the fourth Friday in each month when Private Member's Business shall have precedence."

It defines there what is Government Business and what is Private Business. If you look at this Motion, it is not Private Member's Business. This Motion that is being sought to be debated by the Member for La Brea has as its resolution:

"Be it Resolved that this Government reaffirm its commitment to promoting the advance of democracy through the rule of law, sound industrial relations practice and ..."

It has nothing to do with the spirit of Private Member's Day.

In Trinidad and Tobago, the practice has arisen that the Speaker, who has the discretion as to whether or not to accept Motions as they are worthy—Standing Order No. 23(2) of the House of Representatives—also selects the order in which motions are listed for debate on Private Member's Day.

Since 1991, this Government has used Private Member's Day as a vehicle for a showcase of its own policy—which is totally contrary to the principles of Private Member's Day, however discredited those policies are in the eyes of the Government, by getting its own Members to propose motions praising its policies, which is exactly what this motion is about. There seems to be no even-handedness in the selection.

2.10 p.m.

I understand that all these motions were presented at the same time, and my information is that the Member for La Brea did not present any motion at all. It was presented by the Minister of Education, the Member for St. Joseph, who handed it to the Clerk and said, "Fix up this for me." There are people here who were present. The motions by the Opposition Members were handed at the same time; upon what criteria—

Mr. Ramrekersingh: Madam Speaker, on a point of order. On the occasion of the opening of this new session, I was acting as the Leader of Government Business in the absence of the hon. Member for Diego Martin Central, and it was in that context I presented the envelope with the motions at a particular time, and said nothing else.

Mr. B. Panday: That is exactly the point I am making—the hon. Member was acting as Leader of Government Business.

Madam Speaker, I do not know what criteria are used for presenting these motions but, what I can say, is that there seems to be no even-handedness in the selection of Private Members' Motions for priority in debate.

In September, 1992 at the beginning of the Second Session of the Fourth Parliament, the hon. Member for La Brea again had set down Private Members' motions. These were listed consecutively, as indeed, three motions by the Member for La Brea are again listed consecutively and, Madam Speaker, you know, that one day per month—which as far as I am aware is no more than eight days for the year, is the time it takes to debate one or two motions. So what that in fact means is that in this session, the Opposition would never have any motions debated. That cannot be the intention of the Standing Orders or the Constitution.

Just as they were listed consecutively then, they are being listed consecutively now, and they would obviously take the whole of the present session. The same thing is happening at the beginning of the Fourth Session of the Parliament, and as I said, Madam Speaker, on the very same day that those motions were presented. They cannot be presented before the Proclamation, as we have been so informed by you.

So as soon as the Proclamation is made they are presented to the Clerk—by the Members for Couva South, La Brea and Oropouche, but when the Order Paper appeared, three motions in the name of the Member for La Brea were listed first, second and third, relegating the Opposition's motions to the bottom of the list. It is

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important to note, that one motion takes more than three months to be debated. And that is our experience in this House on consecutive fourth Fridays.

Because of this practice, the present structure of the Order Paper prevents the Opposition from filling its official constitutional role, which is to challenge the Government of the day, and to call upon its Members to account to the population for its actions or inactions. J.A. Griffith, in a book called *Parliament Functions, Practices and Procedures* published in 1989, describes the functions of the Opposition as being—

Madam Speaker: What is the page number?

Mr. B. Panday: I do not have the page, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: I would like to have the page number for my research.

Mr. B. Panday: I will get that for you. It says:

"The function of the Opposition is to explore, highlight and publicly oppose those aspects of the Government's policies and administration which it believes to be damaging to the nation. In carrying out these functions, the Opposition must seek information about the conduct and working of the Government at all levels and will use and publicize this information as it thinks fit. The first task of the Opposition in Parliament is to minimize secrecy in Government."

What is intended here, is a motion to praise the Government. Every motion that has been put forward here is a motion calling upon this House to praise the Government. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Maharaj: They are praising themselves.

Mr. B. Panday: Unless there is partiality in the selection and listing of Private Member's motions for debate, the Opposition cannot be part and parcel of the undermining of the parliamentary process, and in particular, the constitutional role of the Opposition, which is to challenge the Government on its performance. Therefore, all we can say is, if this state of affairs is permitted to continue, then the Opposition would be serving its role and its destiny much better, if it spends every Private Member's Day speaking to the people in Woodford Square or in their constituencies.

Madam Speaker: There was a motion moved. Is the Member then asking the Speaker to defer the proposing of the motion until the Speaker's decision is given?

Mr. B. Panday: Yes, Madam Speaker.

Hon. K. Valley: Madam Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition touched on a few points and I think we need to respond. First of all, it is fundamental to determine who is a Private Member. A Private Member is quite different from an Opposition Member. *May's* at page 260 states clearly what is allowed with respect to Private Members. It also points out at page 271—Opposition time. It says:

Standing Order 13, 20 days in each session, proceedings on business chosen by the opposition parties shall have precedence..."

Quite distinct from page 260 which deals with Private Member's time, which says that Private Member's days are set aside. *[Interruption]*

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, I have to rule on this. Would you allow me the opportunity to listen to the submissions?

Hon. K. Valley: Any Private Member is allowed to file a motion in the Parliament, that is the first point.

Madam Speaker: The hon. Member was referring to page 261 which deals with Opposition time.

Hon. K. Valley: Page 261 of *May's*, deals with Opposition time, page 260 deals with Private Member's time. I am making the distinction between Private Member's time and Opposition time. I am saying that in our Parliament, if our Standing Orders, as they do not now—provide for Opposition time then it is something for the Parliament to consider. However, until a change is made, we must be governed by the Standing Orders which make provision for Private Member's time, as distinct from Opposition time.

I am saying, Madam Speaker, that the procedure is that, motions are filed and they are taken in order of filing.

Everybody knew when this Parliament would have been recalled; it was no secret that Parliament would meet for the first time on October 17, 1994. There was a recess, everybody had the same opportunity to prepare motions, and, if owing to the incompetence and inefficiency of Members on the other side they were unable to present their motions in a timely manner, I cannot see now *[Interruption]*

Mr. B. Panday: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. The Member should not mislead the House. When I addressed the House a short while ago, I said that the motions were delivered around the same time, on the same day.

Hon. K. Valley: If that is so, Madam Speaker, the Member is then saying that the Clerk was in collusion with the Government. *[Interruption]* If the Member is making the point that by conscious decision the Member for La Brea's motions were given precedence over those on that side, he is saying that there was collusion so that, one has to be clear on that.

