

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES***Friday, June 07, 1996.*

The House met at 1.32 p.m.

**PRAYERS**[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]**LEAVE OF ABSENCE**

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, I wish to advise that the hon. Member for La Brea (Mr. Hedwige Bereaux) communicated with me today indicating that he would be unable to attend today's sitting and he is excused.

**PAPERS LAID**

1. Report of the Auditor General on the accounts of Deposit Insurance Corporation for the year ended December 31, 1995. [*The Attorney General (Hon. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj)*].

*To be referred to the Public Accounts Committee.*

2. Report of the Auditor General on the accounts of National Broadcasting Service of Trinidad and Tobago Limited for the year ended December 31, 1995 [*Hon. R. L. Maharaj*]

3. Report of the Auditor General on the accounts of Trinidad and Tobago Television Company Limited for the year ended December 31, 1995 [*Hon. R. L. Maharaj*]

*Papers 2 and 3 to be referred to the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee.***SARASWATI MANDIRAM (INC'N) BILL**

*Question put and agreed to,* That a Bill for the incorporation of the Saraswati Mandiram and matters incidental thereto, be now read the first time.

*Bill accordingly read the first time.***ARRANGEMENT OF BUSINESS**

**The Attorney General (Hon. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj):** Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that this House proceed with Bill No. 1 under Bills Second Reading, An Act to remove the restrictions on entry into Trinidad and Tobago of skilled nationals of qualifying Caribbean Community countries.

*Agreed to.*

**IMMIGRATION (CARIBBEAN SKILLED NATIONALS) BILL**

*Order for second reading read.*

**The Minister of Foreign Affairs (Hon. Ralph Maraj):** Mr. Speaker, I beg to move,

That a Bill to remove the restrictions on entry into Trinidad and Tobago of skilled nationals of qualifying Caribbean Community countries, be read a second time.

The purpose of this Bill is to remove restrictions on the entry into Trinidad and Tobago of qualifying nationals of certain categories of skills into this country from all Caricom countries except the Bahamas because, as you know, the Bahamas, whilst it is a member of the Caribbean Community, it is not a member of the Common Market. On this occasion it has opted to remain out of the arrangement for the movement of skilled nationals.

**1.40 p.m.**

The qualification requirements of the Bill as set out in clause 8, include a degree of the University of the West Indies or the University of Guyana, designated as a Bachelor's Degree, Master's Degree or a Doctor's Degree; membership of the Guild of Graduates of the University of the West Indies, certified by the University of the West Indies; a certificate from the Secretary General of the Caribbean Community attesting that qualifications possessed by the applicant satisfy the conditions for recognition of Caribbean Community skills qualification; and a certificate from any authority designated by the Minister, by order, as an accrediting authority for the purpose of this section, attesting that qualifications possessed by the applicant satisfy the conditions for recognition of Caribbean Community skills qualification, and any qualification or a combination of qualifications, prescribed under clause 11.

Of course, under clause 11, Mr. Speaker, we see a provision whereby the Minister of the receiving country can add to the list of accepted professions, which is in Schedule I, bearing in mind the needs of the country and the skills requirement of the country. It may eventually be amended to include trades, professions and other occupations, additional to those listed in Schedule I and qualifications additional to those listed in clause 8(1), which satisfy the requirements of this Bill. Those are the qualification requirements, Mr. Speaker.

Whilst we are talking about the movement of skilled nationals among Caricom countries, we want to make it very plain that, at least, to start with the

very important process in Caribbean integration, the free movement will be limited to certain categories of workers. If we are to turn to Schedule I of the Bill, we will see these qualifying occupations; they are accountancy, dentistry, engineering, law, medicine and any other profession or occupation prescribed by the Minister under clause 11; which, as I said a while ago, allows the Minister in the receiving country to make the necessary adjustments and amendments to include certain categories of workers which may fill certain national requirements from time to time.

Schedule II deals with the certificate to be issued by the Trinidad and Tobago Government and it is clearly outlined there. It is in the form of a certificate; the Immigration (Caribbean Community Skilled Nationals) Act, 1996, Certificate of Recognition of Caribbean Community Skills Qualification. This is an important document. In fact, this is the document which will allow a qualifying national from a qualified country to enter Trinidad and Tobago and to be able to work, live and so forth. It is only when one has that document—after one has applied to the particular country—will one be free from the restrictions which are provided in this Bill. If we turn to clause 3 of this Bill, we will see what are the benefits to be derived after having acquired the certificate. Of course, the first benefit is that one would be able to stay in Trinidad and Tobago—and Trinidad and Tobago nationals will be able to stay in other Caricom countries—for an indefinite period. It is not so at the moment.

One would also be free from any restriction on freedom of movement, including the freedom to leave and re-enter the country without permission. Once one has that certificate one is able to stay in the country for any period; one will be able to come and go without seeking further permission; one would have freedom to acquire property for use as a personal residence. In other words, Mr. Speaker, a citizen coming from another country to work in Trinidad and Tobago or a Trinidad and Tobago citizen going to another Caricom country, will be able to acquire property for use as a personal residence. One will be free also to be engaged in gainful employment or occupation. In other words, one can go and work and there will be no restrictions, as well, on freedom to acquire property for use in that person's business. Mr. Speaker, there is little restriction here with respect to acquiring property. If citizens are allowed to come into Trinidad and Tobago, and we allow our citizens to go into other countries, one would not be able to acquire a property for one's personal residence and also to acquire property for use in one's personal occupation.

There is also a provision for those Caricom nationals who have not yet gained employment. As you know, Mr. Speaker, if one is seeking employment, one sometimes has to scout around and apply where employment is being generated and where one feels there are chances and so forth. The Bill also makes provision for those people who have not yet received the certificate of which I just spoke, from Trinidad and Tobago, to come into Trinidad and Tobago for a period of six months. If we look at clause 4 of the Bill, we will see that this provision is provided here, for example, once the applicant is born in the state issuing the passport or any other qualifying Caribbean Community State, and also, once the applicant receives or acquires from the country of his origin, that very certificate that I talked about in Schedule III. In other words, if one is to come to Trinidad and Tobago or if a citizen from Trinidad and Tobago has to go to another country, he must acquire that certificate from the country from which he is originating in order to enter the Caricom country and in order to stay there for a period of six months while he looks for employment and so forth. He would then also be in a position to have his length of stay extended for another six months.

Upon acquiring employment—which would mean that he would have acquired the certificate which is dealt with in Schedule III—he would then be free from the restrictions, which I mentioned a while ago; he would be able to stay for an indefinite period; to acquire property for residential and business purposes; to gain employment and so forth. That is an important consideration that we ought to bear in mind.

We ought to bear in mind, as well, Mr. Speaker, that this Bill is based on the principle of reciprocity. In other words, Trinidad and Tobago will not be granting these rights and privileges to any Caricom countries if those other countries are not granting similar rights and privileges to our citizens. If, in a particular Caricom country similar provisions—and, may I say, Mr. Speaker, that this legislation is based on a model that had been developed by the Caricom Secretariat and used throughout the Caribbean Community—are not enacted into law, that country will not enter into an agreement with Trinidad and Tobago.

**1.50 p.m.**

I just want to underscore that it is based on the principle of reciprocity and that is outlined in clause 10 subclauses (1) and (2). Of course, as in any piece of legislation, there are safeguards and these are dealt with in clause 13(1) where it is stated:

“A person who for the purpose of procuring a certificate under Schedule III, or for the purpose of seeking permission under section 3(1) or 4(1)—

- (a) makes any statement which that person knows to be false in a material particular; or
- (b) recklessly makes any statement which is false in a material particular, is guilty of an offence.”

The permission can be revoked. For example, the Minister may revoke the permission of a person who violates the stipulations of this Bill. Such a person, of course, will be found guilty and liable on summary conviction to a fine of five thousand dollars and to imprisonment for six months. So there are safeguards, it is not a free-for-all. We might be talking here about free movement of skills but it is not a free-for-all. As I pointed out, we have limitations and we are taking steps on an incremental basis to ensure that we achieve a satisfactory level of movement of skills in the integration movement.

Talking about the incremental approach, Mr. Speaker, there is provision in the Bill for amendments. In other words, all of the schedules are subject to amendments of course. If one looks at the qualifying occupations that are listed here, by common consent among Caricom countries, one may wish to add to these occupations teaching, nursing and so forth as they see fit and as the information becomes available. We are not in a rigid situation. There is a measure of flexibility here, and really, there is the need for this approach because whilst the decision was made some time ago with respect to the movement of skilled persons, we are now beginning to take these tentative steps forward on this particular matter, but we need to leave room for ourselves to ensure that there is more and more movement of skills in the region.

