

Leave of Absence

Friday, February 02, 1996

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, February 02, 1996.

The House met at 1.30 p.m.

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I have received communication from the Member for La Brea seeking leave of absence from today's sitting, which I have granted.

ELECTIONS AND BOUNDARIES COMMISSION REPORT

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I wish to inform this honourable House that yesterday, February 01, 1996, Sir Isaac Hyatali, Chairman of the Elections and Boundaries Commission presented to me—as he is required to do under Rule 108(6) of the Elections Rules made under section 161(1) of the Representation of the People Act, Chap. 2:01—the Report of the Elections and Boundaries Commission on the parliamentary elections held on Monday, November 06, 1995.

PAPERS LAID

1. Report of the Auditor General on the accounts of the National Institute of Higher Education (Research, Science and Technology) for the year ended December 31, 1989. [*The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (Hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar)*].
2. Report of the Auditor General on the accounts of the National Institute of Higher Education (Research, Science and Technology) for the year ended December 31, 1990. (*Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar*).

Mr. Manning: Is that your last will and testimony?

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: If you live you will see.

Mr. Panday: Politically, that is, of course.

Papers 1 and 2 to be referred to the Public Accounts Committee.

3. Annual Report of the Law Commission for the period January 1, 1993 to December 31, 1993. (*Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar*).

4. Green Paper on Integrity in Public Life—A Review of the Legislation. (Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar).

**Integrity Legislation
(Joint Parliamentary Committee)**

The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (Hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar): Mr. Speaker, in laying this Paper, with your leave, I would like to make a short statement.

On July 26, 1994, Sen. Wade Mark, now Minister of Public Administration and Information moved a Motion in the Senate which reads as follows:

“Whereas present legislation does not currently extend to a host of dishonest and improper acts and conduct as it relates to public officers; and

Whereas recent evidence and instances have revealed serious misconduct in public office by a host of public functionaries; and

Whereas the present Integrity legislation is too weak and does not cover a series of illegal acts and criminal activities:

Be it Resolved: that this Senate call on the Attorney General to introduce comprehensive legislation within a period of a year aimed at outlawing or making illegal the following acts:

1. Conflict of interest particularly involving persons who participate in decisions calculated or capable of furthering their private interest.
2. Use of insider information not available to the general public in an effort to seek one’s private interest.
3. Unlawful use of influence to further one’s private interest.
4. Unlawful acceptance of benefits in connection with the performance of one’s office.
5. Carrying on business incompatible with one’s public office.

Be it Further Resolved that this Senate call on the Government to establish, as an interim measure in view of the gravity of the situation, a joint parliamentary committee to monitor these activities whilst appropriate legislation is being prepared for introduction, deliberation and ultimate passage in the national Parliament.”

That Motion which had been on the Order Paper of the Senate for over three years prior to that date, was again debated on August 23, 1994. On that date, the then Government proposed two amendments to the Motion, the first of which was as follows:

“The deletion of the words: ‘Whereas recent evidence and instances have revealed serious misconduct in public office by a host of public functionaries’.”

The second amendment effectively changed the character of the action demanded by the mover of the Motion, it was as follows:

“That after the words: ‘Be it Resolved’ the substance of the Motion should be deleted and replaced by the following: ‘That this Senate urge the Attorney General to institute a review of legislation to ensure that the integrity legislation is strengthened, so as to enhance the scope and powers of the Integrity Commission, and to present to Parliament, within one year a Green Paper for public comment and consultation’.”

On that second date the Motion was passed with amendments.

The then Attorney General and Minister for Legal Affairs appointed a working team to carry out this mandate of the Senate. This team was chaired by Mr. Justice Guya Persuad, Chairman of the Law Commission and the following organizations and departments were represented:

1. The Integrity Commission;
2. the Law Commission;
3. the Public Service Commission;
4. the office of the Ombudsman;
5. the Auditor General’s Department;
6. the Ministry of Finance;
7. the Ministry of Trade and Industry.

In preparing the Green Paper which we have laid today, the working team considered a wide range of existing schemes, arrangements and legislation in other Commonwealth jurisdictions and in the USA.

The approach of the working team was that corruption and lack of integrity amongst persons in public life and the consequent erosion of public confidence is a serious and frightening matter.

1.40 p.m.

The legislation proposed in the Green Paper to deal with the problem would achieve the following:

- a.. the promotion of integrity in public life;
- b. higher standards of accountability and transparency;
- c. giving the Integrity Commission greater powers to allow it to become a more effective tool in the prevention and detection of corruption;
- d. restoring respect in the ethical values originally associated in the idea of public service.

Specific legislation was suggested to deal with perceived lacunae in the law:

- a. Disclosure of financial interests by those in public life and public office.
- b. The scope and nature of interests to be declared to the Integrity Commission and the publication of a statement, giving information in respect of those persons required to make disclosure whilst respecting their right to privacy.
- c. New integrity legislation should promulgate firm standards of ethical conduct which would inform and guide individuals and give the Integrity Commission power to enforce sanctions for breaches. A code of conduct should be developed and made enforceable by the House of Representatives, Senate, Service Commissions, each local government body and statutory bodies and the state enterprises.

A new offence known as "public misconduct" should be created, punishable, ultimately, by the loss of public office. The following acts should be regarded as offences against public morality:

- Conflicts of interests;
- Insider trading;
- Influence peddling;
- Acceptance of gifts;
- Lobbying.

Mr. Panday: We are making that retroactive.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: On February 01, 1996, Cabinet considered the Green Paper and deemed it to be consistent with the avowed policies of this Government on accountability and transparency in Government and public life, and also consistent with the commitment given in the foundation agreement made between the NAR and the UNC following the general election on November 06, 1995 to promote integrity in public life, decided that the Green Paper be laid in Parliament and be published for public comment. It was also decided that a Motion be moved in Parliament for the setting up of a joint select committee to receive and consider the comments from members of the public, and to submit recommendations to Parliament thereon.

Having regard to the decision of Cabinet we have laid that Paper today and we would be taking steps very shortly to have the Motion before this House to set up the Joint Select Committee of Parliament.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

**SELECT COMMITTEE REPORT
(Presentation)**

The Minister of Public Utilities (Hon. Ganga Singh): Mr. Speaker, with your leave, I wish to lay on the table the First Report of the Regulations Committee of the House of Representatives, (1995-1996 Session).

DEFINITE URGENT MATTER

Mr. Speaker: With respect to the Member for Diego Martin Central who gave me a notice a few minutes before coming into the House, seeking my leave, it is not granted, simply having regard to the practice.

Mr. Valley: Mr. Speaker, just for my own guidance, according to Standing Order 12 (1) on page 13, I thought that I had to attempt to make a case before you ruled. I wonder whether you could assist me please.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, it all has to do with the question of getting my leave, first of all. That is important. I have to give leave for the matter to be raised, as I said. Having regard to the time at which it was given, I would not have had the opportunity of going into the details of it, and in those circumstances, as I indicated to you then, having regard to the practice, that leave is not granted.

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, just for our own edification, could you be kind enough to let us know what kind of advance notice is required on Motions of this nature for future reference?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the practice is that these notices should be in by 12.00 noon. The Clerk will give you further information on that if you so wish.

Mr. Valley: Mr. Speaker, according to Standing Order (1), I am just looking for clarification because I consider it extremely important.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, please be seated. For the sake of the record what has happened is that you hand-delivered to me a letter in which you were seeking my leave to raise certain matters and that was done at 1.20 p.m. this afternoon. I pointed out to you that the practice, which is well established, which is what I have been advised, is that it should be in by 12.00 noon. I advised you on that. The reason for the deadline is that it is necessary for me to look at it and see whether I could determine that it is in fact, acceptable.

In the circumstances, I have not been able to look at it. Indeed, when you came to see me, there were three Members of the House consulting with me. It is in these circumstances that I have told you that leave is denied. We would close the discussion on this issue now.

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, the Opposition is making a formal request to hold discussions with you on this matter. The reason being, that there are many occasions in which on one's way to Parliament, important matters are raised by constituents with us and it has been the practice in the past that the House has been conducted in such a way that allows for the raising of matters of this nature by Members of Parliament. Indeed, the Standing Orders themselves talk about "before the sitting of the House."

I understand what you are saying, Mr. Speaker, but I am merely suggesting to you, that having regard to this circumstance, we would like to engage in discussions with you to see whether we could arrive at some other arrangement.

Mr. Speaker: I could assure the hon. Member that he is pushing against an open door insofar as meeting to discuss is concerned, and I will be happy to do that.

EVIDENCE (AMDT.) BILL

A Bill to amend the Evidence Act, Chap. 7:02 [*The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs*]; read the first time.

SHOP (OPENING HOURS) (AMDT.) ORDER

The Minister of Trade & Industry and Consumer Affairs (Hon. Mervyn Assam): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move,

Whereas it is provided by section 5(1) of the Shop (Hours of Opening and Employment) Act, 84:02 that the Minister may, if he thinks fit, make an Order (hereinafter called a "Shop Order") fixing the hours on the several days of the week, including Sundays and public holidays, during which, either throughout Trinidad and Tobago or in any specified area of Trinidad and Tobago, all shops or shops of any specified class may be opened for serving customers:

And Whereas it is provided by section 5(3) of the said Act that a Shop Order shall be subject to affirmative resolution of Parliament:

And Whereas on the 10th day of January, 1966, the Minister made under section 5 of the Shop (Hours of Opening and Employment) Act, an Order entitled "the Shop (Opening Hours) (Amendment) Order, 1996" whereby the shops operated under a Spirit Retailer's Licence, a Wine Retailer's Licence, a Night Bar Licence, a Spirit Grocer's Licence, a Spirit Dealer's Licence or a Wine Merchant's Licence may open for the sale or supply of liquor at any time on any day (including public holidays):

1.50 p.m.

And whereas the Shop (Opening Hours) (Amendment) Order, 1996 was published in the *Gazette* as legal notice No. 3 of 1996:

And whereas it is expedient that the said order be now approved:

Be it resolved; that the Shop (Opening Hours) (Amendment.) Order, 1996 be approved subject to the following modifications:

1. In paragraph 2, delete the words "(c) a Night Bar Licence," and renumber subparagraphs (d) to (f) as subparagraphs (c) to (e).
2. Insert after paragraph 2, the following paragraph:
3. "This order comes into effect on the 10th day of January, 1996."

Shop (Opening Hours) (Amdt.) Order
[HON. M. ASSAM]

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Mr. Speaker, throughout the course of human history, man has had to adjust to change. Be it socio-political, socio-economic, socio-cultural, socio-legal, or socio-religious, man has had to come to terms with change. And in modernizing societies, change has been rapid, and in some cases, many of us are incapable of grasping this change and adjusting to it.