2.20 p.m.

Madam Speaker, that, therefore, is a matter for you as Speaker of the House. If they are saying that you acted in collusion with the Government in listing the motions. We have filed the motions. I spoke with the Chief Whip last Friday, and we agreed that we would want to have Private Member's Day today. I beg to move that Standing Order No. 24 *[Interruption]*

Madam Speaker: Just for my own benefit, because I would have to rule on this matter. Let us say, for instance, that all Members arrived at the Clerk's Table at the same time, and handed their motions, what would be the position of the Clerk in such a situation?

Hon. K. Valley: Madam Speaker, that might be a relevant question for the next occasion. It does not now arise. *[Laughter]*

Madam Speaker: That is why I am going to have to get the evidence of the Clerk of the House, and that is why I am making all things clear, so that when I am, in fact, deliberating on the matter, I would have had the proper material before me.

The Opposition is saying that they were all handed in at the same time, and that is why I pose the hypothetical question: Let us for instance, say that indeed, the researches were done and all were handed in at the same time, is it not a question then of the two sides meeting to agree? Or what would you suggest as Leader of Government Business?

Hon. K. Valley: Madam Speaker, you know we are willing to consult with the Opposition at any time. As a matter of fact, last week Friday the Chief Whip and I were discussing this matter and he mentioned the fact that we had the three motions ahead of theirs, and I said, "Well, listen, we can always talk about that." We are willing to do that. That is not the issue. I am saying, however, that I cannot run the Parliament—the Clerks do.

If motions are listed on the Order Paper in a certain sequence, one is guided by that. Unless the Parliament takes some other decision—and I am saying that I am willing to discuss with the Chief Whip, with the Leader of the Opposition

[Interruption] These are not Opposition days, Madam Speaker. I want to make that point, they are Private Member's Days.

I want to touch on that point because in his discourse the Leader of the Opposition made the point that the Motion ended with the words: "Be it Resolved that this Government reaffirm..." a Private Member's motion.

And I am sure if we look at the Order Paper, for example, the fourth motion: "Be It Resolved that this House recommend to Government that it take immediate steps." Government is the one that can take action, so you either reaffirm, you ask Government to do something, or you compliment Government, or something of the sort. That is what it is. That is the situation. So that the fact that the motion talks about Government, it is the norm for any Private Member's Motion, to ask Government to do something, or complimenting Government on some action.

Madam Speaker: Since I am sitting here in a *quasi*-judicial position I am going to have to get assistance on one or two matters before I make my ruling. On the question that I posed before, I would also ask for the views of the other side on it. In these circumstances where, all things being equal, if all motions are brought to the Clerk's table at the same time, does the Speaker in his or her position as presiding officer, have a discretion to allocate equal time to each Member? Can I hear the views equitably distributed? *[Interruption]*

Hon. K. Valley: Madam Speaker, it would seem to me that that is the function of the Speaker, perhaps, after consultation or even at the Speaker's own discretion.

Madam Speaker: I am looking at Standing Order 92(1). This is such a simple matter to be resolved, but it could have a lot of implications, so we want to do the right thing. "The Speaker should have power to regulate the conduct of business in all matters not provided for in these Standing Orders". I have searched, but the Standing Orders do not provide the answer. But it is a convention that whichever comes first, it is put on the Order Paper first.

Hon. Members, this is why I had hoped to have a meeting with the Leader of Government Business and the Chief Whip today. We would have sat down and allocated the matters and made a decision for the future in the event that matters all come to the Clerk's table; for the Clerk does not have a discretion; it is only the Speaker, and the Speaker has nothing to do with the setting down on the Order Paper of matters in the sequence in which they are submitted.

I should like an opportunity to give some thought to what the Leader of Government Business has said, to what the Leader of the Opposition has said in this matter and I really feel that there can be a very amicable solution to this

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matter for equitable distribution, but I want to look at the legal position with respect to *May's*. That is what I would really like to do.

Hon. K. Valley: I thank you Madam Speaker. In the meantime, however, since today's Order Paper suggests that Motion No. 1 is from the Member for La Brea and since I am aware that the Member for Couva South, Chief Whip, knows that that is the motion to be debated today, I suggest that we proceed with that motion, after which we can meet...*[Interruption]*

Mr. Sudama: Madam Speaker, may I be permitted to make a brief statement to this House? This matter did not start on the day of Proclamation of this Parliament. You would recall that I came to your Chambers during the recess.

Madam Speaker: Do not get the Speaker involved; this is why I advised the hon. Member what to do on the day.

Mr. Sudama: The reason is that we had a discussion on the very issue.

Madam Speaker: This is exactly the reason. When the matters came before the Clerk, the Clerk informed on the Order Paper that Government's motion was first. Now what can the Speaker do? I advised the hon. Member having regard to the custom and convention that persist.

Mr. Sudama: I do not know what you are doing here; I really do not know what you are doing in this House.

Madam Speaker: I advised the hon. Member, having regard to the convention.

Mr. T. Sudama: That is what I did. How come my motion became No. 4?

Madam Speaker: This is what we have to find out. I need to find out from the Clerk what the position is.

Mr. Breaux: Madam Speaker, my motion appears to be the subject of this controversy. The point I want to make quite clearly is that I am in close touch with my constituency, and I have a responsibility to my constituents to raise matters in this honourable House as required from time to time. I do not profess to be any legal luminary; however, I know very well the meaning of 'Private Member'—I have read it, I know the meaning of Private Members' Day. I just want to say that I know you will have to make your judicial ruling, but I also want to make it clear that I will not be muzzled in this House nor will any threat cause me to be. *[Interruption]*

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mr. R. L. Maharaj: Madam Speaker what the Leader of Government Business said is correct, that you have to go according to the time that the motion is lodged; and if one wants to take that strictly, then if a Member before the Proclamation is read, puts the envelope on the table it is to take effect as soon as the Proclamation is read. It would seem to me that from the Standing Orders you have the discretion, when you are confronted with several motions. And the Speaker would probably take into consideration the length of time a Member has been trying to get a motion debated, and the nature of the motion, and after considering all those factors, determine which motion should be given priority.

2.30 p.m.

For example, the Member for Oropouche has been trying to get a motion in this House for several years and, maybe, that is one of the factors which should be considered in determining whether a motion would come up. It cannot be that we in this House are going to hold on to a few seconds, or a few minutes, to determine the nation's business.