With respect to the granting of permission, the application has to be made to the Minister responsible for immigration in the particular country and, of course, in Trinidad and Tobago, that Minister is the Minister of National Security and clauses 6 and 7 of the Bill deal with that particular matter where it states:

“6. Any citizen—

- (a) of Trinidad and Tobago; or
- (b) of a qualifying Caribbean Community State who was born in a qualifying Caribbean Community State,

may, subject to section 10, apply to the Minister for a certificate...”

So it is the Minister of National Security in Trinidad and Tobago who would grant the certificate to qualified applicants.

Of course, there is the question of the revocability of the permission.

**Mr. Valley:** Just for clarification please. I have noted the point, but the certificate talks about being signed by the Minister responsible for Caribbean Community Affairs. Who is granting it, is it the Minister of National Security?

**Hon. R. Maraj:** Under the law, it is the Minister of National Security to whom one would apply. That is a matter that can be considered, it has been brought to my attention already and it is something that can be the subject of further discussion. According to the Bill, it is the Minister of National Security to whom one must apply.

Mr. Speaker, I was talking about the revocability of the permission under this Bill, and clause 5 says that permission can be revoked if for example the person who is coming to the country has committed an act which will make him liable to deportation, extradition or any other form of expulsion.

In other words, if a citizen of a Caricom country comes into Trinidad and Tobago or *vice versa* if a Trinidadian or Tobagonian goes to Jamaica or Barbados, for example, and he does anything that warrants expulsion or deportation and so forth, the permission granted under this Bill can be revoked.

Those elements really are in fact, the essence of this piece of legislation. This decision was taken by the Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community and it has a very long history. It stems from the Grande Anse declaration when it was decided that we needed to establish a single market economy in Caricom. There has been much dilly-dallying, no doubt about that and we must accept the fact. There has been uncertainty, and fear, one may say of taking steps forward, but eventually, a decision was in fact taken that we should move towards establishing the single market in the economy and once that decision had been taken because of the pace of globalization and the emergence of trading blocs all over the world and in our own hemisphere, I think the economic imperatives are driving the process for us.

The Caribbean Heads did take a decision, I think it was last year, that they would begin to implement this critical decision by starting with a certain category of skilled worker. The legislation has been enacted in other Caricom countries and all are committed to it. I know Guyana, Barbados, and Jamaica, for example, have already enacted the legislation and other countries are in the process of

doing so and we feel it is important to again underscore this country's commitment to the Caricom integration movement. As you know, Mr. Speaker, the free movement of labour is an important component of the single market economy and I have no doubt that this will go a long way to achieving that goal. I have no doubt as well that this piece of legislation will receive unanimous support from both sides of the House. I beg to move.

*Question proposed.*

**Dr. Keith Rowley** (*Diego Martin West*): Mr. Speaker, I rise to make a short intervention on this matter relating to the preparation of avenues for Caricom citizens to move relatively freely with respect to certain categories of persons.

Let me begin by saying that while it is not required for us on this side to state our credentials in this matter, if only for the record, I want it to go on record by saying that we support Caribbean integration in all its manifestations and insofar as this measure is meant to foster Caribbean integration—the Minister is quite right—he can look forward to our support.

If I may speak as a spokesperson for Trinidad and Tobago I can also go on record as saying that Trinidad and Tobago's credential with respect to supporting Caribbean integration is without question. One needs to look at this in a number of perspectives, historical and otherwise and one would see that notwithstanding that it is put across to us as a Heads of Government decision and so forth, for me, it raises more questions than it provides answers insofar as our overall aspirations are concerned, and insofar as we hanker to be one people with one objective in the Caribbean.

**2.00 p.m.**

Mr. Speaker, this measure is simply a drop in the ocean of Caribbean integration initiative; and while it may benefit a few, it is not really what we were hoping to achieve when we agreed to Federation back in the fifties. What we had aspired to was a complete movement with no barriers; to be one people. We now talk about the single market economy and if we go back to the fifties we can recall that there was a time when we were, in fact, politically and administratively one people. That did not last very long, for a variety of reasons. In the context of that Federation and those aspirations, this measure can only be viewed as an attempt by those of us today who are in the Parliaments of our various Caricom countries—an attempt by those persons who are advancing this—to pick up fragments of a broken vase of greater grandeur.

Mr. Speaker, as we talk about providing this facility for persons, we need to look at who are the people who are going to benefit from these things. When we look at it, questions arise, because our intellectuals have always chided the political directorate of the region that the reason why our attempts at Federation and oneness and togetherness have always failed, or largely failed, is because the Federation was conceived in a top down way. It was handed down to us by the colonial masters and we accepted it and took very little responsibility for the midwifery of that.

Some intellectuals go so far as to say that, insofar as Caribbean politicians always seek to pass down the concept of leadership and togetherness to Caribbean peoples, our aspirations are doomed to failure, because no real integration will be had unless the wider Caribbean peoples are involved in the process and feel a part of it at every stage in the proceedings. It is in that context, Mr. Speaker, that this particular initiative, once again, raises the debate from which direction the integration efforts are coming. The orders are coming from above and, once again, in some context we are seeking to talk about integration or to implement integration in the context of privilege.

Mr. Speaker, one may recall when we had the debate at an earlier time in this honourable House on the creation of the Order of the CARICOM Community, when my colleague from Naparima was an eminent and eloquent advocate of that initiative—in those days wearing a tie like mine [*Interruption*] I am told that that tie is in a safe place in a drawer. He is a man of great care. [*Interruption*] But at that time when we discussed the OCC, there were points of view expressed—which I myself shared—that while we saw it as an initiative that was worthwhile and worthy; in some kind of vacuum it did not seem to strike the right cord, identifying two or three people and saying that we are going to give them this great honour and somehow that should symbolize “Caribbeanness”. In a way that did not seem befitting of the aspirations we had. In fact, since we had those presentations I have not heard anything else about the OCC and it is that kind of thing we have been doing.

Mr. Speaker, even the very Federation itself and all the subsequent initiatives are coloured by acts of tentativeness. We always seem to be tentative when it is time to act on Caribbean integration; and this is one of these things, Mr. Speaker. Here we are saying we are going to allow certain persons to move freely; and by ‘freely’ I mean with the restrictions as outlined by the Minister. It is not total freedom, there are some considerations. Who are these Caribbean people



who are going to move freely in the region? Accountants, dentists, engineers, doctors and, of course, lawyers.

Mr. Speaker, throughout the region, particularly in Trinidad and Tobago, one would find that these people, by and large, represent a very small proportion of Caribbean peoples. In fact, when I first heard about this initiative, I thought it applied to all persons with university degrees, so that degreed people could have moved freely. The reason I thought that, is because it is my view that our present circumstances would not permit us to go immediately into total free movement. That is reasonable. I am being very reasonable. I cannot expect this Government, or any government in the region, tomorrow, to get up and say, okay, let our peoples move freely; because they have not laid the appropriate groundwork for that.

So the next step is to move within the context of what we have been able to achieve up to now. I thought that because we have such clear certification for degreed people, all those persons within the Caricom who have been certified by our certifying bodies, like the university, and so forth, that this first tentative step would, at least, have applied to all those persons. Instead, what I am seeing in the Bill is that it says accountants, dentists, engineers, lawyers, doctors—

**Mr. Assam:** Will the Member give way? My reading of the Bill, Mr. Speaker, page 4, clause 8, states:

“The following qualifications satisfy the qualification requirements of this Act”

that is, to qualify for a certificate of entry,

“a degree of the University of the West Indies or of the University of Guyana designated as a Bachelor’s, Master’s or Doctor’s degree;”

So anybody with a degree can come in, in addition to Schedule I.

**Mr. Imbert:** No, no. Ask your Minister.

**Dr. K. Rowley:** Mr. Speaker, if the honourable gentleman is going to interrupt me, I would suggest to him that before he interrupts he consults his colleague from Naparima. The Schedule says “Qualifying Occupations” and those occupations would then have to be certified by the section he has just read. Mr. Speaker, any school child reading this would understand that. The list of Schedule I spells out who qualifies at this time. The Bill lists very clearly, at Schedule I, the occupations in which persons who qualify under the Bill may be

engaged. So I wonder why he is interrupting, Mr. Speaker? I would suggest to him that he asks his colleague to assist him with the document, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, the point I was making was that a question immediately arises: Why only these privileged few? Once again, those of us who are enacting this law in this Parliament, or any other Caricom Parliament, can be accused, and I would say quite correctly so, of creating special privileges. So while the general aspiration of our people is to come together and move freely, whenever the Parliaments or the politicians act we are very tentative and, insofar as we have done anything here, what we are doing is creating privilege. So a privileged group can move, but the others cannot. I am saying that, Mr. Speaker, to point out that the comment I made earlier on, that this is but a very small drop in the ocean of that aspiration, is demonstrated by the very fact that we have restricted this only to these five professions.