Indeed, wherever change takes place, whether it is in the home, the school, in corporate entities, or in governments, people tend to resist change, because some persons are unable to adjust to it while others believe that change has some kind of ulterior motive serving the purposes and the self-interest of the people who are the proponents of the change.

Moreover, governments find themselves in almost invidious positions from time to time, particularly governments operating in plural societies—multi-ethnic, multi-religious, multi-cultural—as a consequence of which the governance of such a society is one that has to be based on compromise and consensus. It is in this context that we bring this Motion to the House this afternoon in order to validate it after it has already been proclaimed, because this is what the Act requires us to do.

This Government does not intend to inflict any kind of attitudes on the people of this country, whereby we are suggesting as a result of the amendment of this Order that people must sell or buy alcohol, or people must be forced to imbibe alcohol. It is a principle rooted in the Christian ethic of free will, an ethic, to which I am sure the Member for Diego Martin East, who has been talking about his Catholic background, must subscribe in the fullness of time.

More than that, the Christian *Bible* says—and I am sure the Member for Diego Martin East is aware of it, and other born-again Christians from San Fernando East—that what goes into you does not defile you, it is what comes out of you that defiles you. Jesus himself, during the early days of his missionary work, went to Canaan in order to attend a wedding feast. When he arrived some of the wine had already finished and his mother prevailed upon him; and it was the first miracle of his public life where he changed water into wine making it the finest wine of that festival.

More than that, I have been reading the *Catholic News* of Sunday, January 28, 1996 and the editorial of that day says: “TRADING ON SUNDAYS: A BACKWARD STEP”. In one of the paragraphs of this editorial it says—and I want the

Member for Diego Martin East, who professes that he is such a good Catholic to listen to the dogma in this particular editorial:

“Our Church’s way has never been rigid, following the teaching of Jesus that the sabbath is for man not man for the sabbath. Mark 2:27.”

Do you remember when Jesus Christ was telling his disciples when the ass fell into the pit that they should go and take the ass out of the pit notwithstanding the fact that it was the sabbath because it is said: “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath?”

The article continues:

“It was always taken for granted that some people did business on Sundays—little tradesmen, newspaper vendors, drug stores, parlours.

But these were small, often family, businesses. The new laws open the way for something different—big companies, tough competition. There is no respite from business as usual.”

In other words, one can commit small sin, but one cannot commit big sin, there is a differentiation between sin of the small operator and the sin of the large operator. It is unfortunate that someone who is also a Catholic by upbringing cannot agree with this kind of distinction, because if a particular church’s ruling is that one should not do business on a Sunday, it should apply equally to the small, medium and large operator.

We have to understand that Trinidad and Tobago is living in a small world. When the PNM was in power, they were the ones who ran ahead with all kinds of legislation telling us in Trinidad and Tobago that we had to become competitive, we had to globalize, we had to liberalize, we had to become part of the global economic and trading environment. Therefore, we had to update all laws such as the Insurance Act, the Financial Institutions Act, the Securities Industries Act, the Companies Act and so forth. Now, we on this side are attempting to open up the economy to create new possibilities, opportunities and further employment by having shops open seven days a week, 24 hours a day, in which a component of that selling structure and sets of transaction is alcohol.

It is only one part of opening the shops 24 hours a day, seven days a week, on Sundays and public holidays. One is free not to shop on a Sunday or a public holiday, but moreover, this Government is attempting to plug loopholes, something which the former Minister of Works and Member for Diego Martin

East could not do—he could not even plug potholes. We are plugging loopholes in the sense that we are attempting to prevent the illegal sale of alcohol in a piece of *Guardian* newspaper and a brown paper bag behind the shop on Sundays and public holidays. This is an occurrence that takes place at the beaches, in the country districts, and in all parts of Trinidad and Tobago on an illegal basis. We are attempting to plug that loophole, and at the same time create the opportunities—economic and otherwise.

If one can buy alcohol on a Saturday and imbibe that alcohol in one's home on Sunday, public holiday or whatever, what is wrong, or what is the moral incorrectness of someone purchasing the same alcohol on a Sunday or any day before that and drinking it on the Sunday? What is so morally incorrect? In what way is this Government encouraging immorality? This Government has not taken away the free will of anyone or any institution.

2.00 p.m.

In fact, today, this operates in most modern societies. Even the church of which the Member for Diego Martin East says he is a staunch member has undergone through Vatican councils what is called an *aggiornamento*. In the Soviet Union, the former President, Mr. Gorbachev, started to introduce glasnost and perestroika, opening up the society in a more liberalized fashion. Mrs. Thatcher came on the scene and she modernized and liberalized the United Kingdom's economic, financial and social systems.

In the process, obviously, some of the attitudes, mores, hallowed situations would begin to disappear and be eroded because, as you know, there is really no sacred cow. There is no sacred cow once a human being has the freedom to exercise free choice and free will in accordance with his God-given conscience.

It is in that context, Mr. Speaker, that this particular Motion is being piloted in the House, giving this country the assurance that this Government, the UNC/NAR Government, is not a hedonistic government. We are not asking people to go and worship at the altar of Dionysus, far from that! We are a government that will all times insist on the highest principles of morality, and highest ethical standards to be inculcated in our young people and indeed all the members of our society. I want to make this abundantly clear. We will subscribe at all times to the principles governing these considerations.

I hope that we would end this debate on the note that this Government's intention is certainly not to make drunkards and alcoholics out of the people of

Trinidad and Tobago. We understand the moral sensibilities just as those persons who pretend to be good Christians and Catholics and boast to the House that nobody on this side is a Catholic because we would not have brought this Motion to the House and inflicted this kind of “immoral behaviour” on the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

I want it to be fully understood, Mr. Speaker, that we are not by any means telling the people of Trinidad and Tobago, young, middle aged or old, that they have a licence to go and get drunk or do whatever they want because we have opened up the economic system to people who want to avail themselves of a bottle of alcohol or whatever it is seven days per week, 24 hours per day.

It is so ironical that the very people who want to be exemplars, who want to give leadership to this society, people who have held the highest offices in this land, political and otherwise, even ecclesiastical, one sees them in certain places—I understand they are called “Smokey and Bunty”. These are the people who come here like bleeding hearts and hypocrites to instruct the Members of the UNC/NAR Government on the ethics and principles of morality. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: Yes.

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. Member for St. Joseph for giving way. This afternoon he began by giving us treatise on the Bible and is now seeking to chastise the Member for San Fernando East for participating in a place called Smokey and Bunty. Perhaps I could remind him that there is another biblical story when Jesus himself accepted dinner at the home of someone who was not considered to be honest and just, and his response at that time was, “I came not to preach to the converted but to bring sinners to repentance.”

Hon. M. Assam: Indeed, Mr. Speaker, I thought he would have ended by asking who is without sin to cast the first stone. I really believed that he would have told us about his biblical teachings on that matter. But, you know, I am not here to chastise anyone. I am an adherent to my religion which is Catholic and I respect everybody’s religion—Christian, Hindu, Muslim, Seventh Day Adventist or whatever—and everybody has the right to exercise choice and free will in this matter.

Mr. Speaker, as a Roman Catholic, I must tell you that the church raises funds through bazaars and other methods and on the very church grounds on a Sunday, the holy Sabbath day, alcohol and alcoholic beverages, including rum—which I heard an Opposition Member speak about—are sold for profit. I want it to be

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known, I am not castigating them for doing that because, quite frankly, I see nothing wrong with that. I am not a puritan to believe that the imbibing of alcohol is a bad thing. It is abuse, excess, irresponsibility—whether it is food, drink, sex, money, profit, whatever it is one does in excess or abuse that makes something immoral. It is not the act that is immoral, it is the abuse of the act that makes it immoral. *[Applause]*.

Therefore, after my presentation, I hope that Members opposite would be persuaded to believe that our intentions are noble, that we are not inflicting any immoral order on this country and that we are in no way trying to corrupt the youths. They have said that there would be young people under the age of 16 going into supermarkets to buy on a Sunday, as if when they go to the supermarket on a Tuesday, Wednesday or Saturday it makes a difference. They cannot go to the liquor section and buy alcohol because they are under 16. They are saying it will happen on a Sunday. How illogical? The propensity to be illogical on that side, I have alluded to it so often and I want to put it to rest this afternoon. This kind of illogic must not be tolerated in this noble, august Chamber.

It is in this context and against this background that I propose the Motion to this House.

I beg to move.

Question proposed.

Mr. Eric Williams (*Port of Spain South*): Mr. Speaker, there is a matter that puzzles me. It seems that because some undisciplined citizens of this nation go through red lights, we must now legalize going through red lights. A red light means to stop. The fact that the law is flouted and that alcohol is sold on Sundays and public holidays, because it is put in a brown paper bag means people recognize that it is an illegal act. Therefore, to condone such activity in this House, the highest court in the land, does not seem to be a responsible thing to do.

2.10 p.m.

The Member for St. Joseph, the hon. Minister of Trade and Industry, gave us the background definition behind what it is to be defiled from the Judeo-Christian ethic. Well, Mr. Speaker, allow me to quote from the *Amplified Bible* which, for those who do not know, is closer to the original Greek and Aramaic than the *Bible*

was written in. The background to what he spoke of is found in Matthew 15:17–20, [*Interruption*]

Mr. Imbert: Which he probably never read.

Mr. E. Williams: —and I read:

“Do you not see and understand that whatever goes into the mouth passes into the abdomen and so passes on into the place where discharges are deposited?”

But whatever comes out of the mouth comes from the heart, and this is what makes a man unclean and defiles [him].

For out of the heart come evil thoughts such as murder, adultery, sexual vice, theft, false witnessing, slander and irreverent speech.

These are what make a man unclean and defile [him]; but eating with unwashed hands does not make him unclean or defile [him].”

Mr. Speaker, this was in reference to the eating with unwashed hands, but let us understand what the *Bible* does say about alcohol to some degree.

If we go to Proverbs 20:1, Mr. Speaker, again quoting from the *Amplified Bible*:

“Wine is a mocker, strong drink a riotous brawler; and whoever errs or reels because of it is not wise.”