Mr. Valley: Madam Speaker, we had a nice Divali luncheon, today, where we were talking about light over darkness. The Opposition missed it. As we said, we are willing to talk with the Opposition. So, Madam Speaker, we are willing to suspend the sitting to discuss this matter. We have no problem.

Madam Speaker: We should really use a civilized and equitable system in the distribution of the motions. I have no problem with that. As a matter of fact, Standing Order No. 93 provides for that type of discussion. Where, in fact, the Standing Orders do not provide for these matters, it is definitely by discussions among the Members; the Speaker is informed accordingly and the House is bound by the agreement reached between the Members.

In those circumstances I would now suspend the sitting for 15 minutes.

2.31 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

2.55 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to report that under trying circumstances we have been able to reach an agreement. The Member for La Brea would like to make a statement.

Madam Speaker: In the spirit of Divali.

Mr. Hedwige Breaux (La Brea): Madam Speaker, as you said, in the spirit of Divali, we have been able to reach an agreement. But I should have thought

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that a matter as important as this—particularly to the Member for Couva North, in respect of tripartism and the collaboration of labour, business and Government—would have been given some sort of priority in his mind, or in the minds of the Members of the Opposition. Unfortunately, it seems that that is not the case.

As I said, in the spirit of Divali—and I believe that my constituents would have liked me to display this quality of understanding, co-operation and collaboration—accordingly, I consent to move my motion one down and take it after the Motion of the Member for Oropouche.

Madam Speaker: I am really very heartened by this decision. I have spoken to the Chief Whip and I indicated that it seemed to me that this matter could have been amicably resolved. I am happy that it has been so resolved.

Hon. K. Valley: Madam Speaker, I beg to move the suspension of Standing Order 24(2). As discussed, Government would not respond today. As you know, we came prepared to do the first Motion on the Order Paper. The Government would respond on the next Private Member's day.

Madam Speaker: Not only that. As I had indicated to this House a long time ago, this Motion gives us the opportunity to probably revive the Public Holidays Committee. So I think all of that would be good timing.

Question put and agreed to.

INDIAN ARRIVAL DAY

Mr. Trevor Sudama (Oropouche): Madam Speaker, I beg to move, the motion in my name which reads as follows:

Whereas the first group of indentured workers from India arrived in this country on May 30, 1845;

And Whereas the above date heralded the commencement of a long period of immigration from India involving thousands of indentured workers who came to these shores;

And Whereas the vast majority of these indentured workers settled in this country and their descendants today comprise a very large and substantial portion of the population;

And Whereas the above date is of outstanding significance in the historical evolution of this country as a multi-racial, multi-cultural and multi-religious society;

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And Whereas the above date is today widely commemorated as a day of great national historical importance:

Be It Resolved that this House recommend to the Government that May 30 be declared a national public holiday to be known as Indian Arrival Day.

Madam Speaker, it is unfortunate that I have to begin this Motion by commenting on the health of the Member for San Fernando East. But today is an historic day for this Parliament, in the sense that we have had to negotiate for our existence as the Opposition in Trinidad and Tobago and our role in this Parliament.

This is the season of Divali; this is the season of seeking light and truth, and this is the season when one tends to dispel the darkness that surrounds one's consciousness and thinking. I particularly commend this thought to Members on the other side, that this Motion be accepted in that spirit of light, in that spirit of seeking what is best for the nation, what is best for the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and indeed, of acknowledging the cultural and plural diversity of our society and where we are as a nation today.

This Motion has been on the Order Paper now for five years. So that this Motion, as far as the Order Paper is concerned, is an historical Motion. For one reason or the other, we have not had the opportunity to debate this Motion and today it has come up for debate. I hope that we shall have a full debate on the issue. It raises a number of questions which I shall try to deal with in my contribution.

What is the significance of holidays in a country? That significance has very many diverse elements to it. In our own case, we inherited, as a colonial country, holidays which were determined by the colonial powers until 1962. So we had an historical legacy. And when we became independent in 1962, we had the opportunity to change the structure of the holidays; we had the freedom to make our own decisions and the opportunity to take full account of our own history; we had the opportunity to express the ethos of our people; we had the opportunity to commemorate the distinctive events in the evolution of our society.

Public holidays give a kind of symbolic significance to the pervading sentiments which inform outstanding occasions in our history. In short, the significance of public holidays has to do with our own emergence as a people in Trinidad and Tobago. Therefore, when we look at this subject of public holidays, we need to look at it in its broadest perspective, and we also need to look at it in a certain spirit. After independence we made certain changes as to the kind of

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public holidays we would commemorate. Unfortunately, the arrival of the first group of Indian workers in Trinidad from India did not receive the attention which it deserved since 1962. We do not want to go back and state why that was not done; let us go back and make the argument.

3.05 p.m.

The recorded history of Trinidad and Tobago is that of an immigrant society to which people from different parts of the world came, or were brought at different times and under different circumstances. The indigenous people of this country are no longer with us. Therefore, since we are an immigrant society, each society and country must have a sense of its own history, and a knowledge of where it came from, how it evolved as a society, where it is at this present time, and it should have a vision of where it intends to go.

When we look at it in that context, the coming of the indentured workers from India was of immense significance as an outstanding historical event in the evolution of the society of Trinidad and Tobago. Had those workers and their descendants from India not come to this country and settled here, then we would not have emerged as the kind of multi-racial, multi-cultural and multi-ethnic society that we are today, given the fact of the predominance of numbers which constitutes the descendants of those people who initially came from India.

Therefore, once one takes that perspective as to where we are today—the kinds of people who have come together to make the society what it is—then one will see the importance of May 30. It was on May 30, 1845 that the first group of indentured immigrants from India arrived in Trinidad on the ship called the *Patel Rosack*.

These indentured immigrants from India came under certain circumstances. They came here to work as indentured workers on the sugar plantations in Trinidad primarily, voluntarily. Some of them came out of a spirit of adventure; some of them came because of the depressed economic conditions that existed in India at that time; some of them came to make money and save their money to go back. Some came to acquire fortunes; some came because of family disputes, but the important thing to remember is that while they came under a system of indentureship, their coming here was a voluntary act. It was not due to any physical compulsion to come to Trinidad.

I make that point because when they came here and were indentured for five years, they had the option of returning to their native homeland. When they came, the conditions under which they worked in Trinidad—I have to elaborate on this a

little more—were very much akin to the conditions under which African slaves toiled here. The significant difference was that there were terms of industrial relations which governed their indentureship and they were not regarded as shackled, as was the situation with the African slaves.