**2.10 p.m.**

One asks oneself: who are these people? Many of them would have been supported at university by these very same people who will not be able to travel freely in the Caribbean when this Bill is passed and they would have been the ones who would have supported these people to get their university degrees. So our nationals, whatever calling in life, would have made some contribution directly or indirectly, to having our engineers, dentists and accountants trained. Once they are trained however, they now belong to a privileged class; they can now enjoy free movement in the Caribbean, but those who made the sacrifice to get them trained, cannot enjoy those benefits. Clearly, this is not what we aspire to when we talk about Caribbean integration and freedom of movement in the Caribbean. So we are a long, long way from that.

I raise the question: Why is it being restricted only to this? What system has been used to determine that these professions are the only ones that can benefit the region? I can see that any approach or movement of this nature at this time should be based on some element of certification. In fact, I would go further to say that what I was hoping to have seen coming out of the Heads of Government meeting in parallel with this decision, was an equally important decision to establish or to commit the region to have certifying arrangements in all Caricom territories to certify all skills. This is something which is not new; it exists in developed countries, where, as long as you access a skill and you put out effort to be trained in that skill, some certification procedure applies to you and

regardless of what walk of life you have placed yourself, you will get some element of certification.

Therefore, if that were our direction, it would mean that this Bill could have said that certified skills within the region could have moved relatively freely. It would have meant that if an "A" grade welder or a mason or a plumber, or somebody, who had some skill that was certified by some acceptable institution, such a person could have said, "I, too, can travel within the region, because I have a skill that I can offer my brothers somewhere else in the region."

I am sure that there are times when there is a need in some of our areas for skills which are not listed here but are in greater demand, such as electronic technicians. There are times when the greatest movement of skills within our region are the skills in the construction industry, quantity surveyors, masons, tradesmen of all kinds. These are Caribbean people too. In fact, they are in greater need of that opportunity to move and peddle their skills from place to place than doctors and dentists. I am not aware that there is any pressing need within the region to have doctors move from one point to the other. Doctors tend to become very sedentary. They develop a practice, have a clientele, follow their speciality, and live relatively comfortably within that catchment area. My Friend from Barataria/San Juan would attest to that.

By the same token, accountants. I am not aware that there is any pressing need within the region for accountants to move from one place to the other. What I do know, in a lot of the less noble professions, if I may put it that way, you will find that if there is a construction boom taking place in territory "X" many skilled persons can move there and make their skills available, but when that project ends and they need to move again to where the other project is; to me it is those persons within the region who would have benefited more from an initiative which says that skills could move relatively freely from one territory to another.

It is in that context I am saying that this initiative, while it has come down to us from the Heads of Government, it has not really been fully thought through to get the best of the initiative, a half-way house as it may be. I think we could have done a lot better if we had gone for a wider range of skills based on acceptable certification and also based on putting within the region certifying arrangements to allow a wider cross-section of our people who have acquired skills, to make those skills available to the region as and where required. By and large, the measure is one which opens us up to the queries of those who are

not going to be the beneficiaries of this, what I may call, action for the privileged.

I have another concern, which is that the Bill seeks to make a recognition of the University of Guyana which had not been afforded that university before. I raise this at great peril to myself because there seems to be a point of view that I am against Guyana; but I will come back to that. The context in which I am raising it is this: This Bill is saying that insofar as certification would be required to determine these professions, that facility is accorded to graduates of the University of Guyana. The Minister must tell us whether, in fact, this is a new way to acknowledge, or to give accreditation to the University of Guyana which that institution has not been able to get before. You see, we have a problem in the region that on one side of our mouths we talk integration and on the other side we go off and do our own thing.

You may recall that for many years the advocates of the University of the West Indies have been saying that we need to incorporate all our efforts into that university. The governments of Guyana over the years have taken a different position and have supported their own university, and every time we look at that institution with respect to accreditation—it is not my saying; it is not my doing—the fact of the matter is that accreditation at the University of Guyana has not been forthcoming in this way, because those who were charged with the responsibility of supplying the facts have determined that the standards are not up to what are required. Yet now, for the first time we here are offering an accreditation to that institution and we are writing into law here now that the University of Guyana's graduates are certified sufficiently to access this. I am asking whether, in fact, this was done with the proper knowledge of the status of the University of Guyana in the context of Caribbean tertiary education.

I would really want either the Minister who is piloting this Bill, or the Minister of Education, to tell us something about that, because we have a query on that aspect of it. I do not want to belabour that point, but I think it is a point which is worthy of very clear descriptions from the Government when Members on the other side respond. Specifically, what does this mean with respect to the long-standing issue of accreditation for the University of Guyana.

This Bill symbolizes many things. If I may encapsulate those things under two headings. One would be sharing of skills. While limited to a few skills, the basic underlying principle is that we are agreeing here that it is good for the region and it is good for us, as a people, to share what pool of talent we have

developed, what pool of talent we have trained. If we share it, we are saying that it would contribute to our wider good.

The second thing that this Bill is saying is that there is strength in unified effort. If we unify our effort, then we are stronger. I want to raise, in that context, a matter which has been attracting my attention in recent days. I want to start by quoting from a famous Caribbean person who had this to say about the whole concept of sharing. I read, from the *Daily Express* of May 30, 1996, with your permission:

"We may have our inter-island or inter-territorial rivalries and our quarrels may be acrimonious at times, but at the end of the day we are proud of one another's achievements."

We share a sense of sadness or loss when disaster strikes, whether natural or man-made. We express this sentiment in a readiness to come to one another's help in times of trouble..."

**2.20 p.m.**

Mr. Speaker, those are the words of the Member for Tobago East—eminent Caribbean statesman that he is—speaking at a meeting in Barbados recently, about how we need to share and come to each other's aid. I could not agree with him more, because that is the underlying cornerstone of all our Caribbean initiatives. That sentiment can be undermined—I would not go so far as to say it "has" been undermined—by our behaviour to one another.

If it is that we agree, as the Member for Tobago East has said, that we need to come to each other's aid and help in times of trouble, it has to be a two-way street. One has to recognize the extent to which one is helped by one's brother and acknowledge it. It is in that context that I raise the matter of Trinidad and Tobago's assistance to a Caricom country. I have heard it said that Trinidad and Tobago gave away our money to Guyana, but how could that be said if what we are being told by one of our eminent statesmen of 40 years' public service in the region, is that we must come to one another's aid in times of need? That is the spirit of our co-operation.

Mr. Speaker, in one breath we are told that we must do that; it is the essence of brotherly love, but when we do it we have been told by others that that action was meant to prop up the regime of the day. Clearly, it cannot be both ways.

During the period of the oil boom, those countries that had oil—countries as Trinidad and Tobago which were fortunate enough to have as their God-given

resource, hydrocarbons in the form of oil—were benefiting immensely from the runaway prices which reached as high as \$40 per barrel during that period. For us it represented a period of plenty, but what about those countries or neighbours of ours that did not have a supply of oil available to them and had to come to the market place to procure that product at the prices that were prevailing? It meant great hardship for them. So here we had the case where Trinidad and Tobago had oil and Guyana did not, and we went to the aid of the people of Guyana by allowing them to access an oil facility where they would obtain oil.

Mr. Speaker, it was not only Guyana. We went to the aid of our Caribbean brothers; we established what was called a "Caribbean oil facility" which allowed those countries to access this very vital supply, not for the government of the day, the prime minister or the president, but for the people of those territories to have light when they were faced with darkness.

Mr. Speaker, I do not know if you would recall the stories coming out of Guyana with respect to the blackouts and the lack of fuels for motor vehicles and, of course, if one goes to the logical conclusion, the shut-down of industries and so forth, and needless to say, the hardships that would have been meted out to the people of Guyana if that situation was not addressed. Trinidad and Tobago intervened and addressed that matter on behalf of all the people of Guyana by allowing them credit from a supply of material which we had available to us.

I heard it said by my colleague from Tobago West that we should have given that money to Tobago and so forth, but the bottom line is that Tobago was not facing that problem. Tobago had, within the context of Trinidad and Tobago, an adequate supply of affordable fuel and therefore it did not arise. It arose in the context of a have and have not. With respect to oil during those periods we had that product and our brother did not have it and we shared.