Mr. Speaker, that is what the *Bible* does, in fact, say about wine. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker, I am against this Motion for several reasons. It is anti-religious, anti-youth, anti-family and, in fact, Mr. Speaker, it is anti the honourable Government’s stated policy. [*Desk thumping*] When one looks at the concept of the Sabbath—and, yes, I am a Christian and the Sabbath for me is on a Sunday; there are others who have Sabbath on another day. The fact of the matter is that there is the recognition of the concept of a Sabbath, in much the same way that we celebrate December 25 as Christmas, even though we know fully well that was not the time of the year, even, that Christ could have been born. But there is the concept, the setting aside, of a day to commemorate the birth of Christ. So it is with the Sabbath, Mr. Speaker.

Again, reading from the *Amplified Bible*, and I wish Members would pay some respect, at least, to this Good Book which I held to take my Oath of Office. In Deuteronomy 5:12–15, we read:

“Observe the Sabbath day to keep it holy, as the Lord your God commanded you.

Six days you shall labour and do all your work,

But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, or your manservant, or your maidservant, or your ox or your donkey or any of your livestock, or the stranger or sojourner who is within your gates, that your manservant and your maidservant may rest as well as you.

And [earnestly] remember that you were a servant in the land of Egypt and that the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; and therefore the Lord your God commanded you to observe and take heed to the Sabbath day.”

Hon. Member: What is the relevance?

Mr. Imbert: He will tell you just now.

Mr. E. Williams: Mr. Speaker, this was in reference to the Israelites. But in Luke 13:11 to which the hon. Minister and Member for St. Joseph referred—and let me quote again, Mr. Speaker, because you have to put it in context. Luke 13:11–17 states:

“And there was a woman there who for eighteen years had had an infirmity caused by a spirit (a demon of sickness). She was bent completely forward and utterly unable to straighten herself up or to look upward.

And when Jesus saw her, He called [her to Him] and said to her, Woman, you are released from your infirmity!

Then He laid [His] hands on her, and instantly she was made straight, and she recognized and thanked and praised God.

But the leader of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath day, said to the crowd, There are six days on which work ought to be done, so come on those days and be cured, and not on the Sabbath day.

But the Lord replied to him, saying, You playactors (hypocrites)! Does not each one of you on the Sabbath loose his ox or his donkey from the stall and lead it out to water it?

And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day?’

Even as He said this, all His opponents were put to shame, and all the people were rejoicing over all the glorious things that were being done by Him.”

Mr. Speaker, Jesus the Christ was referring to a necessary act to take place on the Sabbath day, such as the purchase, maybe, of food, or gasoline, if you had to get somewhere in an emergency, or to go to church, even. That was the context in which Jesus spoke about doing activities on the Sabbath day. When he cured someone, it was a necessary thing. I put it to this honourable House that the sale of alcohol is not a necessary thing. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Robinson: Do not sell.

Mr. E. Williams: But it is necessary for those who are indisciplined and must imbibe uncontrollably, Mr. Speaker. But, again, I don’t want to preach too much.

Mr. Speaker, two wrongs do not make a right. There is also the fact that in this nation, because we are a plural society—we have all races, creeds—we adhere to many different tenets. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Robinson: Tolerance!

Mr. E. Williams: That is correct, Sir, and I want to show you that I am tolerating you, Sir. [*Desk thumping*] Many of our public holidays are, in fact, religious days, Mr. Speaker. There is Eid ul Fitr, Divali, Christmas, Good Friday and now, thank God, we even have Easter Monday.

Mr. Speaker, every religion teaches about abstinence and, in fact, the reason for many of those holidays is that they are days of worship, they are days on which particular religious activities are either performed or observed. Mr. Speaker, we have just had a new holiday added to our calendar. Many people are very happy about it. We now have the Shouter Liberation Day. That, too, is a day to commemorate religious freedom and so forth, in this society.

Mr. Sudama: The Member for Diego Martin East is against it.

Mr. E. Williams: Mr. Speaker, I suspect that we are sending the wrong signal. Allowance of the sale of alcohol is, in fact, to make a ready supply available on days that are, in fact, religious.

2.20 p.m.

On public holidays many people, if they do not go to their place of worship, families get together and they go to the beach; to the river lime; to the botanical gardens or to some place of family recreation. On those days we carry along picnic baskets. In those picnic baskets we have food, whether it is pelau, curry duck, or whatever. But the point is, to make the pelau one has to purchase the meat which is, quite often, purchased the day before. It is seasoned the day before and prepared to be taken on the following day, the day of the holiday. If it is that we must have alcohol—and there are many who do—why could we not purchase it on the day before and carry it with us on those days, just as we do with the meat? What is the big deal?

This Government is on record as saying, if you do the crime, you will do the time. I applaud that, as I have done so previously in my contribution to the budget debate, because it is something that all right-thinking people would want to see happen. I subscribe to that. The fact of the matter is, one of the serious co-factors of those crimes is illegal drugs or alcohol. Quite often, alcohol is the drug of choice.

We are seeking to increase the supply of alcohol into the society on public holidays and on Sabbath days against the mores of every religious body in this country. I put it to this House that to do so, in fact, may be stopped short of being criminal in itself. Who will do the time when these crimes are committed because of this measure? In addition to which, a significant co-factor in road accidents in this country, as indeed in a number of countries, is alcohol. A number of these accidents occur on public holidays and on Sundays. Why, in God's name, are we seeking to increase the supply of alcohol on these days? It is illogical. Again, I subscribe to a certain amount of discipline. If you must, you must. But some things ought to remain sacrosanct.

It is with regret that I have come to learn that Trinidad has one of the highest incidences of AIDS. This is based on a per capita occurrence, not in fact a volume. For many years the Family Planning Association has gone to a lot of expense, as indeed previous governments, to introduce all sorts of rehabilitative programmes into the society to warn of the dangers of illicit sex, or unwanted sex or wanton sex, and the causes. Primarily though, some of them have been aimed against

unwanted pregnancies, but increasingly so, those warnings are against sexually transmitted diseases, of which AIDS is but the deadliest.

Another thing that we tend to not speak about is the problem of alcoholism among our youth. One of the things that the Family Planning Association counsels against is: Watch what you drink; do not drink too much, because wine, as was previously pointed out, dulls the senses. It causes otherwise sane and rational people to do things that they would not do ordinarily.

Our youth, full of energy, full of alcohol, have been known—it is unfortunate—to engage in activities which put them at risk for the transmission of sexually-transmitted diseases. I put it to this honourable House that an increase in the supply of alcohol, particularly on public holidays and on Sundays, is, in fact, an attack against the youth of this nation. In fact, the slogan is: "Get drunk; get stupid; get AIDS."

On the matter of family life, one of the education programmes that has been going out into the countryside by public health visitors, of which my dear mother was one, now retired—is "women, get your husbands out of the bar; keep them home; let them spend more time with the family." In fact, many men are home—in some country areas, I am told—on a Sunday because the bar is closed. They drink on Saturday or right after collecting the pay cheque on Friday. It is unfortunate, but it is a fact. They spend a fair amount of the pay cheque at the local rum shop and then they go home with what is left. Putting one day more of the week in which this is a possible thing to do, what does this do for the money that would otherwise be taken home? Already it is depleted and left at the watering hole.

I had heard some reports—I was not able to substantiate them and I really hope that I am wrong; I think it was the Supermarkets' Association that said something to the effect that, "if you allow us to sell alcohol on Sundays, the prices of food will go down." If that is true—and I really hope that it is not a true statement—I would hope that this particular measure that we are debating is not caused by that particular statement. In fact, such a statement goes against itself, because the family budget is a finite thing.

2.30 p.m.

If prices of food come down, but at the same time one is able to purchase more alcohol, then the net effect is quite questionable. In fact, it is quite possible, for those who are at risk, that more of the family's budget for the wives, children,

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school books, shoes or gas for the car would be reduced as the disposable income would have been disposed of. In fact, it would have been drunk.

Mr. Speaker, there is the regrettable incidence of domestic violence in our society, and this Government saw the wisdom in developing on those programmes which would mitigate against the whole business of domestic violence, and continued with polices previously laid down.

I am on record as saying—and I say it again—that families in this nation that do get together, in fact, do so on Sundays and public holidays, if on no other day. It is my humble submission that the increased supply of alcohol on those days—for families at risk to domestic violence who get together—in fact, may serve to encourage that type of activity. In fact, it may serve in some circumstances to negate the effects of the good work of the civil servants of the Ministry of Social Development, the churches and the police. If that were to happen, it would, in fact, make a mockery of this Government's policy.

Mr. Speaker, I want to know who would really benefit from this measure. That is not clear at all. Is it the supermarket owners or the manufacturers of various alcoholic beverages? I am at a loss to see how this would be a benefit to the national economy, the families of this nation, the youth of this nation and, in fact, the very Government itself.

Again, if I were to refer to Proverbs 20 verse 1—and I crave the indulgence of those who do not think that this is, in fact, a holy book—which says that:

“Wine is a mocker, strong drink a riotous brawler; and whoever errs or reels because of it is not wise.”

Mr. Speaker, I put it to hon. Members that this measure is, in fact, a mockery of the people and of Government's plans, and, in fact, it is not wise.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mrs. Camille Robinson-Regis (*Arouca South*): Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak very briefly on the matter before the House today which, if and when it is passed, will have an impact on three main concerns in Trinidad and Tobago as we see it: employment practices; alcoholism and its attendant maladies and the sanctity of Sundays and religious holidays.

Mr. Speaker, this measure will result in shops of all types being free to be open every and any day at all times—particularly, groceries or supermarkets—being allowed to sell alcohol on a Sunday and on religious holidays in a country

such as Trinidad and Tobago, which has been hailed as a very religious country. Consequently, it seems passing strange to me that one of the first parliamentary actions of this coalition Government is to ensure that alcohol can be sold from any and every shop, grocery or supermarket on Sundays and religious holidays.

Indeed, Mr. Speaker, one would recall that this intent was signalled in the budget which was brought before this honourable House on January 10.

The question must be asked: Where is the sanctity of Sundays and religious holidays? The argument has been made by the Member for St. Joseph that persons who want alcohol may still obtain it for use on those days—which cannot be denied. Does this practice mean that the state should actively encourage the sale of alcohol on Sundays and public holidays?

The argument has also been made that the present law is archaic as rumshops can sell alcohol but not supermarkets, and that this is merely levelling the playing field. Is this really what this Motion is seeking to do? Or, is it a situation of the Government succumbing to the demands of another facet of the group that the Member for Couva North, our hon. Prime Minister, once described as the parasitic oligarchy?