East Indians were indentured labourers. After they completed their term of indentureship, they were free to either voluntarily return to India or to re-indenture themselves. Subsequently, the vast majority of those who came, elected to stay in Trinidad and Tobago to become citizens of this land and to make Trinidad and Tobago their homeland.

While May 30 is of special commemorative value to the descendants of indentured immigrants from India, who today comprise a very significant portion of the population, the point I want to re-emphasize is that that day is of a wider historical significance for the whole national community. The arrival of Indians in this country—and its commemoration—is not a matter merely for the descendants of the indentured workers. It is a matter of significance to the entire country given the nature of our plural and diverse society. Once one acknowledges that central concept of our existence, one would see the rationale of the advocacy of commemorating Indian Arrival Day.

Therefore, the declaration of May 30—not by itself, but with respect to other things that we do—as a public holiday, symbolic as it may be, will give recognition to that plurality in a very positive way. That is what, again, I want to emphasize. There is a further element, because our national watchwords are “Discipline, Production, Tolerance”, and I commend them to the Member for Diego Martin Central.

What we are saying is that even if this holiday is identified in a way with the Indian-descended citizens, May 30, as a public holiday, would then serve to sensitize other ethnic groups to the diverse inputs and contributions made by so very many people in the historical evolution of this society. Therefore, it will contribute to fostering greater inter-ethnic respect, tolerance and understanding.

May 30, as a public holiday would promote a greater sense of acceptance and appreciation in this society of citizens of East Indian descent and nurture a greater sense of belonging among them. There is that feeling among very many citizens of East Indian descent—that this society does not give due recognition to their presence. They feel a sense of alienation from the mainstream of Trinidad and Tobago's society. They feel somehow that they have been left out. Therefore, symbolic as it is, if we declare this day a public holiday, I think it would

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disseminate that sense of nationalism and patriotism which we have lamented is so lacking in Trinidad and Tobago.

3.15 p.m.

Therefore, for this particular community it would forge a more soundly-based nationalism together with the rest of Trinidad and Tobago, and inculcate a more vibrant spirit of patriotism among our peoples. Such a declaration would subserve the concept of unity in diversity. We are one people but we have diverse origins and we accept, appreciate and commemorate the diversities of our origins, without losing sight of the importance of our being a single, unified people striving to achieve a common destiny.

The other means of bringing together descendants of indentured immigrants, citizens of East Indian origin, is that the declaration of such a day as a national holiday does not seek to distinguish those of East Indian descent of the Hindu faith, those who are of the Christian faith, or those of the Muslim faith. It seeks to bring a sense of unity among all these and override the question of creed.

It can hardly be denied that indentured immigrants from India, through their endeavours, as well as those of their descendants, contributed enormously to the building of this country and its economy, and, therefore, the declaration of May 30, as a public holiday would, in a symbolic way, give recognition to, and express appreciation for, those efforts.

I come to another point which I touched upon earlier. I make it absolutely clear to this House that, in seeking to have May 30 declared a public holiday, to be named Indian Arrival Day, I am not seeking compensatory recognition for citizens of East Indian descent or a *quid pro quo* for the declaration of Emancipation Day as a public holiday. I am not putting this Motion in that context at all, simply because both dates have overwhelming historical significance in their own respective rights, and should be commemorated as such. Therefore, whatever the merits of Indian Arrival Day being declared a public holiday, Emancipation Day is a day of enormous historical significance not only to people of African descent but to the society at large.

I observed that the *Sunday Express* has come around and made the point—which I fully endorse—when talking about Emancipation Day, that it is a day for all of us. For the same reason that I am advancing Indian Arrival Day is for the whole society, emancipation is for all of us. We must understand the significance of that historical day in our existence, although it would probably have some greater significance to people of African descent.

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Madam Speaker, we do not want to put the systems of indentureship and African slavery as counterpoised. They are different systems; they are different historical experiences. The conditions under which indentured workers from India came to Trinidad and Tobago were somewhat different from the conditions under which the African slaves were brought in. The African slaves were regarded as chattel and subjected to very inhumane conditions. The Indian workers who came here were subjected to similar conditions but they were not regarded as chattel. They had a system of employer/employee relations, and, there was no question of fighting for emancipation.

The inhumane conditions under which they worked automatically expired at the end of indentureship. They did not have to fight for that. The abolition of indenture does not have the same significance for citizens of East Indian descent as the abolition of slavery justifiably has for citizens of African descent. To put the two historical experiences together and try to compare them in every detail—as one academic put it—is trying to create a Procrustean bed in order to fit these two historical events.

I raise this point because some people are arguing that to celebrate Indian Arrival Day is to celebrate a system of slavery, and I am arguing against that because the critical issue for the workers who came here from India and their descendants was the fact of arrival. That was the critical historical experience; not the fact that their terms of indenture expired on different dates. If we were going to talk about the expiry of indenture we would have to celebrate different days on which each individual worker's indentureship expired. That is surely impractical, Madam Speaker.

More significantly, on release from indentureship, an overwhelming number of people who came to work as indentured workers did not go back to India. They stayed on and voluntarily reindentured themselves, or sought to settle in Trinidad and did their own work as peasant farmers and as labourers on the sugar estates and in other agricultural pursuits. And, that is very important to consider.

For the vast majority of indentured workers, the ending of indenture did not, for them, constitute a release from working on the sugar plantation. On release from indentureship many of them went back—maybe they had no option—and worked on the sugar plantation. The experience of the African slaves who were emancipated was that they went away from the plantation and they followed other pursuits.

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I am saying emancipation is a day of special significance for historical reasons; Indian Arrival Day is a day of special significance for different historical reasons dealing with another ethnic group.

May 30 is now widely commemorated throughout Trinidad and Tobago as Indian Arrival Day. Numerous requests have been made to me by various groups and organizations, and to other Members, I am sure, to have national recognition accorded to the day, thereby, giving to it the stamp of approval of public authority. This is a widespread sentiment and, therefore, when I brought this Motion to this House, it was as a result of those numerous requests which were made to me and other Members of Parliament, and other people in high office in Trinidad and Tobago. It is not something which came out of the blue; it is something which has widespread support in Trinidad and Tobago.

3.25 p.m.

Let me then address the arguments which are allegedly advanced against the declaration of Indian Arrival Day as a public holiday. I believe that there are three arguments which have been advanced.