In the context of what has been said by the Member for Tobago East, I cannot see how we could have been faulted for going to the aid of those who were in need. [*Desk thumping*] There were other aspects of the debt which had to do with balance of payment support. As a result of the world economy at the time, and the local and regional economy, countries as Guyana were having great difficulty in accessing the required amount of foreign exchange to meet their basic needs for food, medicine and so forth, balance of payment support was required, and again we went to their aid.

Today, for purposes of convenience, we are hearing arguments that that action was somehow to be seen in the context of the PNM doing something that was not

acceptable and propping up Burnham and all that kind of useless talk. In fact, I have heard it said that the final outcome of this loan is now to be regarded in racial terms.

I do not know where in God's name the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago finds the link between a borrower, a lender and race. I do not know where he finds that, but as the head of the *Daily Express* says, whenever he is faced with an issue, our Prime Minister has an unfortunate habit of reducing every and any issue to race. I would dearly love to have him leave this argument out of the racial ambit. This is a straight case of Trinidad and Tobago going to the aid of all the people of Guyana at the request of the Government of Guyana of the day and they all benefited regardless of their race, colour, creed or class. They all benefited from Trinidad and Tobago's intervention.

Insofar as there is a debt to be paid by Guyana to Trinidad and Tobago, they all owed that debt—every race, creed, class and religion. So, I do not know how that could be reduced to race and ethnicity.

Mr. Speaker, as Caribbean brothers we went to the aid of the other, and together we went through that difficult period, but having done so a liability was created because one now owes me for what I have supplied in times of trouble. How can Caribbean integration be fostered if the recipient of such generosity takes the position that, "I am not repaying you"? That debt is not going to be repaid. Worse yet, a leader of the region takes the position that that debt was lent to an earlier leader and it is not his responsibility.

One can go further and reduce it to the level of who is in that group with whom. Mr. Speaker, how could that kind of behaviour foster regional integration? We are here talking about fostering regional integration by allowing five categories of persons representing .00051 per cent, or some similar figure, of our population to move within the region. We are doing that thinking that we are fostering regional integration, but at the same time larger, more tangible issues are being treated in the most flippant of ways. If the experience of one Caribbean country to another is that if you make the mistake and loan any of your resources to another Caribbean brother you would end up in a position where you are faced with what we have been faced with in Trinidad and Tobago and this Guyana debt, which Caribbean government would very willingly, quickly and easily come to the aid of another Caribbean country if that aid is so required and it means transferring some of its resources to that Caribbean brother?

**2.30 p.m.**

It is in that context that I raise this matter of the Guyana debt and say that the behaviour of Guyana to Trinidad and Tobago has been a signal action which has not done us proud in our quest for regional integration. In fact, this outcome will now cause all Caribbean countries to be wary of each other. I would be very surprised indeed, when the next loan is made in any form or fashion by any Caribbean country to any other Caribbean country.

I have heard it said by the Minister of Finance that the reason for Trinidad and Tobago writing off the debt is because we are helping out one of the poorer countries of the region. That statement gives the impression that the "write off" of the debt is required because Guyana is so poor that it cannot service its debt. Therefore, we have no other choice but to write off the debt. What is the point in carrying it on the books? It cannot pay, so the logical and practical thing to do is to write it off.

It is with that philosophy I part company with the Government. While I understand the Government's position with respect to wanting to treat with this matter at the Paris Club, I may make the point that the administration of which I was a part had seen that opportunity and taken steps to have it work in our favour. I am saying that in the context of regional integration one cannot lose sight of the issue of the behaviour of one our colleagues to us.

Let me read how the debt arose because there is some confusion. Today, I was listening to the radio and many persons from all walks of life, from editors down are confused as to what it is about. When we supported Guyana as a Caribbean brother in the spirit of integration and sharing, the debt arose as balance of payment support—\$47 million; bilateral settlements loan—\$310 million and Caricom oil facility—\$95 million. Of course, over the years interest accrued because in the context of a debt there is interest. It started out as a debt of just over \$400 million and with interest over the years, I am advised that the figure is now approaching US \$540 million.

In the context of repayment of this loan and a responsibility of one Caribbean neighbour to another, it is my view that it cannot be logically argued that for 26 years our Caribbean neighbour was not in a position to service any portion of this loan. I disagree with that. An editorial in one of the newspapers dated Friday, June 7, 1996 asked what we did about it. We did many things about it. This matter was the subject of interventions and approaches at the Caricom multilateral level and at the Heads of Government level. I remember when my colleague for



Naparima was in the government of the PNM, one of the things we did was to mount an initiative, and this came after my Friend for Tobago East was Prime Minister for five years. He too had this problem. During this period I have no doubt that this matter would have attracted his attention as Minister of Finance and Prime Minister for the entire period.

The bottom line is, regardless of who was in charge of Trinidad and Tobago's administration, there was a situation where the borrower was taking the position that it cannot pay and will not pay. That is what I have a difficulty with. It is not a question of PNM, NAR or UNC. It is the resources of Trinidad and Tobago. This problem went from Eric Williams to George Chambers to A. N. R. Robinson to Patrick Manning and now the hon. Basdeo Panday. Every step along the way the borrower took the position that it will dictate the terms on this loan. Its terms were that it was not paying that.

The penultimate initiative of Trinidad and Tobago on this matter was with respect to trying to work out an arrangement at that time. Twenty-three years have elapsed and there are new governments in Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago. Once again we sought to raise this matter. We had always been very reasonable. We knew that the cash might not have been available in large quantities, but we said that in Trinidad and Tobago there was need for a variety of the products which Guyana had under its control and ownership. We were prepared to accept some of that, or interest in some of it for the money that Guyana owed us.

I am hearing the Member for Caroni East asking what we did about it. I want to put on *Hansard* a copy of an agreement dated August 17, 1993 notifying the national community where we were in 1993 with this matter. The Member for Diego Martin Central had travelled to Guyana for the expressed purpose of doing something about this debt. The government of the day in Guyana agreed with the initiative. Let me tell you what was agreed to:

“Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana agree on debt repayment.

The Government of Trinidad and Tobago and the Government of Guyana have agreed that Guyana will meet its debt service obligations to Trinidad and Tobago mainly through debt equity swaps over the next three years. This means that the Guyanese Government will offer the Trinidad and Tobago Government equity in Guyana state enterprises, newly formed enterprises or other government assets in lieu of making cash repayments. To the extent that these debt equity swaps are insufficient to absorb the full debt service

payment of \$21 million annually, Guyana will be required to make a cash payment to a maximum of US \$5 million annually.”

In answer to the question of what we did, we spoke to Guyana about the debt which it owed us and we came to an agreement. Nothing was achieved for the simple reason that even after we had an agreement as to how we would proceed, once again, Guyana took the position that it was not agreeing to that.

In fact, I saw an article in a recent newspaper where the current Guyanese Minister, Mr. Jagdeo was boasting that he was responsible for going to the Guyanese Cabinet and having this agreement repudiated. Look at the Caribbean integration behaviour! Two major Caribbean countries, one of which has within its borders the headquarters of the Caricom, met at ministerial level under the umbrella of the President—because they were meeting with the President as well—and agreed in a bilateral way as to how they would solve their problem. We were all happy! We made no issue about trying to get more than what it was offering. We asked Guyana to tell us what it was prepared to offer and we had a certain target. If Guyana did not meet that target, we would have accepted certain things. It was very amicable.

Here Caricom was at work; integration was at work and brothers were at work. We had brotherly love. What happened after? A minister of government is boasting to the Guyanese media that he took the agreement to Cabinet, and unilaterally, a Caricom country repudiated the agreement which was made in the very amicable situation in 1993.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, 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.*

**2.40 p.m.**

**Dr. K. Rowley:** Mr. Speaker, I thank you and hon. Members very much for the extension.

What kind of behaviour is this within the Caricom when we talk about our aspirations to move forward? A bilateral agreement on a debt which has been hanging for 23 years and which has not been serviced in any way, is unilaterally repudiated by a Caricom country. It is the same context that is being raised. This

Minister who is boasting about repudiating the debt is saying that he does not agree with what the previous Minister agreed.

Minister Asgar Ally had agreed, on behalf of the Government of Guyana, to the agreement about how to proceed. Mr. Asgar Ally left the government and a new Minister of Finance was appointed. He takes the same position taken by the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, who said that Williams lent Burnham, so do not look to us to get it back. Mr. Jagdeo takes the position that Asgar Ally agreed with that, so do not look to him to agree with it.

Mr. Speaker, how in God's name could Caricom progress if that is the attitude at the level of ministers? What troubles me more is that the people who are elected to represent the interest of the people of Trinidad and Tobago seem to agree with that position because they too are castigating me for raising this issue. I am saying to all on the other side that if they do not want to discharge the oath of office they have sworn to here, and look after the interests of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, I will discharge it without fear or favour.