Mr. Speaker, in 1992 the Member for Couva North was of the distinct impression that the business community was in total control of the economy when he said—

"...the election was really about a struggle to decide who would control the economy—whether it will be those who constitute what I call the parasitic oligarchy, that small group that wants no real change in the *status quo*, and who are prepared only to hand out crumbs to keep the howling masses at bay, or whether for the next five years, the economy was going to be controlled by those representatives of the vast majority of the population—"

I am now asking whether, in fact, this, as stated by the Member for Couva North is his true feeling about controlling the economy? Is it that he now feels that he must pander to the parasitic oligarchy in order to maintain election promises?

The issue of the sale of alcohol is not purely an issue of sale; it is even more so an issue of accessibility. A person may not want to be seen coming out of a rumshop, particularly, on a Sunday, but there is no problem with that same person being seen coming out of a grocery with his alcohol. Abuse of alcohol has been seen as an integral aspect of many of the unfortunate incidents of domestic violence as they exist in our country. Domestic violence is an issue which is

plaguing our country, and the abuse of alcohol has been seen as part and parcel of incidents of domestic violence.

2.40 p.m.

My colleague mentioned motor vehicle accidents. We have seen the abuse of alcohol as an integral part of motor vehicle accidents and road fatalities. This measure, as simple as it may seem, may in fact have several repercussions.

This coalition which is prone to vacillation may within a couple weeks or days change its mind even about this action which it is now apparently taking. The Government took away the import duties; the TTMA and Chamber of Commerce spoke and it was returned. The Government took away Easter Monday; the Tobagonians spoke and their representatives awoke from their apparent slumber in the Cabinet, the Government spoke to the Government and Easter Monday was returned. The library project was stopped and now the Government says it is only a temporary cessation. An Attorney General was appointed and now there are whispers that we may have a new Attorney General. [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: That is bothering you.

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: It is not bothering me, but I am sure it is bothering you.

The Government told the voters to give themselves a chance and every day it seems that we are continuously on the wheels of uncertainty and indecision. We do not know if we are moving to the left or moving to the right; if we are going down south or indeed if we are going up north. [*Desk thumping*] I trust that the Minister of Trade and Industry who is also the Minister of Consumer Affairs, the Member for St. Joseph, my representative has taken time to understand that consumer organizations have been quite vociferous in the concerns raised about the use and abuse of tobacco and drugs, including alcohol.

In the Green Paper prepared by the previous government entitled *A Consumer Policy for Trinidad and Tobago*, one issue of major concern was tobacco and drugs. Permit me to quote very briefly from that document. Page 24 states:

“Principle

- (a) Consumers are entitled to be protected from the risks of injury caused by exposure to tobacco and to be

aware of the harmful effects of the use of tobacco, alcohol and drugs.”

As one of the priorities of any Ministry of Consumer Affairs the document listed:

- “(a) To develop and maintain programmes which will assist consumers to promote healthy life styles and to produce educational campaign materials for consumers;
- (d) To introduce legislation to ensure advertising in all media of tobacco and alcohol includes statements regarding risks involved in their usage.”

I trust that this Minister of Consumer Affairs, as he has done with several other proposals of the previous administration regarding consumer affairs, would be inclined to implement this policy and perhaps do his own consultations. Then again, even though this coalition of the NAR and UNC has said it will consult, it has not shown that it is really going to do so. Clearly, the Member for Couva North, the hon. Prime Minister has not been consulting. If he had consulted with the representatives for Tobago East and Tobago West he would not have taken away the Easter Monday holiday in the first place. Surely, if he had consulted with the Member for Nariva, the Minister of Labour and Co-operatives, he would have known how to relate to the media and that a Prime Minister cannot order a private newspaper to terminate the employment of one of its employees.

I am very concerned because perhaps the Member for Couva North got carried away by the goodwill of the people of Trinidad and Tobago; this goodwill which is normally extended to any new administration and more particularly, to a new prime minister. He may have perceived that goodwill incorrectly and therefore got carried away resulting in his trying to bulldoze his way around. I hope for the sake of the office of Prime Minister that he would adhere to the Constitution which enshrines the freedom of the press and allows the freedom of the press. I also hope that he would withdraw the ban on the *Trinidad Guardian*, but if however this is not to be done, I would advise Mr. Madeira to secure the advice of someone who can champion his human rights. Member for Couva South, maybe you can assist. [*Desk thumping*]

As I refer to rights, I must take this opportunity to make a brief reference to the effect this amendment may have on employment practices. Research has shown that in the 1930s the first record of women going on strike in Trinidad and Tobago was when an attempt was made to change the working hours of shop

attendants, the majority of whom were females. They had stopped working because the hours were extended; they were not being properly compensated and their health and the welfare of their families began to suffer. I ask the hon. Member for St. Joseph to ensure that there is no abuse of the extension of the hours and that persons are adequately compensated if they have to work on Sundays or for extended hours.

This legislation must not result in deleterious effects on the society. Its implementation and effect as it relates to alcohol consumption, employment practices and maintenance of the sanctity of Sundays and religious holidays must be carefully monitored. This coalition has been aptly described as a “vaps” government. We see evidence of this every day. I trust that this Motion, if it is enacted will not be an activity as signalled in the budget which is not properly policed, and it will not be seen as another one of those decisions made in an effort to curry favour another section of the population.

2.50 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to make the point that we have heard scripture quoted by the Member for St. Joseph, but indeed, even the devil can quote scripture. Let me make it clear that I am not terming my representative a devil. I am just indicating that anyone can quote scripture, even the devil.

Sometimes people refer to the *Bible* and open it on any page as long as it backs up what they want to say, and if there is not a clear understanding of the *Bible*, we may get ourselves in serious trouble.

I would like to make two further points before I take my seat. I would like to point out to the House that in accordance with the first report of the Regulations Committee of the House of Representatives, there has been a query raised with regard to the retroactivity of this Motion that is before the House. The contention is that the Motion should have been brought before the Regulations Committee of the House—*[Interruption]* I have desisted from saying that it contravenes; I am now saying that the Motion should have been brought before the Regulations Committee, in accordance with Standing Order No. 76, before it was laid before the House. *[Interruption]* I am saying that the Regulations Committee is concerned about the retroactivity of the Motion which is now before the House.

In closing, I reiterate that I am trusting that this legislation is carefully monitored because it can have deleterious effects on our society. I would also like

to crave your indulgence and leave several words of advice for the Members on the other side. I quote:

“For the past decade this country has been searching for change. ... If perchance they should come to the conclusion that this too is not change, the kind of change they have been longing for, then the consequences are inevitable.

It is a pity that the new Prime Minister should begin his career by trying to convince the population ... that there will be no real change in the way things were done in the past. What at this stage appears to be an asset, his ‘nice boy’ image, may well turn out to be his greatest liability, if it is eventually seen as a cover-up for fear to take decisive action.”

I commend these words to the hon. Member for Couva South, our hon. Prime Minister and the other Members of the Government. *[Interruption]* I do not know if the Member for Tobago West has some concern. He is our hon. Prime Minister. I do not know if she has some doubt about that. I hope not. Once he is the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, he is honourable. These words have come from the mouth of the Member for Couva North in his contribution to the Appropriation Bill, 1992. I think he should take these words to heart.

I thank you.

Mr. Colm Imbert (*Diego Martin East*): Mr. Speaker, the Motion before the House deals with the amendment to the Shop Act. Specifically, the Member for St. Joseph, the Minister of Trade and Industry, was very careful to skirt around the real purpose of this Motion. This essentially is an amendment to allow persons to sell rum on Sundays. The Member went all around the world; he went to Japan and back talking about opening business and so forth, but this is an amendment to sell rum on Sundays.

Every time I have to talk after the Member for St. Joseph, I have to tell him—and I will tell him again—that the quality of one’s contribution is measured, not by the volume, but by the content. The quality of one’s contribution is not measured by the decibel level, it is measured by what one says. I am recommending to the Member for St. Joseph, as one who is a little more experienced in Parliament than he, that he tones it down. With all these sarcastic words, carrying on, ranting and raving, the Member for St. Joseph will very shortly become the joker of this Parliament.

The whole point is that I would have preferred that the Minister, in his presentation, had come on a different tact. He demonstrated complete ignorance of christian traditions. I find it very curious that in a previous session in this honourable House I raised the point of the imbalance of the Members on that side and the imbalance of the social make-up of the Cabinet. I specifically referred to Christians and Catholics and asked the question how many Christians and Catholics were on that side.

I was reading page 7 of today's *Daily Express*. I was shocked. Listen to this! Do you know the story of Pinnochio, Mr. Speaker? Some people's noses will really grow.

“Finance Minister, Brian Kuei Tung says he is reasonably satisfied with the performance of Prime Minister Basdeo Panday so far.”

Well, he has to say that or he will be fired.

“In an interview published in this week's *Catholic News*, the Minister offered a very cautious assessment of the country's leader and firmly denied reports that he ‘bought’ himself the Finance Minister. (sic)”

Methinks he protests too much. Let me quote:

“‘I have come into government more unwilling than most people think.’”

He goes into the vernacular, now.

“‘Some people think I buy a ministry. I eh buy no ministry,’ Kuei Tung said.”

What amazed me about this article, Mr. Speaker is that it has relevance to this Motion.

“The Minister also spoke at length about his Catholic upbringing during the interview. He said all of his actions were guided by his religious background.”

Mr. Speaker, anybody who knows that fellow and knows his background and his present action would be astonished to read such a statement coming from the Minister.

3.00 p.m.

“Kuei Tung cited two of his recent budget measures—the sale of liquor on Sundays and the three-day marriage licences— ...

He explained: ‘In both cases I have had to moralise and my Catholic upbringing in no way came into conflict with the decisions I have had to take.

The Minister said he would continue to abide by the teachings of the Catholic Church...”

Mr. Speaker, that is an absolute charade, but I will leave that to other Members.

It is amazing, one raises the composition of the Cabinet and all of a sudden, the Member for St. Joseph is the biggest Catholic ever, and Mr. Kuei Tung, the hon. Minister of Finance, moralizes because of his deep religious upbringing. Do not make me laugh, Mr. Speaker. Do not make me laugh!

If the hon. Member for St. Joseph had taken two minutes to talk to any priest, pastor or any other person involved in religious ministries, he would have understood the reason for the celebration of the Sabbath. My colleague, the Member for Port of Spain South has expanded on it in his own religious way. In simple terms, if one reads Genesis in the *Bible*—I wonder if he has ever read Genesis, it is in the beginning in the *Bible*—one would see that God took six days to make the world and he rested on the seventh day. That is what the Catholic Church has preached.