The first argument is that such a holiday would create greater divisiveness and fragmentation in the society or promote sectional loyalties since such commemoration would seek to emphasize only the Indian experience in Trinidad and Tobago. By signalling a date which has greater significance for one sector of the population, that would create greater divisiveness.

My argument is contrary. I have said before, we have to acknowledge the fact that we came here as different people, at different times, under different circumstances. As a result, we cannot dismiss our history, but if we acknowledge and appreciate it in a constructive and progressive way, then it would enable us to become a people unified in diversity, and set to achieve that unity from the historical diversity from which we emerged. We cannot escape that. This is why we need to give this day the special importance and recognition that it deserves.

As I have argued before, the day is of importance in our history. The history of Trinidad and Tobago is not the history of one people; it is the history of different people coming here together. Therefore, to give recognition to this day is also of importance to citizens of non-Indian descent, to sensitize them to the diverse inputs in our emergence as a society.

If we had that sensitivity and appreciation, certain issues which are current today which smack of difficulty in dealing with cultural and religious diversities,

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perhaps would not have emerged. They emerge out of a kind of consciousness which emphasizes our differences and separateness, rather than emphasizing the diversity despite our separateness, the unity, despite our diversity, separate affiliations, allegiances and inclinations.

If we say, for example, that if we declare such a holiday now, it would create divisiveness in the society, if we take that argument further, then we can use it against any holiday, such as the religious holidays which we observe. We can argue that it caters for only a certain sector of the population, or we can use the same argument against Emancipation Day, or any of these holidays which recognize the existence of particular groups in the society. If we are going to use that argument, then the logical step would be to abolish all these religious holidays and Emancipation Day.

Far from creating divisiveness and disunity, the declaration of such a holiday would instill and reinforce a sense of belonging—I want to emphasize that—and a greater feeling of acceptance in the minds of citizens of East Indian descent in this country, today. As I said before, it is bound to nourish the spirit of patriotism and national solidarity. It has an appeal which transcends religious affiliations among citizens of East Indian descent. I believe that I have answered that argument that it would create divisiveness in the society. It would not.

The second argument which has been advanced is that declaring such a holiday would trigger off demands by other ethnic groups such as the Chinese, Portugese and Syrians to commemorate their arrival in this country. It is alleged that such a situation would then open up a Pandora's box and foster sectionalism and the propagation of divided loyalties.

Let me answer that argument in a certain way. Let us say that at this juncture, no such demands have been made or are forthcoming from citizens of Chinese, Portugese or Syrian descent. If demands are made, of course, we should give them due consideration, but no such demands have been made. More importantly—I would emphasize the historical aspect of May 30—the recorded history of this country, until recently, just a few decades ago was by and large the history of the sugar industry, and the roles played by various groups who sustained it at one time or another.

There were three major ethnic groups: the Europeans, the Africans and the Indians. The plantation experience of the Chinese and Portugese who were bound up with the history of sugar did not count for much historically, but this is not to deny their contribution in other areas of the economy, though numerically small, in very small minority groups.

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The small number of Syrians came under very different circumstances. Thus in a historical sense, in relation to these latter ethnic groups, the commemoration of Indian Arrival Day must be accorded a prior claim for national recognition. That argument that other groups would claim holidays for themselves, I have put to rest, on the basis of the historical argument and the fact that these groups have not made any claim to have their arrival in this country commemorated in a public way.

Finally, that this country already observes too many public holidays, is one of the other arguments that have been raised. And to add to the list would erode productivity and undermine economic effort. Such an argument confuses the relationship between productivity and the enjoyment of national public holidays.

Productivity has to do with the discipline, conscientiousness, diligence and commitment of persons during their working hours. The general work ethic in the society has a bearing on productivity. A country may have no public holidays whatever, but if the desirable attitudes and the proper orientation are not present among the population, productivity and the total production effort would be low. In any event, this is confused. People have to think about the argument of productivity. It has a very marginal relationship to national public holidays.

Productivity primarily has to do with people, their output, commitment to work, diligence, skill and preparedness in order to go to the workplace and produce at their maximum. That is what productivity is all about and not whether we declare another public holiday.

For example, festive days such as Carnival may not be declared public holidays, yet no-one will dispute that not much is contributed by way of individual productivity on these two days and, in fact, long before these two days are observed and perhaps a week or so after.

3.35 p.m.

This is an issue that relates to productivity. This is not just a matter of economics. In the consideration of policy in the areas of cultural and societal affairs, a wider perspective is required which is not confined to the economic dimension, in spite of—and I am not conceding that—the argument which has been put forward as to the relationship between productivity, national production and the declaration and observance of national holidays. I am saying that there is no direct connection there. Productivity has to do with what you do when you are at work. More significantly, I am not requesting an additional public holiday, and later on I should like to go through the holidays we observe.

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Mr. Manning: I thank the hon. Member for giving way. He has just indicated that he was not specifically requesting an additional holiday. I wonder if he would care to clarify.

Mr. T. Sudama: As usual, the Member is "jumping the gun." I am coming to that because it is very important that I clarify that situation.

I have been agitating for this for a very long time, and I believe it was in 1989 that I wrote in the *Sunday Guardian Supplement* on Indian Arrival Day, and made the point that discussions should be initiated with the Christian authorities with the objective of substituting Indian Arrival Day for one of the less significant Christian public holidays, and I suggested Whit Monday or Corpus Christi. That is the suggestion I made way back in 1989 when I first raised this issue.

The *Trinidad Guardian* of May 29, 1990 reported that the Anglican and Roman Catholic Church leaders—I want to emphasize this and I would like my Friend the Member for La Brea to check the *Trinidad Guardian* of May 29, 1990—had offered no objections to giving up Whit Monday as a public holiday if the Government so decides. This is an unequivocal statement made by the Archbishop of Port of Spain and the Bishop of Trinidad of Tobago, that they would have no objection if the Government so decides that Whit Monday should be eliminated as a public holiday and another holiday put in its place.

Members will recall that Whit Monday is observed in the month of May, and we are asking that May 30, the day of significant historical importance should then replace that day, in order to deal with the argument that I am asking for an additional public holiday to undermine production, and all the other spurious arguments which have been raised.

I made these representations because I felt that there were very strong feelings amongst a sufficiently large number of citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, particularly those of East Indian descent, to have this day declared as a public holiday, symbolic as it may be, but symbolism is so important in national life when one is dealing with the psyche of a people. I think it is justified, quite apart from the numbers who are agitating for it and who have lent their support to this representation, and moreso from the historical aspect of it which I have elaborated in great detail. I am primarily basing my argument on the historical significance of this particular day.