In today's *Trinidad Guardian*, the editorial says that Guyanese are angry and upset that I have raised this matter. Look at me, Mr. Speaker! I am trembling in fear. I am on my knees. I am begging for forgiveness from Guyana. I am raising a matter where my people are being asked to give up \$2000 million and some editor is telling me that the people in Guyana are angry that I have raised it. All I can say to him and the people in Guyana who are angry is: Go on the streets of Trinidad and Tobago and ask any coconut vendor, any clerk or ex-prime minister and he will tell you that we in Trinidad and Tobago know that the truth offends.

The editorial writer who asked what the Government did about it, and my Friend from Caroni East, who, when he was trying to pass his exam for the nineteenth time, must understand that we were trying to do something about this. We were in Cabinet trying to do something about this and after we observed Guyana's behaviour on this matter, we realized that they were not going to discharge the debt in any way.

It came to our attention from third parties that Guyana intended to approach the Paris Club. The reason for that was that they would like to access preferential funding and to do so they would have to have the blessing of the Paris Club. At that time we saw a ray of hope and a light at the end of this tunnel. We said, insofar as Guyana was going to the Paris Club, it signalled an opportunity for us to seek to get in on those discussions and press our claim within that context. So

it was our initiative to seek to prosecute this matter by way of the Paris Club, but Guyana knew what our position was on this matter. *[Interruption]*

I will tell you a short story. I was called very urgently to a Cabinet meeting because it came to our attention, again from third parties, that Guyana was about to enter into discussions with the Paris Club and that the meeting was taking place in Paris within a matter of hours. The PNM Cabinet convened urgently and we took a decision to send two officers post haste to Paris, by whatever means, to press our case at that meeting. *[Interruption]*

They can trivialize it, Mr. Speaker, but Guyana had gone to the Paris Club without telling us the date of the meeting. We found out through a third party. We hurried to Paris and when we got there, they were most surprised; they did not expect us to be there. *[Interruption]* That is the behaviour and now I have some joker asking me about it. I am trying to point out the behaviour of the borrower to the lender. However, we got there on time and we got there in the context that we were the largest lender to that territory. We had an agreement with Guyana and I have read for you what we were prepared to accept. *[Interruption]* They will continue to make mistakes. Let them listen.

I would like to read, Mr. Speaker, the agreement on the terms of reorganization of the loan.

“Furthermore, both delegations acknowledged the support of the Paris Club creditors for the implementation of bilateral agreement between the Governments of Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago. Such bilateral agreement will take cognizance of the concessions already granted to Guyana by Trinidad and Tobago.”

Mr. Speaker, this means that we agreed to go to the Paris Club, but when we got there the bilateral agreement of 1993 should have formed the basis of any agreement, because it says that both delegations acknowledged the support for the implementation of a bilateral agreement between Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago. At a later stage, I will ask this Government what happened to that.

We are being told that our Caricom brother cannot pay his loan, but the facts do not bear that out. If we are to be integrated, we have to know each other's position. Mr. Speaker, listen to what *Caribbean Week* reports in May under the headline, “Guyana: steady growth continues”:

“First quarter figures point to a continuation of steady growth recorded here since 1992, with Finance Minister Bharrat Jagdeo ...”

—that is the man who repudiated the agreement—

“reporting that the economy grew by more than 6.6% projected for this year, and that ‘there was also an excellent fiscal performance’.

‘The exchange rate is stable, imports are going up, foreign exchange earnings are increasing and inflation is just about 1.6% ...’

Mr. Speaker, that is the country we are being told by our Minister of Finance is a basket case and for whom we are writing off \$2000 million of debt.  
[*Interruption*]

That gentleman from Arima who is bawling, “Paris Club!” “Paris Club!”, let me explain to him what the Paris Club is. The Paris Club is an informal grouping of major industrial countries who have come together to look after their interest *vis-à-vis* their lending to Third World countries. Trinidad and Tobago is not a member of the Paris Club. What I am hearing and what the action of this Government leaves me to believe is that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago is prepared to say that this informal grouping of industrial countries calling themselves the Paris Club is of greater significance to them than Caricom.

**2.50 p.m.**

Mr. Speaker, let me quote, for the Member of Parliament for Pointe-a-Pierre, what the Minister of Finance says:

“The Paris Club is an informal group of creditors from industrial countries.”

It is not us! There is no Paris Club law! If there were, then the Paris Club should have helped us write off our loan too because we, too, have debts! [*Interruption*]  
Mr. Speaker, I would ignore him because he is trying to provoke me. The Paris Club consists of Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, United Kingdom and United States of America. This Government is telling us—in a Caricom debate, in a debate about integration and free movement—that they are prepared to give greater credence to what the Paris Club says. Well, I want to tell all the Members on the other side, that the Paris Club did not lend Guyana any money and they cannot write off Trinidad and Tobago’s money. Understand that! It was Trinidad and Tobago that lent that money. It is our money and in our bilateral arrangement within Caricom, we agreed—and it is written here—that that bilateral agreement will be the basis on which Guyana will deal with the Paris Club. That agreement has been broken by the Government of Guyana with the concurrence of the

Government of Trinidad and Tobago. The interest of the people of Trinidad and Tobago has been sold down the drain. *[Desk thumping]*

Mr. Speaker, I heard my Friend from Oropouche say that this bilateral agreement to which Guyana agreed, in 1993, and to which it said, in writing, that that would be the basis of its approach to the Paris Club, could not work because Guyana's state enterprises were only worth US \$20 million. I do not know where he got that information. He also said that if we had taken material from Guyana we would end up owning Guyana.

**Mr. Sudama:** Mr. Speaker, would the Member give way?

Could the Member tell this House whether this draft agreement which his government entered into expired at the end of 1994?

**Mr. Valley:** There was no draft agreement, the agreement was signed.

**Mr. Sudama:** Mr. Speaker, the draft agreement, which is not final, does not have any validity after December, 1994. *[Interruption]* What did you do after December, 1994? *[Interruption]*

**Hon. Member:** They called an election.

**Dr. K. Rowley:** For your benefit, Mr. Speaker, I am not aware that this agreement had any date of expiry. *[Interruption]* The PNM government would not have gone to Guyana and agreed to a date of expiry, in a situation where Guyana owed us money and would not pay, and where we knew that it was very likely that a certain kind of behaviour could follow. What we have, Mr. Speaker, is a signed agreement as to how we would proceed, with no cut-off date. The agreement said that we take note of the Guyana's approach to the Paris Club and that the agreement will form the basis.

Mr. Speaker, if the Trinidad and Tobago Government had done what it was supposed to do—what it had to do was to insist, at the Paris Club level, that we have an agreement with Guyana—the Paris Club would then have taken notice of that agreement and that would have allowed them to proceed with treating with Guyana's problems.

However, the Trinidad and Tobago Government agreed to a write-off of the debt to allow Guyana to proceed with its business without Trinidad and Tobago's business being taken care of. I want to demonstrate how the approach that they have repudiated could have and would have worked in our interest and in Guyana's interest. *[Interruption]*

In that agreement we knew that Guyana had available to it substantial acreage of tropical hard woods, which are in great demand; substantial acreage of rice lands, which they were making available to other people; the mining rights and concessions, which we could have accessed. Mr. Speaker, Guyana, while owing us substantial sums of money, would not agree to make available to us any concession of timber, but they made available, under commercial terms, large concessions to interests from Singapore, Malaysia, Korea, Canada. All I am saying is, if one has these resources which one is making available to other people, we are saying to you, make available to us a concession of some such nature and we will accept that in lieu of cash payment. Could my Friends on the other side tell me what is the problem with Guyana making available to us a concession of timber? *[Interruption]*

We have, in Trinidad and Tobago, 68 sawmills, all of which are short of timber. The Government of Trinidad and Tobago took the position with Guyana *[Interruption]*

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, it is not right that while the debate is in its early stages, that Members who may want to utilise their 45 minutes plus another 30 minutes should take the opportunity to say across the floor, some of what they could properly say when it is their turn to speak. One does not mind an aside from time to time, but to keep it up like that is not right.

Would the Member please continue?

**Dr. K. Rowley:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, I hope I will get some injury time.

Let me paint a scenario of Guyana attempting to settle a portion of that debt by an action of the Government, simply by granting to Trinidad and Tobago a concession of forest of one million acres, and put that in the context that there is one concession granted to a foreigner for over three million acres. Mr. Speaker, at the same time that they are granting three million acres to a non-Caricom country, if Guyana had made available to us a concession of one million acres for us to manage in a commercial way, through whatever mechanism we choose—Mr. Speaker, we have in Trinidad and Tobago 68 sawmills with a capacity of doing 34,000 cubic feet per day. *[Interruption]* We sought to do that! We got Tanteak to go to Guyana to pursue—Tanteak is a state agency in this area—this matter, but once again the borrower took the position that it is not giving that up.