The Member for St. Joseph went as far back as 1966 and the answer was right there in the article he quoted, but he did not understand it. The Catholic Church has preached that the Sabbath should be a day of rest, it should be different to the other days. Different religions have different Sabbaths. I believe the Sabbath for some Muslims is on Friday; the Jewish is on Saturday, other religious groups have different Sabbaths. The Christian churches have preached for years that Sunday, which is their Sabbath, should be set aside as a day of rest. As the Minister quite rightly read from that 1966 *Catholic News* article in his presentation—but he did not understand it—the Catholic Church is opposed to commerce, business, the whole question of working on the Sabbath. The reason being that Sunday should be a day for reflection, renewing of family ties—the family is one of the most important building blocks in the society—this is why

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the Christian churches have always asked that Sunday be set apart from all other days.

Businesses in this country lobbied for many years for a relaxation of the restrictions in the Shop Act. The supermarket, in particular, lobbied for the opening of supermarkets on Sundays and after many years this came to pass. As a concession—again, if the Minister had done his homework he would have understood—to the Christian churches, supermarkets agreed not to sell alcohol on Sundays, hence the reason, in the recent past supermarkets opened on Sundays but did not sell alcohol.

The Minister has demonstrated complete ignorance of the religious and social composition and the history of Trinidad and Tobago, that is why I have called this Government “a cavalier”, “a vaps” Government and they are, in fact, a “vaps” Government. Look at what they did with Easter Monday. Where is the Member for Tobago East? It is amazing! The Member for Couva North came into this House last week and spoke about a decision of the Cabinet—of which the Member for Tobago East is a very influential Member and the Member for Tobago West, maybe not as influential—to give a holiday to the Baptist community and to take away Easter Monday. The Members for Tobago East and West were in the Parliament and said nothing. When the Member for Couva North said Easter Monday had to go, they banged the table. It took the PNM Members to make the point in the House last Monday that the removal of Easter Monday betrayed total ignorance of the social and religious composition of the peoples of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

I noticed in the press release which came from that side yesterday they said, in recognition of the social and religious composition of the country they are putting back Easter Monday—words to that effect. “Vaps” Government, Mr. Speaker. Do you know what a “vaps” is, Mr. Speaker? A “vaps” is the first thing that comes into one’s mind and is done. I do not know whether the Members for Tobago East and West really did not agree with the Cabinet’s decision or whether they were out-voted and then they had to find an excuse to make noise—[*Interruption*]

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

Standing Order 36(1) says:

“Subject to the provisions of Standing Order No. 12...debate upon any motion, Bill or amendment shall be relevant to such motion, Bill or

amendment, and a Member shall confine his observations to the subject under discussion.”

As I understand it the Business of the House at the moment is Motion No. 1. It is my respectful view that the observations of the Member for Diego Martin East have no relevance to the matter being dealt with.

Mr. Speaker: In a sense, the Member is relevant. I therefore rule that the point of order is not valid. *[Desk thumping]*

Mr. C. Imbert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, another “vaps” point of order from the other side. I can see why the Member for Couva South will soon replace the Member for Siparia. *[Laughter] [Desk thumping]* Who drafted this Order, Mr. Speaker, was it the Attorney General? Set up! Set up! Let me read the Order for the Attorney General:

“*Whereas* it is provided by section 5(1) of the Shop (Hours of Opening and Employment) Act, 84:02 that the Minister may, if he thinks fit, make an Order (hereinafter called a “Shop Order”) fixing the hours on the several days of the week, including Sundays and public holidays,...”

I am talking about public holidays and the sale of alcohol on public holidays.

3.10 p.m.

Before I was rudely interrupted, as I said, Mr. Speaker, the Member for Tobago East, perhaps, was not in favour of the decision to remove Easter Monday and was outvoted in the Cabinet and looked for an excuse—so forget the Christians, forget the religious significance of Easter Monday; forget the fact that the law of this country states that if a holiday falls on a Sunday it is celebrated on a Monday. When the tourism industry sector in Tobago made noise the Member for Tobago East then said, “put back Easter Monday”. No problem, I do not mind. I do not know why he is not more influential in the Cabinet.

The fact is, the Member for Port of Spain South made the point that many traffic accidents occur as a result of drunken driving. If one goes into the statistics which the Minister of Trade obviously has not, one will see that many of our traffic accidents and in fact many of our fatal traffic accidents take place on public holidays as a result of drunken driving. So that this is not a trivial matter, Member for St. Joseph. I find that many of the Members on the other side tend to trivialize serious matters. The celebration of public holidays is a very serious matter.

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Easter Monday is a Christian festival, but before the emergence of the Christian religion there was the celebration of the spring festival. As a matter of fact, the celebration of the coming of spring in the end of the first quarter of the new year is one of the oldest and most important public festivals in the world. The celebration of a holiday at that time of the year has a long history of thousands of years, probably as long as mankind itself. Therefore, the Member should understand that Easter Monday has to be included and now the Member comes with this Order allowing the sale of alcohol on Easter Monday. That is the effect of this Order, and that is why I am dealing with public holidays for your information, Member for Siparia.

The Member for St. Joseph also, as far as I could interpret, appeared to be attacking the thinking of the Catholic Church, when he quoted from the Scriptures and spoke about church bazaars and the sale of alcohol in church bazaars and so forth. Really, that is not something I would like to encourage. Even though he is a Member of the other side, I would recommend to him that he does not attack any of the religious bodies in Trinidad and Tobago for his own benefit. The fact is, he quoted from the Scriptures. There is a particular book, I do not have a copy with me, it says, "for evil to flourish and survive it must closely resemble good". I am reminded of a story of someone who lived in Nazi Germany during World War II; this is a very informative story pertaining to the persecution of various religious and ethnic minorities in Nazi Germany at that time. It says, "they came for the Jews and I was not a Jew, so I said, nothing; they came for the Poles and I was not Polish, so I said nothing; they came for the Czechs and I was not a Czechoslovakian, so I said, nothing; and then they came for me". That is the whole point, for evil to survive it must closely resemble good. When I see the machinations of the Member for Couva South I am reminded of that book—evil closely resembling good.

Let me turn to today's *Daily Express* on page 9 which states:

"The Prime Minister and the mask. Is the mask slipping?"

If the Member for Siparia wants to stand again, let me give her the relevance right away. There is an alleged quote by the Prime Minister—he did not really say this, "well nobody could vex with me for dropping Easter Monday". It states:

"Can Mr. Panday hack it?"

Or to put the question more elaborately:

Confronted by the demands of government rather than opposition, numbed by the manner in which he has seen practically every new government initiative attacked and, subsequently overturned (imagine him the night before the announcement saying: 'Well, nobody could vex with me for dropping Easter Monday'), is Mr. Panday, drowning in a sea of troubles, flailing out in all directions? Is my old mentor, Mr. Best, right as usual and did this new administration take power already in a state of pre-collapse?

And does this explain why Mr. Panday is so quick to label any contrary opinion as "racist"? If, indeed this UNC-NAR coalition government does collapse, is Mr. Panday already planning to con his national constituency into believing that he and his people came to grief not because they came to office ill-prepared with the means of governing but because of a racist conspiracy against which he has been struggling all life long?"

Again, Mr. Speaker, this brings me to my point—[*Interruption*] So the *Express* is PNM too?

Hon. Member: Yes. [*Interruption*]

Mr. C. Imbert: Oh! [*Laughter*] Mr. Speaker, a "vaps" statement, from a "vaps" Minister to be in a "vaps" Government. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Gentlemen, I think we need to control ourselves a little more so that we can get on with the matter.

Mr. C. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, I have to keep coming back to the point that this is a "vaps" Government, that the whole question of the opening up of the sale of alcohol on Sunday is a "vaps". The behaviour of the hon. Member for Couva North to the media is a "vaps", I do not think that is the mask slipping at all, I think it is a "vaps". He said the first thing that came into his mind. He saw an editorial that he did not like, and all he could do was jump up and violently attack the Editor of the *Trinidad Guardian*.

Just as in the Opposition, if one goes into the records in this Parliament, the *Hansard* is replete with vicious and violent attacks on the media by the Member for Couva North. I remember sitting in this Parliament not too long ago and hearing the Member for Couva North say on more than one occasion, again a

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"vaps", that the Editor of the *Trinidad Guardian* is a drug dealer. He said it at least twice in my presence in this Parliament. Mr. Speaker, now the Editor of the *Trinidad Guardian* is a racist. Now the *Daily Express* is PNM because it has attacked the UNC and the hon. Prime Minister; very, very interesting.

3.20 p.m

Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague, the Member for Port of Spain South, gave the Member for St. Joseph some religious teaching a short while ago, when he gave him the exact quote from Matthew about whatever comes out of the mouth, comes from the heart, and the true face of the Member for Couva North is now apparent. Whatever comes from the mouth, comes from the heart. The point is, that what this Government is doing, is an incremental erosion of the fundamental rights and freedom and the societal norms and practices of the people of this country. Day by day, what this "vaps" Government is doing is eating away at societal norms and the many practices and traditions that we in this country take for granted, and that is why I come back to my analogy of the person in Nazi Germany who said: "They came for the Jews and I said nothing. They came for the Poles and I said nothing. And then they came for me."

I want to warn this country, this Government is not yet three months old and look at the way it is behaving. Look at its anti-democratic behaviour; its intolerance for large groups in this society; its behaviour in the budget debate—a deliberate strategy by the Member for Couva South to ensure that the contributions of the Members on this side were not heard by the national community, a deliberate plot by that master strategist—or so he thinks. A scheme, as I said, evil closely resembling good; that is what it is all about. And it is an incremental progression.

First, they tamper with the traditions of this Parliament. There has never been an occasion in the history of this country—even in the legislature that predated the independent Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago—where a government or ruling side sought to suppress the legitimate contributions of the Opposition. Never in the history of this country! Never! They took Easter Monday, they put it back because someone made noise; now they are threatening the press.

Mr. Speaker, I remember when one day an editorial in the *Trinidad Guardian* annoyed the Member for Couva South and he got up in Parliament and said that when they come into power they are going to pass a law to license media houses

and if they do not come good there would be no licence for them. That is the essence of what the Member for Couva South said. He cannot deny it.

Let me return to the sale of alcohol. The last PNM administration was in power for four years and many times the whole concept and question of the sale of alcohol came up before the Cabinet. We had serious discussions on the matter and at the end of the day, we bowed to the expressions, feelings, and requirements of the Christian community. That was always the reason that we did not proceed with the sale of alcohol on Sundays and public holidays. It is not a new matter, it came up many times. As a matter of fact, the hon. Minister of Finance was the one who brought it up, but we thought about it, we deliberated, we looked at it and decided not to do it—four years. They are in office for two months—“vaps”, they do it. What is the next “vaps”? We have to be very, very careful.