When I made that representation I was not at that time looking into the larger picture of the total number of public holidays we observe; I was trying to allay fears and deal with the criticisms that I am adding to the number of holidays, so

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making people less productive, and that I was, as they would say locally, "pushing an Indian head." This was said colloquially in one of my discussions. I am doing no such thing. Although, I admit, the holiday would have greater significance for citizens of East Indian descent, it is of significance to the whole society because it is a tremendous event of historical significance in our emergence as a people. We cannot lose sight of that fact.

If we are going to rationalize the system of public holidays, then we have to look at all the holidays that we observe and their significance and ask ourselves very important questions. Are some of these holidays currently observed, in fact, a historical legacy which does not mean a great deal to the vast majority of the people of Trinidad and Tobago? Is it merely a continuation of a historical legacy? It is about time that we reviewed this.

The Government appointed a committee last year to review the question of national public holidays. This committee was appointed way back in April or May, 1993. We are now at the end of October, 1994 and this committee, from what I can see, did not report to this House in the last session. I do not know whether it was reappointed in this session, but it seems to me that its work has lapsed, and a debate in this House on the merits or demerits of this representation would assist the committee in its deliberations if it is reappointed.

That committee had the task of going through all the holidays, looking at the relevance of each and then making recommendations. I am arguing that when one looks at all the public holidays being observed in this country, and at the arguments for Indian Arrival Day to be declared a national public holiday, one sees there is absolutely no reason that Indian Arrival Day, May 30, should not be included in a rationalized system of public holidays. The Prime Minister has signalled his agreement. I hope that he stands by his word on that.

3.45 p.m.

Mr. Manning: Do not speak for me, Sir.

Mr. T. Sudama: I hope he would stand by his word. *[Interruption]* I am trying to debate a very serious issue here, but you see what the bantering here is all about?

Madam Speaker: The hon. Member's speaking time has expired.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. T. Sudama: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and Members of this House. I believe that I have put forward sufficient arguments and claims for the Motion I am moving. I even have the support of the Member for San Fernando East, the hon. Prime Minister, and that shows the force and the cogency of the arguments I have advanced.

Let us now look at the holidays that we observe. I shall start with New Year's Day, January 01. The significance of this holiday is that it is the observance of the first day of the year. It is now for the House to judge whether that is a matter of significance; whether the first day of the year should be observed as a national public holiday. I know that there are some countries which do not observe New Year's Day as a national public holiday. One of those countries is the United Kingdom. Different countries view New Year's Day in different ways and with different significance.

I am saying, for those who are so concerned about production and productivity, it would probably be a good idea to start the year as a working day. I am not arguing for the abolition of New Year's Day; I am countering the argument of those who are concerned with production and productivity. One report was *[Interruption]* I am coming to that; you are jumping the gun again; you are very forward this afternoon—I do not know why! Are we going to have a forward date for the general election? Will it be April, 1995? *[Interruption]* Well, make sure it is a public holiday, otherwise the UNC will do what is needed. Madam Speaker, I am just trying to answer the argument about production and productivity, and this day is commemorated for no other reason than that it is the first day of the year.

We understand why people commemorate it as a holiday. Primarily many people fete into the wee hours of the morning and, therefore, they are in no position or shape to go to work the next day. I am just showing the contradictory nature of the argument of production and productivity.

One report stated that as a result of public holidays which are observed in Trinidad and Tobago, the Government loses \$130 million in production. How that figure was calculated is really a mystery. Do you know what the assumption is, Madam Speaker? The assumption is that everybody who goes to work in Trinidad and Tobago during their working hours, in fact, works at the rate and intensity at which they are supposed to work.

The Minister of Works and Transport and Minister of Local Government has a programme under his control called the Unemployment Relief Programme; before

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that it was DEWD, and before that it was the Prime Minister's Special Works Programme. My understanding is that people do report for work, on this programme. The question is, how many of them do work for how many hours during this programme, and how does one calculate production and productivity? This possibly, is not only confined to the Unemployment Relief Programme; it probably happens in other spheres. This argument about loss of production and productivity, as I indicated before, is a rather spurious argument being thrown at this whole question of having Indian Arrival Day declared a public holiday.

Madam Speaker, from the calender, the next day we observe is Good Friday, and this is a Christian holiday in observance of the crucifixion of Christ. This is a very significant Christian holiday, and therefore it is of enormous significance to the Christian community in Trinidad and Tobago and must be observed as a holiday. Its significance has spilled over to the larger community, and because of the nature of that holiday, one cannot concede its removal as a public holiday, so we say, yes, to Good Friday.

Easter Monday is also a Christian holiday in observance of the resurrection of Christ. *[Interruption]* Easter Sunday is the resurrection but the event is really commemorated on the Monday. Of course, given the importance of the resurrection in the Christian creed, thought and theology, I know my good Friend the Member for Caroni Central is in a better position to elaborate on the resurrection. My Friend the Member for St. Augustine informs me that in terms of destiny, the resurrection has a significant concept, it has to do with the continuity of life.

Therefore, the life of Christ is symbolic in that way, that he came on this earth to die for the sins of mankind. Of course, in doing so he resurrected and gave hope to the faithful. Therefore one cannot just ignore the significance of that, so that has to remain.

We observe Whit Monday, and I am sure if one goes around Trinidad and Tobago and asks people why we observe Whit Monday as a holiday, 000.1 per cent may be able to give any answer at all.

The question is one of equity in our diverse society. The preponderance of Christian holidays was because of our colonial legacy, where the colonial power was trying to create a colonial society in its own image and likeness, a Christian colonial power. We are a religiously and culturally diverse society, which the then powers refused to acknowledge, but we, as an independent nation, now have the opportunity to put what is wrong, right.

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3.55 p.m.

Whit Monday is said to be a Christian holiday in observance of the day of Pentecost, that is, the descent of the Holy Spirit on the disciples, which occurred after the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. The Member for San Fernando East asked where did this take place. I do not want him to go back into his own researching as a born-again Christian—this is a tenet of the born-again: faith to find out about the origins of Whit Monday, where the descent of the Holy Spirit took place and so forth, but I would leave that to his researches.

I am arguing on two bases. Firstly, regardless of the fact that it has been handed down to us as a public holiday, the fact that very few people in Trinidad and Tobago, and very few Christians at that, are aware of the significance of this holiday, seems to me one reason to consider whether we should continue its observance in Trinidad and Tobago.