Therefore, it is not a question of I do not have cash to pay; it is a question of I am not paying the debt. If it were a question of cash when the matter was raised, okay give us a concession of one million acres. From that million acres, with the installed capacity we have here in Trinidad and Tobago and with a 16 per cent unemployment, we could have been earning \$400,000 per day from the proceeds of that concession. *[Interruption]* That was the approach that was given up in favour of an approach that says, we will write off two-thirds of the debt, we will use the other one-third, and over 23 years, the interest that we earn from that, will repay the debt.

**3.00 p.m.**

I am saying, Mr. Speaker, the original bilateral agreement would have put us into funds now, to treat with our problem now. It would have been 26 years late, but we are in a position now, to use any of those facilities. If we had them to contribute to our economic development now; to contribute to unemployment now; to contribute to export now—because the same people who got the three million acres of Guyanese timber, are going to market that timber in the international market—we too, could have done that for the debt that we are owed. *[Desk thumping]*

Instead of pursuing that line, this Government chose to accept the unilateral repudiation of Minister Jagdeo to dismiss the bilateral agreement and go for debt write-off instead. I am saying that the other option of not agreeing to the debt write-off once you got to the Paris Club and forcing Guyana to accept the bilateral agreement—because all that was needed was to say “we do not agree”. If we did not agree, Guyana could not have proceeded with its business at the Paris Club—because a requirement for Guyana to proceed at the Paris Club, was that it had to have Trinidad and Tobago’s agreement on our debt and as long as we said we did not agree, they could not have proceeded, and that was our bargaining hand.

The first time we ever had a bargaining hand with Guyana, this Government threw it away and now tells us we must wait for 23 years to earn the interest on one-third of the debt and they write off two-thirds up front. From day one, after 26 years of not paying us any money and not servicing the debt, Guyana gets two-thirds of the debt written off and we must now wait for 23 years to get the interest on what is made out and which will eventually be equal to the amount of the loan. At the end of the day it would mean that it would have taken us 55 years to recover the loan. We are saying that we had in place a bilateral agreement signed



by Guyana and it could not have been repudiated without the say-so of the Panday Government of Trinidad and Tobago [*Desk thumping*] and I am accusing this Government of gross negligence and conspiracy for writing off that debt, and having written it off, we now have to wait till eternity to get it.

Whereas, we were in a position in one of many initiatives, if they had given us a concession in rice land—there are people in Trinidad and Tobago today who are damaging the Nariva swamp trying to grow rice—our businessmen would have gone there and done that rice production. We had set the stage for that, we had the agreement signed, it was signed by a PNM Minister, so do not ask me what we did. We got Guyana to agree to that in writing and you threw it away because you believe that the debt had something to do with Williams giving Burnham. I am saying I part company with you, it was Trinidad and Tobago's money which is owed by Guyana and it should not have been thrown away by this Government. [*Desk thumping*]

The bottom line is, at the same time this loan was not serviced, the resources that we were prepared to accept were being made available to Tom, Dick and Harry all around the world, and you have the unmitigated gall to come here and tell me I must accept that.

**Mr. Sudama:** For 26 years, why did you not get it back?

**Dr. K. Rowley:** Mr. Speaker, I will ignore that. Have you gotten it back? They have got it back, right. For 26 years, the borrower insisted that he will not pay and as a result of him not paying, they are telling me that conduct is okay. When we got this agreement, which Guyana signed, it was the first time we had Guyana in a position to enforce the repayment of that debt and I wonder if they will understand that. Up until then Guyana ignored us; they cannot pay. We are saying it is not a question that you cannot pay, it is a question of you will not pay. When Guyana went to the Paris Club on that day, we should have enforced this agreement but instead of doing that, these jokers went to the Paris Club and agreed to a write-off and have Guyana telling us now that we should be happy to get this.

It is not the first time we have had problems with our resources. We have been very generous before to other Caribbean countries and one of them paid us the great compliment of saying that when we had money it passed through us like a dose of salts. This Government could be as cavalier as it wants on this issue but at the end of the day, it cannot run away from the fact that it allowed Guyana to

escape from a situation where, for the first time we could have got our debts repaid in a much more generous way than what they have offered us here.

Mr. Speaker, there can be no Caricom integration if this kind of behaviour is what is going to mark our relationship with one another. If I lend you money, Mr. Speaker, and all you could say to me after is "when you had money, it passed through you like a dose of salts," how are we going to develop? If, when I come to your aid and provide you with oil and balance of payment support, you take the position after that, that you are not paying because you cannot pay, how are we going to proceed as a people who are yearning after integration? If you take your resources and make them available to other people, while not making them available to me, whom you owe, how then can I integrate with you in the way that I am supposed to and treat you as a brother walking the same course? This Government could say what it wants, the facts are there for all to see and if that is how it does its own private business, then I do not feel happy with them conducting Trinidad and Tobago's business in that way.

**Mr. Speaker:** The speaking time of the hon. Member has expired. I have put you on two minute's notice.

**Dr. K. Rowley:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I will use the two minutes to reiterate my position on this matter. It is a very small drop in the ocean, and while we support it, it is in the context that it means virtually nothing for the wider Caribbean peoples. I support it in the context that we need to— insofar as certification opportunities are available now, we can broaden the schedule and we must move more rapidly towards establishing certification for all skills so that a larger number of our people who are able to acquire skills of whatever kind, can access the programme.

I conclude by saying insofar as we have some history of our treatment one to another and deceit and intransigence in dealing with the transfer of resources one to another, these cannot be seen as actions which contribute to regional integration. Insofar as there are politicians in the Trinidad and Tobago Government, the Guyana Government or any Caribbean Government, who are prepared to trivialize serious matters like this, where the conduct of our highest officials is being called into account. I feel very sure that we are going to be in this position for a long time, and that which we have aspired to will elude us for a very long time until the quality of statesmen and women is known in the region to treat with our issues in a decent way. The Guyana debt is a signal to all our people to be careful with one another and I think that is unfortunate.

**3.10 p.m.**

**The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister of Consumer Affairs (Hon. Mervyn Assam):** Mr. Speaker, I rise to make a contribution on this Bill, an Act to remove the restrictions on entry into Trinidad and Tobago of skilled nationals of qualifying Caribbean Community countries.

Mr. Speaker, I was a bit surprised that the last speaker, the Member for Diego Martin West, of his 75 minutes, plus I suspect, another two minutes that you gave him, spent 46 minutes discussing the Guyana debt; and he took this opportunity, surreptitiously, to debate this issue because he failed to do so on a previous occasion. Therefore, he took advantage not only of this House, but also of the generosity of the Speaker, in allowing him to speak for 46 minutes on the Guyana debt issue something, in my view, which was not quite relevant to the Bill before the House. [*Interruption*]

Notwithstanding that, Mr. Speaker, notwithstanding the latitude that some of us take when we come to this House—

**Hon. Member:** You are talking for yourself.

**Hon. M. Assam:** —I would like to commend this Bill to this House for a number of reasons because, philosophically, the Bill seeks to put in train a very fundamental principle that would lead to the consolidation of the integration movement in the Caribbean.

As you are well aware, Sir, Caricom was established over 20 years ago, and we are moving now from what is a common market to a single market economy. It was only last week, Sir, I had the opportunity to be part of the delegation of Trinidad and Tobago, led by the honourable Prime Minister and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, to discuss some very fundamental issues in Barbados, under the chairmanship of the Prime Minister of Barbados, with respect to what we can do to accelerate the pace of integration and to establish, quite firmly, the single market economy.

In the deliberations, Sir, one of the items was the way forward and in discussing the way forward it was very important for us to underscore that the whole process had to be driven by the consumer and had to be people oriented. We were very cognizant of this, Sir, and therefore in attempting—although I must agree with the Member for Diego Martin West, that we should, in fact, expand the number of persons and skills eligible to move freely within the Caricom area. I think this tentative step is merely a beginning on the road to the achievement of

this larger goal and of this larger vision. I do agree with the Member for Diego Martin West on this point. So that, in attempting to condemn us for this very tentative step, I want him to know that this is not a position merely of Trinidad and Tobago. This is a Caricom position. A position that was debated and articulated and agreed upon by trade ministers and, subsequently, this position was agreed upon by the inter-sessional heads in Guyana some time ago.