It is interesting to hear what the Members on the other side are saying, and how they are operating. I am beginning to wonder what this country will be like in 1997 if this Government is still in power. Under the administration of the Member for Tobago East, the 1986—1991 period, as bad as that administration was, I do not think there were any citizens in this country who felt unsafe or physically threatened in any way. As bad as it was, I do not think they had crossed that line. In less than three months, this Government has crossed the line and that is why in such a cavalier, flippant manner, they could sell alcohol on Sundays and come here and pretend that it is to generate employment. What absolute nonsense! It is like the seller of used motor cars—to generate employment. Employment for whom? Car thieves? For whom are you generating employment by selling alcohol on Sundays? It is totally illogical, and that is why I wish the Member for St. Joseph had brought a different line of argument.

There are many times a government does things which are not popular but which it believes are correct. The way one deals with issues like that is not to come here and “cuss” everybody. Excuse the language. It is not to come here and lambaste everyone, and rant and rave, and anyone who disagrees with you is a racist or wants to commit violence or something like that. This is the approach of this Government. If one does not agree with them—violence! If one does not agree with them—racist! If one does not agree with them—they will deal with you! A government should not act like that, Mr. Speaker.

If the Christian community has raised the question of the sale of alcohol on Sundays, the way to deal with it is not to carry on about how they sell alcohol in

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their bazaars and so forth, that is not becoming of a Member of the Government. I know that the Member for St. Joseph does not listen to anyone, I hope he will listen to you, Mr. Speaker. I certainly hope that you can prevail upon him. So that on the next occasion when the Minister of Trade and Industry comes into this House to bring a measure that he will do proper research. He should not come here and beat his chest and talk about how Catholic he is, one is judged by one's actions, not by one's words.

I was reading in the newspaper about someone who wants to follow his deeply religious background and Christian traditions and so forth. One is not judged by the mouthings, the nonsense that one tells people; one is judged by one's actions. If one is truly virtuous and is a person of integrity, then he would be judged by what he does, not by what he says.

I return to this whole question of this “vaps” Government that talks about being a government of consensus and national unity. I have seen a new definition of consensus over the last month, the definition of national consensus as defined by the UNC/NAR Government—it should be called UNC, there is hardly any NAR there. When one reads the newspapers, all the NAR people are griping about not getting on this state board, and this one is not talking to them, and they did not get a centre, they have no one in the Cabinet, and the political leader not coming to the meeting and so forth. It is a UNC Government.

When one looks at the behaviour of this Government, they do something—“vaps”, and they wait to hear who is making noise. That is what they call consensus. It is the consensus of the noise. They catch a “vaps”, they do something, and they wait and listen. Oh! This one is making noise. Let us put back Easter Monday. The consensus is to put back Easter Monday? All right, we will put it back. No consultation! They are not consulting first, they are consulting afterwards. They do what they have to do, consult afterwards. This is the administration, when in Opposition, that accused the PNM of not dealing with the population in the proper manner; of not consulting; of not getting national consensus; of the worst forms of everything; of political patronage, nepotism and so forth.

As I was reading the article on the interview of the Minister of Finance of how Catholic he is and I looked below, something just struck my eye and, if you will allow me, I will take a look at it again. I see on page 7 of today's *Daily Express* that one of the financiers of the UNC is now head of the National Gas

Corporation. I have no problem with anyone supporting any government you know. If someone wants to support the UNC, let him go ahead. The problem is when Government starts to appoint these people to the Finance Ministry and some of the most powerful and influential corporations in the country—all I am waiting for is the third financier of the UNC to be made chairman of Tidco. So, Brian gets finance, Steve gets energy and Ish gets tourism.

3.30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Is the hon. Member still on the Shop (Opening Hours) (Amdt.) Order?

Mr. C. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, thank you for allowing me to continue.

The point I am making is that the action of this Government before even three months have elapsed, just going straight ahead and legalizing the sale of alcohol on Sundays is such a cavalier, “vaps” approach. No consultation! I am just drawing reference to other actions of the Government to support my theory that this is a “vaps” government, that they do things which they do not think through; they just get a “vaps” and do the first thing which comes into their minds.

Let us go back, Mr. Speaker. I want the Minister of Trade, Industry and Consumer Affairs to prove to me that there is no link between fatal traffic accidents on public holidays and the sale of alcohol on those days. He seems to believe that this measure will do nothing. People buy alcohol on Saturdays and during the week. They can go into a special restaurant and buy alcohol or they have it home. We are a very spontaneous society. On many occasions we may be driving down the road and then, “Aha, I did not bring the rum”—but it is Sunday so one cannot go into the supermarket and buy it. This measure is removing all restriction, and that brings me back to my point.

When the supermarkets were allowed to open on Sundays, the concession to the religious community was that they would not sell alcohol on Sundays. Now, that concession is totally gone.

The Member for St. Joseph apparently supports the conducting of business 24 hours per day, seven days per week no matter what it is. He said so. That is against the teachings of the Christian church. Pick one side! It is either one is with the Christian church or against it. There is no in-between. He agrees with working 24 hours per day seven days per week but he is a Christian too. It does

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not work like that. It is either one subscribes to the principles or one does not. You cannot pick what you do not like.

When you are a member of a religious body, you cannot say, well, I agree with this but I do not agree with that. I have a rum shop so I am a good Christian selling alcohol on a Sunday. It does not work like that. The Members on the other side who are members of the Muslim faith will know how serious members of that faith are about their religious teachings. They are very serious about it. I would not have expected a member of the Muslim faith to make the flippant comments of the Member for St. Joseph; at least, one of the Members on that side. I would not have expected a good Christian to make the flippant comments that the Member for St. Joseph made.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to reinforce my point to the Member for St. Joseph that empty vessels make the most noise. [*Desk thumping*]. When I look at what he said, "alcohol is sold during the week, so what is the big deal"? Then he talked about being a Christian! He does not understand the meaning of the Sabbath.

It is the usual superficial approach of this Government to very serious and fundamental matters. They do not stand for anything. They believe in nothing. They do not adhere to any principles. Anything! That is why the Member for Couva South could take the job of the Member for Siparia even though he said in an interview that it would take him a year to wind up his law practice. Two months later, he discovers that he could hand over all the matters to somebody else; but that is after the Member for Tobago East acted as Prime Minister in the absence of the Member for Couva North. If one is not a minister one cannot act as Prime Minister.

Hon. Member: He has to pay the Jamaat.

Mr. C. Imbert: The superficiality of that administration is coming through more and more.

Hon. Member: What about Saith?

Mr. C. Imbert: He was a minister. I do not think you understand. Do you know what is a minister? Somebody in the Cabinet. That is the definition of a minister.

Mr. Speaker: Quite apart from the fact that the Member was just doing something he should not be doing, the speaking time of the hon. Member has expired.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. C. Imbert: I thank hon. Members on the other side and you, Mr. Speaker, for your generosity in allowing me an extension of time.

When one looks at page 9 of the newspaper, it talks about the Prime Minister and his mask. Is the mask slipping? I think it is, and more and more the population is beginning to see the superficiality and lack of thoroughness of this new administration.

As a matter of fact, this urgency to remove the prohibition of the sale of alcohol on Sundays—there are so many other matters to deal with, why should we be in this Parliament debating this today? Today, a member of the public made the point when he learnt that this was the item on the agenda: What is wrong with this Government? They have been in power for nearly three months and they are doing nothing, taking no action. The country is at a total standstill. That is why one hears rumours about a foreign exchange crisis. People have no confidence in the system because they are looking at what this Government is doing. Instead of coming here with serious matters, they come here to remove the prohibition for the sale of alcohol on Sundays. That is why there is capital flight, and a slow-down in investment decisions. The investment climate in Trinidad and Tobago has changed since November 6; it has deteriorated. They can get any number of people they want to get up and say that Trinidad and Tobago is fine under this administration, the people know different.

I wonder what would be the next action of this “vaps” government, Mr. Speaker. I really, really wonder because they are pandering to sectoral interests. I wonder what takes place in those Cabinet discussions. What goes on? Who makes the point? When this issue came up, what were the arguments for and against, were there any discussions at all? One wonders what goes on. Somebody says let us do this and the Cabinet says, yea, that is a good idea. Like with the removal of Easter Monday, somebody says, let us remove Easter Monday and the Cabinet says, yea, that is a good idea let us do that. Then, when the point is made that that is a bad move—the next thing they would say is let us remove Boxing Day; and now the racing fraternity is up in arms, they say do not touch Boxing Day because that is the biggest horse racing day in the year. So they go to Republic Day.

Mr. Panday: They would say do not touch that either.

Mr. C. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, what they did not understand is the problem which the PNM had for years with the whole question of holidays. Which one to take away; there are conflicting objectives. One does not want to increase the number of holidays in the country but one does not want to take away any holiday. Of course, they deserve a holiday. That is why governments have struggled—even the government of the Member for Tobago East—with the question of public holidays. During the tenure of the Member for Tobago East, I do not recall any new holidays—the Member can correct me if I am wrong.

The fact of the matter is, it is something that governments have struggled with for years. The argument comes from the business community that there should not be too many holidays because it affects productivity, but then the argument comes from all the various interest groups that they want certain holidays. That is why it takes so long for decisions to be made.

3.40 p.m.

Finally, the Government has given the Baptists a holiday, which I support and endorse and I want to make that absolutely clear.

As I said in this House—and I am going to repeat it—in the debate on the Committee's Report on Public Holidays, I supported giving the Baptists a holiday, [*Interruption*] and the Member for Oropouche could rant and rave and misbehave and distort the truth as much as he wants, the *Hansard* record is there. This Member for Diego Martin East supported the giving of a holiday to the Baptists. Go into the *Hansard* and check it out.

Mr. Sudama: You opposed it!

Mr. C. Imbert: The fact is, Mr. Speaker, as I said, in Cabinet what happens when they have to deliberate on these matters—in the past, with other governments, Cabinet meetings only took a few hours. This Government meets for six and seven hours and look at the kind of decisions they make. Take away Easter Monday! Sell alcohol on Sundays! Look at the time that they take. [*Interruptions*]

Mr. Speaker, if it were a professional Cabinet it would understand that a lot of the preparatory work can be done before the actual meeting, and that the discussion at the meeting could be more focused. [*Interruptions*] If the preparatory research work was done, the decisions would make a lot more sense. That is why I think they have so easily agreed to this Motion, and to the sale of alcohol on Sundays because they have done no study of the amount of traffic

accidents on a public holiday. They have done no research on the number of traffic accidents that are related to drunk driving on a public holiday. If the Member for St. Joseph had checked that out, he would have found out that many of the traffic accidents on public holidays are caused by drunk drivers. [*Desk thumping*] They have done no research on it at all! If the Member for St. Joseph had done research on the reason why the Christian Church did not want the sale of alcohol on Sundays, he would have understood the meaning of the Sabbath, but he does not understand.