The next holiday is Corpus Christi, another Christian holiday. This really is not of significance to all denominations of Christians. This is a Roman Catholic holiday observed in honour of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. I myself am not very conversant with all the theological connotations and implications and so forth. I do not know and I should like to be advised about the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist—this is what Corpus Christi is all about.

Again, I want to believe, and I am convinced, that a very, very small minority of Christians even in this country know the significance of this holiday and, in fact, do observe it in the manner in which it ought to be observed. But as we move down the line you will see that we have five public holidays so far, observe four of the five are Christian holidays and this one is specifically a Roman Catholic observance.

Then we have Labour Day. Labour Day was a creation of the independence period—and that has, of course, now been converted to Butler Day. It is Labour Day but I think the commemoration of this Labour Day pays homage to the father of the labour movement, so to speak; the man whose name is identified with the struggles of the working people of Trinidad and Tobago more than anyone else, although other people have struggled in this regard. Labour Day is observed on June 19, and we should continue to observe this day because of its significance for working people not only in Trinidad and Tobago, but also elsewhere in the world.

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Today, more than ever, where working people are under such tremendous pressure by the policies of the present Government, I think a day of solidarity ought to be set aside and perpetually observed, so that these people who are now discarded and have joined the breadline, the dispossessed of the earth, who have become the wretched of the earth in this land, could come together and declare their solidarity and their commitment to their own self-liberation. This is why we believe that Labour Day ought to be continued as a public holiday.

There is Emancipation Day and I have spoken at length on this. Emancipation Day is one of those days in our history that stand out like a beacon; that was the legal ending of slavery in this land, which gave birth to a new vision for a whole people and made them feel that they were emerging into true citizenship in this country. *[Interruption]* Into humanity, quite apart from citizenship—they were ushered into a new era of human dignity. Therefore, a day marking the ending of slavery, one cannot dispute, is one that should be celebrated by all.

Then there is Independence Day. This is another day of very important historical significance, that is the day that we formerly cut off the political nexus with our colonial masters. While we have recolonized ourselves by virtue of the policies of the present Government—we have gone into a period of economic and cultural recolonization—at least this day signifies an attempt at a new beginning, as I said, cutting that nexus which has kept us in subjugation and finding ourselves as an independent and sovereign people. So we have to commemorate that day.

And now we come to Republic Day. This is in recognition of the change to a Republican form of government. Madam Speaker, what has the change to a Republican form of government done for our political system, apart from replacing the Head of State—the Governor General who was a representative of the Queen—by the President? *[Interruption]*

Mr. Manning: Madam Speaker, it was not my intention to intervene in the contribution of the hon. Member for Oropouche, but I think I should let him know that the change to Republican status was also accompanied by a new Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago, and a move away from a purely ceremonial Head of State to a Head of State that has some authority.

Mr. Sudama: Madam Speaker, I do not want to get into a constitutional debate at this point. Yes, we had a new Constitution. When you look at the significant provisions of the new Constitution with the old Constitution you will realize that very little has changed. *[Interruption]*

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Mr. Manning: I am sorry again to intervene, but as Head of Government, and someone who has to operate that Constitution, I am in a position to say that much has changed.

Mr. Sudama: Did you operate that Constitution before it became Republican?

Mr. Manning: Yes, I was in the Government, and after also.

Mr. Sudama: When you were in the Government before 1976 *[Interruption]* And he is not operating it now. But I want to remind him that he cannot speak with any authority, that was his first term in Parliament from 1971 to 1976, and he was regarded as the junior of the juniors—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Manning: What does that mean? Confusion.

Mr. Sudama: And he was on the periphery of everything, so he cannot say that he was in Government and was an active participant in constitutional and political decisions. So that the Member has no experience as to how the system operated before *[Interruption]*

Mr. Manning: That is not true.

Mr. Sudama: The Member has some experience in how it operates now, but to talk about our present Head of State having significant authority under our present Constitution is something open to dispute, because almost every significant decision that is made in the name of the Head of State is made by the Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago. I do not want to go into any long constitutional argument.

4.05 p.m.

Mr. T. Sudama: I have to wind up the debate, so when he participates and makes his constitutional arguments, I would have the opportunity to respond.

Mr. Manning: Okay.

Mr. T. Sudama. I will move on from Republic Day because I question the utility of giving Republic Day the status of a national public holiday. Maybe in certain constitutions, for example, India, the declaration of Republic Day has significant consequences for the operation of their political system. Maybe that is justified in that country, but I cannot see the justification for it in Trinidad and Tobago, where we have Independence Day.

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Now, Madam Speaker, there is Christmas Day with which nobody will interfere, because although it is a Christian holiday celebrating the birth of Christ, it is for everybody—observed by all concerned.

Mr. Maharaj: They should make carnival a holiday too.

Mr. T. Sudama: If there ever was a national public religious holiday, that is Christmas and, therefore, that has to stay.

We come to Boxing Day. I want to put on record what Boxing Day is about for people to make their own decision. Boxing Day is a legal holiday in England, Wales, Northern Ireland, New Zealand, Australia and the West Indies—a legal holiday—and one can see its historical origins. It is a legacy of the colonial masters—originally celebrated by the giving of Christmas boxes to postmen. [*Laughter*] That is the significance of Boxing Day, Madam Speaker, to give Christmas boxes to postmen and other service workers. Therefore, it is a day of giving gifts to people who work.

Now I should have thought that if one wants to give gifts to people who work, one could do that without declaring it a public holiday. Finally, there are two other days which have been added. Eid, which is the foremost celebration in the Muslim religious calendar, and marks the end of fasting during the month of Ramadan. Of course, that is of such special significance to the Muslim community, that we cannot even think of questioning the rationale for it. Then there is Divali, which has been a Hindu religious holiday, but is now celebrated on such a scale that it is becoming rather a national holiday in its perspective and its incorporation of all the various elements and segments of the population of Trinidad and Tobago. It has a significance and importance which transcends not merely the Hindu religion, but all humanity.

When one looks at these 13 public holidays, one can see that there is good cause for deciding whether some of them should continue to be observed as public holidays. After that, one can look at the various representations and, as I said in my argument, the question of Indian Arrival Day becoming a public holiday is one that should be given priority recognition for all the reasons I have mentioned. The historical reason being the very significant population, the descendants of those indentured immigrants who came here and through their efforts contributed to the transformation of the society and its evolution. It has enormous priority significance.