**Mr. Valley:** Mr. Speaker, if the hon. Member would give way, on a point of clarification, the inter-sessional heads did not agree to limit the occupations to just four and five. The inter-sessional heads agreed with respect to qualifications, to start with the university degrees and even so, at the insistence of Trinidad and Tobago, you would see that the inter-sessional heads further agreed that any member state could be free to extend similar treatment to persons with other skills, as may be required. So that the country is free to go lower than university degrees. In other words, taking other skills.

**Hon. M. Assam:** I do not seem to understand the particular objection of the Member for Diego Martin Central. I was merely stating, Sir, that this is a Caricom position. All Caricom states agreed to this position. In fact, the legislation before the House was drafted by the Legal Department of the Caricom Secretariat; and was sent out as a model draft piece of legislation to all member states for them to make the various modifications to suit their particular national laws for presentation in the Parliament of their respective territories.

**Mr. Valley:** Here it is! [*Showing document*]

**Hon. M. Assam:** So that I do not know what is the quarrel between the Member for Diego Martin Central and what I am saying. I am simply putting to him that this is a Caricom position which Trinidad and Tobago has endorsed and is now attempting to put into law; so that when we go to the heads conference in July, we can say to them that Trinidad and Tobago has complied with one of the decisions of the heads. That is what we are doing today. I want to emphasize that.

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

**Mr. Valley:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am merely doing this because I know that the House is to be adjourned at 4.00 o'clock, so that I may not have the chance to speak this afternoon. I am simply making the point that the heads did not agree; there was no discussion on the occupations; they agreed with respect to the certification, university degree. The legislation talks about four or five occupations. I am saying, that was not even discussed at the heads, and I am

saying that one of the amendments we need to make to the legislation is to expand the occupations. I am saying, further, that at the insistence of Trinidad and Tobago we got the heads to agree that any member state could expand the legislation to include other skills and you would see that noted in the heads agreement. We are saying that since that was Trinidad and Tobago's, we ought to take a decision now to expand it to include other skills; in other words, non-university qualified persons. *[Interruption]*

**Hon. M. Assam:** I see, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that we are giving the Member for Diego Martin Central permission to make a speech even before he is given an opportunity to make his contribution.

**Mr. Valley:** All I am trying to do is help you.

**Hon. M. Assam:** If one looks at paragraph 7 one would see that in order to expedite the enactment of the necessary legislation to give effect to this decision of the heads of government and to ensure uniformity in the content of this legislation throughout Caricom, the Caricom Secretariat obtained the services of Professor Carnegie, Executive Director, Caribbean Law Institute, University of the West Indies, Cave Hill Campus, to draft model legislation. A model draft bill was transmitted by the Secretariat to all Attorneys General. I am not understanding why the Member for Diego Martin Central is jumping to his feet every minute in order to attempt to contradict what I am saying. He seems to think that he is still a Minister. *[Interruption]*

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** So what. He cannot get up and talk? Is it only Ministers who can talk in Parliament?

**Hon. M. Assam:** Nevertheless, Mr. Deputy Speaker, one has to take into consideration that it is impossible for any state to open up its doors completely to all trained people; to all skills that may be available in the Caribbean Community. In the first instance, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this piece of legislation has already begun, in certain parts of this community, to create a certain amount of suspicion on the part of nationals that other nationals will be coming in to take their jobs, or to deprive them of a job.

When you consider, Sir, that there is already a high rate of unemployment, not only in Trinidad and Tobago, but also in other Caricom states, this particular consideration must be taken into account very seriously. Therefore, any kind of skilled movement would have to be incremental. As the economy of Trinidad and Tobago recovers and as we create more job opportunities, particularly in the area

of skilled employment, we will be able to open up our shores and doors, even more, to other nationals who are qualified and skilled in the Caricom Community.

That is how we intend to proceed, in an orderly, organized fashion, bringing about incremental improvements in respect of skilled movement of labour.

**3.20 p.m.**

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Trinidad and Tobago has been abundantly generous ever since we have entered into this arrangement with our Caribbean neighbours. There is no situation that you can recall where Trinidad and Tobago has defaulted on any agreement that has been entered into. No one can condemn Trinidad and Tobago for not implementing a decision that has been arrived at, at even council meetings, inter-sessional heads, or even heads of government meetings.

The Member for Diego Martin West is correct. During the boom period, Trinidad and Tobago played big brother to nearly every Caribbean state. We lent money to Guyana, Jamaica, Barbados, Grenada, St. Kitts/Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent, Dominica. Every Caribbean state was the beneficiary of, not only the oil facility, but in terms of balance of payments support, in terms of loaning them money to pay their public servants' salaries, to build infrastructure, to develop certain kinds of projects in their various states, Trinidad and Tobago was extremely generous. Therefore, if the Member for Diego Martin West is telling us today that we continue with this generosity and that we are to be scolded for it and remonstrated for it, then he is, in fact, contradicting his own argument with respect to the very statement that he said the Member for Tobago East made some time ago, that Trinidad and Tobago must share and must care. I do not understand the argument on the one hand, that we have engaged in conspiracy to write off two-thirds of the debt owed to us by Guyana, and on the other hand, he is saying that the Member for Tobago East, in a rather erudite statement in Barbados recently, suggested that we must share and that we must care for our partners in the region. I do not understand how the two things can be reconciled.

**Mr. Robinson:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, may I say that what I did say was that all of us in the region, when we have difficulties, come to the help of one another. When a hurricane strikes, we help one another; natural disaster, man-made disaster. I did not isolate Trinidad and Tobago and say we must share. I said we all do share. We share our admiration of our achievements; we share our sadness and our losses. Those are the statements that I made.

**Hon. M. Assam:** I do not think the explanation, or the clarification of the Member for Tobago East was pertaining to what I said. He was probably trying to clarify what the Member said.

As I was saying, Trinidad and Tobago has been extremely generous to its Caricom neighbours for many years. If, today, we continue this kind of generosity, I do not know why the Member for Diego Martin West should be condemning us and describing what happened recently as an act of conspiracy.

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Now, Mr. Speaker, it is well known that the Guyana debt has been on the books of this country for several years. [*Interruption*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, it is becoming difficult for the hon. Member who is on his legs to be heard, what with the amount of cross talk that we are getting.

**Hon. M. Assam:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I was saying before the interruption, it is well known that the debt owed to us by Guyana has been on the books for many years. It should be instructive to note that the debt has really two components, one owed to the Central Bank, which is about 75 per cent of the debt, and the other component owed to the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, which is the other 25 per cent of the debt. In other words, when you write off 66 per cent of bad debt, it is really writing off 66 per cent of the 75 per cent that Guyana owes the Central Bank, and that would be reflected on the balance sheet of the Central Bank. On the other hand, the 25 per cent of the debt owed to the Trinidad and Tobago Government, 66 per cent of that 25 per cent would be reflected in the balance sheet of the Treasury.

I think this should be very clear. The Central Bank had no objection whatsoever. In fact, the Central Bank recommended to the Cabinet that this was the only vehicle available because of the many failed attempts in the past by successive ministers, administrations and regimes on both sides, meaning both Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago, in not persuading the Government of the Republic of Guyana to repay its debts to Trinidad and Tobago, notwithstanding the fact that the Member for Diego Martin West stated there was some written agreement between Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago in the form of a debt equity swap.

He may be surprised to learn that I was very much part of that. It was my company that put that particular proposal together when I was in the private

sector, and handed it to the junior Minister of Finance before he went to Guyana to negotiate that. It was the company that I worked for, as an investment banker, that put that proposal together in respect of a debt equity swap. So I am very familiar with the instrument that was being pursued. But notwithstanding the fact that you got an agreement to repay in that form, it failed.

I did not go to negotiate; I gave him the ammunition to negotiate, but it failed. *[Interruption]* I know the Member for Point Fortin would say it is arrogant; he must say it is arrogant, but he should keep his mouth quiet because I would not like to comment on him.

To come back, all of these initiatives failed. That is the important thing. Whatever the cause of the failure, whoever is responsible for the failure, whether the Government of Guyana unilaterally dismissed an agreement by one Minister of Finance going to the Cabinet and overturning an agreement signed by a previous Minister of Finance, all of that is irrelevant and water under the bridge. The point is it became an uncollectable debt, a non-performing loan. In financial circles, whether private financial institutions—and the Treasury is a financial institution, also the Central Bank, but public ones—are faced with situations like that, of a non-collectable debt or a non-performing loan, they have to take a serious decision as to what measures they would wish to employ to have the debt collected. Some make a judgment and say, "we take you to court, because if we take you to court you may have certain assets that we can take if and when the court decides a judgment in our favour."