That is why he can be so condescending and so “holier than thou,” “high and mighty” and pious in this Parliament. He can talk down to everybody in this Parliament about the meaning of the Sabbath. That is what he did, because when he said “all of those churches”—in his usual sneering, sarcastic way—“all of those churches sell alcohol.” Let me try and imitate his accent. [*Mimicking Member for St. Joseph*] “All of those churches sell alcohol on Sunday, so what’s the big deal.” [*Laughter*] He could be so condescending, Mr. Speaker, [*Interruptions*] because he does not understand the responsibility that comes with holding a ministerial appointment.

One is there to serve the people—to serve all the people. That is why, Mr. Speaker, I cannot support this Motion. I cannot support the cavalier behaviour of this Government. I cannot support the vituperation and violent tendencies of the Member for Couva North. I cannot support the violent attack of the Member for Couva North on the media. [*Interruptions*] I cannot support the vacillation, the prevarication of this Government—do one thing today, another thing tomorrow. Wait and hear who makes the most noise and then decide on policy. A government cannot run a country like that, Mr. Speaker. They must formulate their own policy.

Mr. Maharaj: You are jealous because you lost.

Mr. C. Imbert: They must believe in their policy and must carry out their policy.

Mr. Maharaj: You lost the election. You will lose again.

Mr. C. Imbert: I hope, Mr. Speaker, that the Government of this country does not descend into a state of collapse where whatever they hear from the population they do. Whoever makes the most noise, they follow the recommended course of action. I am truly hoping that this Government has not, in fact, already collapsed. [*Interruptions*] As a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago I am

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hoping for the sake of the state, for the sake of my family and for all right-thinking citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, that this Government has not descended into a state of collapse, as did the administration of the Member for Tobago East in the 1989 period—

Miss Nicholson: Led by the PNM.

Mr. C. Imbert: In 1989, Mr. Speaker, the Government of the former administration collapsed. That is when the Member for Couva North went off on his own and formed a splinter group and this country had to suffer through two and a half years. Suffer under a Government that had collapsed for two and a half years. Two months into administration they have already collapsed.

Mr. Maharaj: Your campaign manager joined us.

Mr. C. Imbert: If the UNC decides to drag this country through purgatory for the next five years—to drag it out until the year 2000 and hold an election in that year, then the country will be five years under a government that has already collapsed. God alone knows what is in store for the people of this country under that UNC Government.

Mr. Panday: Happiness, prosperity, lower prices, lower taxes.

Mr. C. Imbert: When the rumours came about the sale of alcohol, a Christian, a deeply religious person called me to ask me to make these points in the debate today. During the conversation they referred to the rumour of the impending ascension of the Member for Couva South to the Attorney General's office; and they were afraid.

Mr. Maharaj: Chill in their bones!

Mr. C. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, do you know what they asked me? Is there any legal mechanism to prevent the Member for Couva South, the Adviser to the Cabinet or whatever it is, from becoming Attorney General? *[Interruptions]* The people in this country are genuinely afraid of him. All these actions that we are seeing—the removal of Easter Monday; the sale of alcohol on Sunday—

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, it is becoming obvious that the descriptive scene is being set by some of the more experienced Members of the House, so much so that the more junior Members are now honestly believing that the way in which they should carry on when Members are on their legs and speaking is by

the example of the experienced ones. I believe that we need to re-think that, please.

Mr. Maharaj: We apologize.

3.50 p.m.

Mr. C. Imbert: I was venturing my opinion that much of this mischief that is permeating the actions of the Government is an undercurrent coming from the Member for Couva South. That is my view. That is why I believe he sits in the Cabinet, to ensure that certain decisions are taken, without taking an oath of secrecy or subscribing to the rule of secrecy of Cabinet doctrines. That is why he sits there, so that he can influence certain decisions.

Mr. Speaker, you are an experienced parliamentarian; an experienced man, I know you know that these things build up, they add up over the years. It is called incremental progression, and one day the dam just breaks. I am warning this Government, that if they keep it up, keep trampling on the fundamental rights and freedoms of the people of this country; keep dealing with the people of this country in a cavalier fashion, on the next occasion that an election is called, the people will deal with them, in a democratic fashion.

Hon. Member: As they have done with you!

Mr. C. Imbert: I truly hope that the Member for Couva North does not make the mistake of appointing the Member for Couva South as Attorney General. I am not saying so because I have any fond regard for the Member for Siparia, not at all; it is simply that the Member for Siparia is not feared by anybody. She has a track record in the legal profession. She does not have a bad reputation. People would not believe that as Attorney General the Member for Siparia would do the kinds of things that they are certain the Member for Couva South will do.

Let me look now at the detailed words of the Shop Order, again, for the benefit of the Member for Siparia:

"Whereas it is provided by section 5(1) of the Shop (Hours of Opening and Employment) Act, 84:02 that the Minister may, if he thinks fit, make an Order (hereinafter called a 'Shop Order') fixing the hours on the several days of the week, including Sundays and public holidays, during which, either throughout Trinidad and Tobago or in any specified area of Trinidad and Tobago, all shops or shops of any specified class may be opened for serving customers."

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The meaning of that, for the benefit of the Member for Siparia, is that this Order allows people to sell rum on Easter Monday. That is the effect of this Order. It allows people to sell rum on the Baptist Liberation Day; on Good Friday; on Eid; on Divali; on Christmas Day, all these religious observances. That is the essence of the Order.

I am hoping when the Minister gets up that we are not treated again to a pantomime, an elaborate charade, a facade, a Punch-and-Judy show. I hope that is not what we are going to be treated to; that the Minister will attempt to use as many sarcastic phrases as he can. Even if he does, he will just continue in the vein as the court jester of the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago, and those things stick, you know. When they make you the joker of the Parliament, you do not recover from that; you remain the joker of the Parliament.

I would ask the Minister, on the next occasion—because it appears the Government is adamant; they are not taking on anybody. They talk about Government by consensus, but they are not interested in the people's views or in what people have to say. I would hope on the next occasion when the Minister comes to do something like this, that he would try to take some time; try to understand the religious, historical and sociological significance and importance of issues such as these, public holidays, the sale of alcohol, and that sort of thing. Because there are many wolves in sheep's clothing lurking outside there. Many people are going to approach the Minister and say, "I would like you to rescind this prohibition in the law and I would like you to change the legislation to do that, and I would like you to remove this restriction." Many people are going to approach the Minister in the conduct of his ministerial business and make suggestions and recommendations to him and they will have far-reaching implications. It is just like the used car business. Again, I am pretty sure that the Minister, in that particular case, was not aware of the true significance of legalizing the assembly of motor cars from used parts, so I am not going to attack him for that. But on this occasion, I would have preferred that this Minister had done some proper religious instruction and research and then he would have understood the meaning of the Sabbath.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Minister of Trade & Industry and Consumer Affairs (Hon. Mervyn Assam): Mr. Speaker, it is very difficult to rise to attempt to rebut some of the statements and comments made by the Members opposite. I always thought that this Chamber was a serious debating Chamber, but when some Members get up

and speak for 70 and 75 minutes and engage in inconsistencies, irrelevancies, illogical statements, you begin to wonder to what extent this Parliament is being denigrated. Moreso, because we had some school children here this afternoon, I thought that the quality of the debate would have risen in order to indicate, at least to the young people whom they are seeking to defend with respect to this opening of the shop hours and the sale of alcohol—I thought they would have risen to the occasion and given that kind of example to these young children.

But you know, I still have respect and admiration for a couple of them on the other side. The person who represents Port of Spain South, I must say, seems to be a genuine human being. He spoke with a certain piety and I believe that he has some very serious Christian religious convictions and perhaps he should try to transmit these convictions to some of his colleagues who seem to be engaging in, what I consider to be, some form of hypocrisy.

4.00 p.m.

What worried me about the Member for Port of Spain South is that he can associate with a leader who engages in the imbibing of alcohol in the wee hours of the morning in public places, thereby giving scandal to the young people of this country. It worries me that he can do that, not only with his leader, but his erstwhile colleagues and, perhaps, some of his current colleagues. It is something I would like the Member for Port of Spain South to address in terms of converting these colleagues to his own conviction of not imbibing alcohol in order to send the right messages, not only to the national community but particularly to the young people whom he seems to want to represent.

The Member also spoke of a number of things related to the Bible, and I do not believe it is necessary for me to rebut what are obviously biblical quotations. All I have to say with respect to his quotation that wine is a mocker, and wine is bad because it dulls the senses—I do not mean to engage in any kind of disrespect for religion whatsoever—but I always thought that the sacred species in most Christian churches came under one of wine. At least one of the sacred species is wine. I always thought so.

Mr. speaker, I also want to bring to the attention of the Member for Port of Spain South that this Motion seeks merely to level the playing field. Indeed, for a long time alcohol was sold in restaurants in Trinidad and Tobago by people who have a special licence for restaurants, hotels or recreation clubs and one can also

obtain what is called an "occasional special licence" to sell alcohol on a Sunday and public holiday.

What this Government is doing is not as nefarious as some Members opposite wish to make the national community believe.

I turn now to the Member for Arouca South who has certain attributes. She looks like a Nubian and speaks with a rather musical lyrical voice, but that is the end of her attributes. She attempted to suggest that we were engaging in a move which would increase domestic violence, alcoholism and its attendant maladies and that the Government did not have much concern for women and other members of the labour class, simply because the employment practices might very well be interfered with.

With respect to employment practices, I have already alerted the Minister of Labour and Co-operatives and the Attorney General with respect to this matter, particularly, as it affects the women of this country. So, I hope I can allay the Member's fears and assuage her woes.

With respect to alcohol and the attendant maladies, I am not here to make a case for the consumption of alcohol. That is not my purpose. For the records, the hon. Member for Arouca South and other Members, I would quote from an article entitled "To Your Health" in *Newsweek*, an international news magazine, of February 5, 1996. I am not a doctor, but during one of my management courses a doctor and a nutritionist lectured to us on exercise, proper diet and eating habits. One of the things that was brought to our attention is cholesterol. I remember the doctor saying that there were two types of cholesterol, the HDLs which are good and the LDLs, which are bad.