Therefore, in our system of dealing with the approach to rationalization of the holidays of Trinidad and Tobago, my argument remains that May 30, the arrival

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of the first group of indentured workers from India, has to be given priority acclaim. For all these reasons, as I stand here and look at the history of the people of Trinidad and Tobago and where we are today, I feel that there is a significant omission which this session of this Parliament now has the opportunity to put right.

By unanimously recommending to the Government that Indian Arrival Day be declared a national public holiday, we invite the national community to look at its significance and appreciate that by making that declaration they would be making one further acknowledgment that they understand and recognize the diversity of the society and the need for an over-arching unity. This will not come about by dismissing the evolution of the diverse elements in our society which is attempting, tentatively, as it looks forward, to forge a new Trinidad and Tobago in which every creed and race will have an equal place.

Thank you very much.

Secoded by Mr. J. Humphrey.

Question proposed.

The Prime Minister and Minister of National Security (Hon. Patrick Manning): Madam Speaker, the hon. Member for Oropouche is advancing a Motion calling for the declaration of May 30 as Indian Arrival Day. In support of his contention he has outlined a very comprehensive argument.

The Government is of the view that the argument has considerable merit. It was the hon. Member for Oropouche, himself, who indicated that it ought to be looked at in the context of a rationalization of public holidays in Trinidad and Tobago. He cited the case of Whit Monday and Corpus Christi arguing, that on an occasion in the past when the matter had arisen, two leading Christian denominations in Trinidad and Tobago had not only offered no objection to removal of both those days as public holidays, but also may have been, so he suggested, actively promoting it. What the hon. Member did not include, and which I should like to draw to the attention of hon. Members, is the fact that there have also been other requests made for the declaration of public holidays in Trinidad and Tobago.

In the case of the Baptist community, March 30 is being requested as Liberation Day; and also a very strong case has been made out by different sections of the national community to declare some day—and it has not been identified which day it would be—to be a day of Thanksgiving.

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It has been recognized in the contribution of the hon. Member for Oropouche that there is a concern in the national community about the number of holidays we have, and concern has been expressed, particularly, from the business community, that we ought to be very cautious in the way we seek to increase the number of holidays to which the people of Trinidad and Tobago are entitled.

4.15 p.m.

A similar problem arose a number of years ago in India, and it would be instructive to Trinidad and Tobago to see how the Indian Government dealt with this issue.

We believe that in the light of all of that, and particularly the fact that the argument for Indian Arrival Day merits further consideration, the Government wishes to propose that the matter be referred to a Joint Select Committee of both Houses of Parliament, with the assurance that it is our intention, on this occasion, as far as possible, to ensure that we come to a conclusion on this matter and it is finalized in this Parliament during this session. I so propose.

Madam Speaker, we would have to formulate the exact resolution because it is not just Indian Arrival Day; it is a rationalized system as proposed by the Member for Oropouche. What we can do, perhaps, is just to break for a few minutes to actually work out the details of the resolution and then we can reconvene to formally consider.

4.18 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

4.33 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Mr. P. Manning: Madam Speaker, during the break, we were able to find a form of words. As a consequence, I now formerly propose that the Motion be amended by the deletion of its resolution:

"Be it Resolved that this House recommend to the Government that May 30 be declared a national public holiday to be known as Indian Arrival Day"

and substituting as follows:

"And whereas it is desirable that the rationalization of national holidays in Trinidad and Tobago be examined,

Be it Resolved that the whole question of the rationalization of public holidays be referred to a Joint Select Committee of Parliament."

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Mr. Maharaj: Madam Speaker, the proposal for an amendment to the Motion has been made, and at the appropriate stage I am sure you would put the question on both the amendment and the Motion.

Madam Speaker: Are we not appointing the Joint Select Committee now?

Hon. Members: No, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: I see. Can an hon. Member second this amendment, please?

Mr. Valley: Madam Speaker, I beg to move that the Government reserve the right to participate in the debate at a later stage of the proceedings.

Madam Speaker: Just for my own clarification, all other paragraphs of this Motion are to remain as they are?

Mr. Valley: Yes, Madam Speaker.

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley): I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to Friday, November 4, 1994 at 1.30 p.m.

Divali Greetings

Hon. K. Valley: Madam Speaker, because the House will be sitting after Divali, I take this opportunity, on behalf of Members of this side of the House, to wish Members and the nation a blessed Divali.

Mr. Ramesh L. Maharaj (Couva South): Madam Speaker, on behalf of this side of the House, I wish you, the Members of the Government and the staff, the best for Divali, 1994.

Mr. Arthur N. R. Robinson (Tobago East): Madam Speaker, on behalf of the people of Tobago—

Hon. Members: And the members of the NAR.

Mr. Robinson: —and my colleague on my left, I extend to the entire population, Divali greetings and the hope and expectation that the spirit of Divali will exercise a much greater influence on the population of Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, at our luncheon today, I did ask hon. Members to look into the crevices of their own being and see the dark areas. I think each of us has our own dark area to work on, and so, I wish all of us here,

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Members, the staff, members of the public, everyone, a wonderful and blessed Divali and really hope that those areas will be illumined and, indeed, fade away forever.

Thank you so much, hon. Members.

Mr. Sudama: Madam Speaker, *[Interruption]*

Madam Speaker: I thought we were dealing with the adjournment.

Mr. Maharaj: Madam Speaker, the Member for Oropouche seems to have surprised everybody today.

4.40 p.m.

Road Improvement Tax

Mr. Sudama: Madam Speaker, I have a Motion on the Adjournment which relates to irregularities in the administration of the Road Improvement Tax. A commitment was given earlier today that there would be a debate under “Public Business”. If that commitment goes, I would not pursue my motion on the Adjournment. The question is: Do we get a commitment and a time frame in which that debate will take place?

Mr. Valley: Madam Speaker, we give the assurance to the Member for Oropouche that the debate will, in fact, take place—but cannot be on Friday. With discussion with the Chief Whip, we have an agenda. Let us discuss it.

I give the assurance that it would take place. We want to debate the Dangerous Drugs (Amdt.) Bill. We would have to look at our callender to see how we can fit it in. Perhaps, we can do it on a special day.

Mr. Sudama: Would that special day be before the end of the year, or at the end of November?

Mr. Valley: As long as there is agreement we can, for example, do it on a Wednesday afternoon so that it would not interfere with Government Business.

Madam Speaker: There are so many matters in this House that, with a little discussion, and a little give and take on both sides, can be resolved. As the Member for Oropouche said at the beginning, light will overcome darkness. Let us put it into practice.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 4.41 p.m.