In this article, this distinguished physician suggested that having two drinks of alcohol every day was a very good thing in order to handle and manage one's LDL cholesterol. In this article it says:

"...a drink or two a day may be very good for you. 'Alcoholic beverages have been used to enhance the enjoyment of meals by many societies throughout human history,'...'Current evidence suggests that moderate drinking is associated with a lower risk for coronary heart disease in some individuals'."

It continues to suggest that they are finally acknowledging there is a contribution wine could make to healthy lifestyles. It states further that:

"The good news keeps on coming: moderate drinkers live longer, moderate drinkers get fewer colds, moderate drinkers have flatter stomachs, moderate drinkers who happen to eat bad oysters don't get sick—"

Notwithstanding my quotation I want to repeat that I am not advocating that anyone should go out and begin to adopt habits that would lead to alcoholism or even begin to adopt the practice of alcoholic beverages. I am not intending to do that.

The next issue is with respect to the sanctity of Sundays and public holidays. As I mentioned when I was introducing this Motion, society has undergone evolutions in so many different areas of economics, ethics, sociology, politics, the law, and religion. Even the Catholic church had an upgrading during the Vatican council and many of the practices were changed very drastically to the extent that certain Catholics up to today are unable to adjust to the numerous fundamental changes that are taking place in their church.

The point is, in what way does the drinking of some alcohol—if one is so inclined, and if that is one's choice and preference—desecrate Sunday or a public holiday that is deemed as a holy day? In what way does the drinking of a glass of wine, a scotch and soda or a rum and coke desecrate that?

I think that we often believe that we know what is in God's mind. I believe so. It is in so doing that we try to legislate for people when, in fact, most of us are like Pharisees.

Additionally, there is no study that has been conclusively conducted to show a direct correlation between domestic violence and alcoholism or road fatalities and alcohol. There is no definitive study that has been undertaken! None!

Indeed, in Trinidad and Tobago the majority of accidents that result in fatality have, in fact, taken place either late at night when the roadways are dimly lit and are wet as a result of our climatic conditions, or because of faulty vehicles operating on the roads of Trinidad and Tobago. That is a statistical fact. I will not dwell upon these matters.

The hon. Member for Arouca South said that this coalition has a capacity and inclination to change its mind. What is wrong in changing one's mind? Only a fool would persist in folly. It reminds me of Spartacus who knew that he was going to Rome to be beheaded, but because of his folly, he continued to proceed to Rome and was beheaded. Consequently, the former Prime Minister, now Leader of the Opposition, ignored Ferdie Ferreira's report with respect to the

election and like Spartacus, he went to Rome and was defeated and beheaded.
[Desk thumping].

I warn Members opposite that arrogance and folly would get them nowhere. I warn the Members opposite that not consulting with people would get them nowhere. I tell them that *vox populi vox Dei*, "the voice of the people is the voice of God". If this Government and the Cabinet make a decision that turns out to be inimical to the interest of the people of this country, and it is pointed out to us, we would listen and reverse the decision every time. One could call this coalition flippant, "vaps" or say that we do not know how to make up our minds, but we would listen to the voice and conscience of the people. [Desk thumping]

4.10 p.m.

When the Member for Arouca South made the mistake and called me a devil, she was very gracious to pull it back.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Thanks for giving way Member for St. Joseph. Mr. Speaker, I never called the Member for St. Joseph a devil. I have called other people devil, but not in this House. Never have I called the Member for St. Joseph a devil, either in the House or outside the House, to his face or behind his back.

Hon. M. Assam: I accept the withdrawal and retraction of the hon. Member. I know that she did not mean it. She is such a wonderful person sometimes.

Interestingly enough, when I heard the word devil perhaps she was about to tell us who was the next speaker. The next speaker was similar to Mephistopheles. He commented on my style, about volume and no content. I have no difficulty if he does not appreciate what I have to say, but he neither had volume nor content. [Desk thumping] He reminds me of the Minister of Propaganda in the Nazi regime Dr. Goebbels. He is a past master of propaganda. He says that he wants to teach. Hon. Member for Diego Martin East, I am always willing to learn. I am not as arrogant as some people because of their size and height. I am prepared to learn. I am a neophyte in this Parliament. The point is that I am not prepared to learn from those people whose only experience is in the practice of the art of convoluted thinking. I am prepared to listen to people who are honest in their deliberations; consistent in their pattern of thinking and relevant in terms of the Motion or the Bill before the House.

I think that we have a very patient Speaker. For 75 minutes I sat and listened to that Member's irrelevancies, ranting and raving. He called it the bleating of

this side; I say the braying of that Member for Diego Martin East. We bleat because we are sheep which are humble and very docile animals. There is nothing wrong with being a sheep because Christ was the shepherd and we are the sheep. There is something wrong with the braying of the Member for Diego Martin East. It is so difficult to rebut what the Member for Diego Martin East attempted to say in almost 75 minutes. Quite frankly, I do not have anything here that I can rebut.

In fact, he tried to tell me that I did not have a proper Christian upbringing. My role here is not to boast about my Christian upbringing, but if the Member for Diego Martin East wishes to know I went to Nelson Street Boys' R. C. School and was taught under the Dominican priests at the Cathedral. I attended St. Mary's College and was taught by the Holy Ghost Fathers; the University of Toronto which is a federation of colleges and I was registered at St. Michael's College and taught by the Basilian priests. My Christian upbringing is very good. I have my *bona fides*.

He said that he is wondering what next this Government will do if it remains in power until 1997. I could understand that. He reminds me of a poem that I learnt when I was a little boy. It was about the naughty boy who went to Scotland and stood in his shoes and wondered. Member for Diego Martin East keep on wondering!

He went on to say that for evil to survive it must closely resemble good. Look who is preaching! He understands that because it is part and parcel of the philosophy of the party to which he belongs. In all seriousness, this Government has been accused of a number of things by the opposite side particularly the Member for Diego Martin East. He went on an excursion attacking the Prime Minister, the Attorney General, the Leader of Government Business, the Member for St. Joseph, the Member for Oropouche and sent snide remarks at the Members for Tobago East and West, attempting to suggest that there is some kind of confusion on this side. I know the reason for that. It is the green eyed monster of jealousy that is haunting him. [*Laughter and desk thumping*] Then he attempted to mimic me. How can he mimic somebody who is versed in elocution and he does not have that skill?

Be that as it may I would like to read a verse from *If* by Rudyard Kipling. It says:

“If you can keep your head when all about you
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you,

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If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,
But make allowance for their doubting too;
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,
Or being lied about, don't deal in lies,
Or being hated, don't give way to hating,"

We will wait and we will never be tired. That is what the UNC/NAR Government is all about.

Let me reiterate that the purpose of this Order has no ulterior motives and no malicious intent. It does not intend to spread the use of alcohol, the abuse of it, or to increase its consumption. It has done nothing more than to level the playing field which has been a part of this country's cultural heritage for many years. In fact, it may very well help the tourism industry. Many tourists come to this country and they stay in guest houses, other small hotels and apartments all around Port of Spain and different parts of this country. On a Sunday, when supermarkets would be opened, this would facilitate them in the purchase of their needs or what beverages they may want to consume.

I also believe that notwithstanding what is said on the other side some jobs will be created. It is not the same persons who work on Monday to Friday or Saturday will be employed on a Sunday. There will be a shift system. There will be university students, O'level and A'level students and probably students from technical schools who will be able to do part time jobs, as it is in North America. They would be able to work for eight hours on a Saturday or Sunday to earn a few dollars to help their parents with the purchase of school books, uniform, transportation or to buy their football gear, and not develop the dependency syndrome that that side has encouraged for 34 years of their administration. That is the kind of imagination and ideas that the UNC/NAR Government is attempting to promote in this country, self-sufficiency and self-support.

With these few words, Mr. Speaker, I wish to commend the Motion to this House once again. I beg to move.

Thank you.

Question put,

House divided:

Ayes 18

Noes 13

AYES

Maharaj, R. L.
Panday, Hon. B.
Persad-Bissessar, Hon. K.
Humphrey, Hon. J.
Sudama, Hon. T.
Maraj, Hon. R.
Nicholson, Hon. P.
Rafeeq, Hon. Dr. H.
Assam, Hon. M.
Khan, Dr. F.
Singh, Hon. G.
Nanan, Hon. Dr. A.
Partap, Hon. H.
Mohammed, Hon. Dr. R.
Singh, Hon. D.
Ramsaran, Hon. M.
Sharma, C.
Ali, R.
NOES
Valley, K.
Imbert, C.
Lasse, Dr. V.
Robinson-Regis, Mrs. C.
Narine, J.
Hart, E.
James, Mrs. E.
Griffith, Dr. G.

Joseph, M.

Sinanan, B.

Boynes, R.

Hinds, F.

Williams, E.

Question agreed to.

Resolved

That the Shop (Opening Hours) (Amendment) Order, 1996 be approved subject to the following modifications:

1. In paragraph 2, delete the words “(c) a Night Bar Licence;” and renumber subparagraphs (d) to (f) as subparagraphs (c) to (e).
2. Insert after paragraph 2, the following paragraph:
3. This Order comes into effect on the 10th day of January, 1996.

4.20 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

4.58 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Mr. Speaker: I do apologize for the fact that I resumed a few minutes late but I had a meeting during the break with the delegation that is going off to Barbados on Monday. Sorry about that.

**RENT RESTRICTION (RE-ENACTMENT AND VALIDATION) ACT, 1991
(EXTENSION OF)**

The Minister of Housing and Settlements (Hon. John Humphrey): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move,

Whereas the Rent Restriction (Re-enactment and Validation) Act, 1991 (No. 36 of 1991) re-enacted the provisions of the Rent Restriction Act, Chap. 59:50, save and except subsection (2) of section 1 which was repealed and replaced therein:

Whereas it is provided by the said subsection (2) of section 1 as replaced, that the said Act shall continue in force until February 23, 1993 and may be continued in force for further periods of three years by resolution of Parliament:

And Whereas, by Resolution passed in the House of Representatives on February 12, 1993 and in the Senate on February 16, 1993, the said Act was continued in force for a further period of three years until February 23, 1996:

And Whereas the said Act will expire on February 23, 1996 and it is expedient that it be continued in force for a further period of three years commencing February 24, 1996:

Be it Resolved that the Rent Restriction Act, Chap. 59:50, shall continue in force for a period of three years commencing February 24, 1996.

Mr. Speaker, the Rent Restriction Act provides for the right to restrict the rents on certain premises and to recover possession of such premises. The Act recognizes the rights of both landlords and tenants.

Motion made and question proposed, That the House do now adjourn to Friday, February 16, 1996 at 1.30 p.m. [*Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar*]

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 5.02 p.m.