Secondly, they may say that this guy has a particular guarantor and they may go after the guarantor. Or thirdly, they may say that the guy can only pay one-tenth of the loan or they may want to forgive the interest altogether, and some formula is arrived at in order to settle, because no bank, no financial institution, wants to carry *ad infinitum* a debt on its books. You want to clean the books at some time.

### **3.30 p.m.**

If you are presented with an opportunity that is certain and definite, even though it may take 23 years to recover, whereby you can collect a portion of what is owed to you, then you obviously opt for that particular vehicle or instrument. In this case, the arrangement with the Paris Club was certain and definite even though it may take a longer period of time.



From day one, the Government of Guyana would be repaying Trinidad and Tobago interest at the rate of \$7 million per year, I think, and there is going to be a moratorium on the principal repayment for six years and from the seventh year it kicks in and we would be repaid principal and interest for the next 15 or so years. Therefore, at the end of 23 years, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago would have recovered, in principal and interest, in excess of US \$450 million on behalf of the taxpayers of Trinidad and Tobago. Whereas hitherto, it was incapable and impossible to collect one cent under the various formulas, approaches and vehicles that were employed by either of the administrations that pursued the collection of this debt from Guyana.

That is the simple point, the truth and the fact; and for the Member for Diego Martin West to come here today, either through ignorance or spite, or both, to say that it was a conspiracy to write off this debt, is one of the unkindest cuts of all.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** "Most unkindest"?

**Hon. M. Assam:** You are worst than Brutus!

**Dr. Rowley:** You do not tell our children "most unkindest".

**Hon. M. Assam:** You do not understand that that is poetic licence!  
[Laughter]

**Dr. Rowley:** That is bad English!

**Hon. M. Assam:** You do not understand that that is poetic licence. You never read Shakespeare when he spoke about "the most perfectest way"? Obviously you have never read Shakespeare. You only did geology thinking that you would have got the Ministry of Energy in the last administration and you were the last person to be appointed a minister, almost as an afterthought. [Laughter and desk thumping]

**Mr. Speaker:** I would suggest to the Minister that if he speaks to me, to the Speaker, and not to Members we will get away from responding to the asides. Speak to me.

**Hon. M. Assam:** But I do not wish to be blamed for the ignorance of the great Shakespearean tradition by Members of the other side, Mr. Speaker. If they want a lesson in good literature I would do it after Parliament has adjourned.

To come back to the point I was making in terms of the collectability of the outstanding debt, it was the only possible vehicle, instrument or approach that

was certain and definite for the people of Trinidad and Tobago to recover the sums.

Mr. Speaker, I am amazed because I sometimes wonder if the left hand on that side is clapping with the right hand and if they know what each other is doing. The Member for Diego Martin Central asked a question about what the Member for Diego Martin East used to do. The Member for Diego Martin West is saying one thing and the Member for Diego Martin Central is saying it was the best thing that ever happened. He was so happy that we had arrived at a solution. He was quoted in the newspapers. If he did not say so then he should ask for the newspapers to withdraw that statement. When the whole deal was concluded at the Paris Club he was quoted to have said that he was happy that the matter was settled and it was a good settlement. Do you know why? The Member for Diego Martin Central has training in finance, therefore he understands what I just explained to this honourable House, how one goes about collecting debts and what are the options available. He understands because he was in the Ministry of Finance and he has some training in finance. He does not have rocks in his head as one Member, or concrete in his brain as the other Member.

I feel very sad to have to stand in this House whenever we meet to rebut some of the accusations and insinuations, innuendoes, malice, spite and inaccuracies of Members opposite. I feel a sense of sadness because I would have hoped that I would have come to this honourable House in order to make contributions that would be elucidating, illuminating and elevating, not only to Members of this House, but to the public in general; and that we would be able to stand here and to tell them the policies of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, that we are moving this country forward in order to enhance the quality of life of the citizenry, but to come here every Friday or every time to have to rebut the nonsensicalities spoken on that side, pains me.

Mr. Speaker, I now return to the Bill—after attempting to dispose of some of the inaccuracies and spite of the Member for Diego Martin West—to indicate that this Bill is one of the several instruments that would be put in place in order to carry forward the Caribbean integration movement.

As I was saying, we have a strategy for the way forward and we on this side are saying that the free movement of persons, even though it is a very small, tentative—and I would agree with the Member for Diego Martin West—at this point in time is not very satisfactory. We can expand it a little more and I am in total agreement with that because if we are to benefit from the skills, professions,

experience and wisdom of all the peoples of the Caribbean, and if we are to carry our economies forward and build a truly common market in a single economy, we need all the technology and all the learning and knowledge reposing in the Caribbean in every one of the states if it could be made available.

I am a Caribbean man and I am of the firm view that that is how we should go, but at this point in time, high unemployment and other economic and financial reasons preclude us from opening up the doors and floodgates as the Member for Diego Martin West would have us do.

Mr. Speaker, in order to proceed with the free movement of persons, we need to put certain things in place. He spoke about accreditation of the University of Guyana. It may be true, and I am going along accepting what he has said, that the University of Guyana has not had accreditation hitherto in Trinidad and Tobago.

**Mr. Imbert:** In the world.

**Hon. M. Assam:** All right, in the world; in Trinidad and Tobago, but I am not going to argue something when I do not know if they do not have it, and I am going along—

**Dr. Rowley:** Is there something that you do not know? [*Laughter*]

**Hon. M. Assam:** I know you failed at National Quarries and you brought the company to bankruptcy! I know that one. [*Laughter and desk thumping*] Nevertheless, I am prepared to plead ignorance with respect to the University of Guyana not having accreditation here in the Caribbean and in the world. I am prepared to accept what the Member is saying, but I am saying that this, again, is a good start if there could be some objective institution evaluating degrees or equivalency of certain degrees and diplomas from Guyana or any other part of the Caribbean, then we would have gone a long way to creating the atmosphere and climate whereby we can accept and receive people who are trained in different parts of the Caribbean, including Guyana, to work in Trinidad and Tobago and other parts.

We must start somewhere and I see no reason why we should be excoriating the efforts of the Caribbean Community with respect to including the University of Guyana as that institution that could receive qualification and a certificate of qualification.

**3.40 p.m.**

Mr. Speaker, more than that, we have also agreed that the various professional bodies in the various territories would be responsible for certifying persons who come here. In other words, the Medical Association of Trinidad and Tobago would be responsible for certifying doctors who want to work here and the Association of Certified and Chartered Accountants would be responsible for certifying persons who hold accounting degrees or certificates before they work here. It is similar with the engineering profession and the legal profession. This is contained in the Schedule to the Bill. Specifically stated are accountancy, dentistry, engineering, law and medicine. All the professional bodies in Trinidad and Tobago would have the responsibility to certify and evaluate persons who want to come here and say that they are qualified to practise accountancy, dentistry, engineering, law and medicine, notwithstanding the passage of this piece of legislation. That is a very important point to consider. Therefore, graduates of the University of Guyana would have to satisfy the bodies in Trinidad and Tobago that they are qualified to operate in the fields of accountancy, dentistry, engineering, law and medicine.

I hope that I can allay the fears and assuage the woes of the hon. Member for Diego Martin West, as he spoke so disparagingly of the educational standard which the University of Guyana has or has not attained. One must understand that from time to time governments must subjugate what is called its sovereignty in the interest of the larger goal. From time to time Trinidad and Tobago would like to be more *avant-garde* as suggested by the hon. Member for Diego Martin West. We would like to push the process faster; give it greater impetus and increase the pace of implementation. One has to understand that members of the Caribbean Community are at different levels of development economically, politically, culturally, technologically and in the area of skills. We have to recognize this as a fact.

At the last meeting which I attended last week, we spoke about support mechanisms to ensure that the states which are deprived of certain kinds of skills, financial and economic institutions, must be given an opportunity and all the assistance possible to come up to speed. Therefore, as we move to a single market economy, and the free trade area of the Americas in 2005, we have to recognize that each of the states of the Caribbean is at a different stage of development and they would have to be helped along. Even though Trinidad and Tobago may want to push, we must not come out as being pompous, arrogant, high-handed, big

brother; as if we are the greatest of all; our economy is strong; we have oil and gas and we are actually “showing off” on our smaller brothers. We have to be very careful about that.

To take the point that the Member for Diego Martin West made, we in Trinidad and Tobago would like to go faster and open up the doors, but at this point in time, the other countries are not in a position to do so. As good integrationists, we are good compromisers and are prepared to see the point of view of our smaller neighbours. We are prepared to take it into account; come to terms with their position and agree on common ground, so that all of us can implement this particular piece of legislation towards integration, through a limited movement of skilled persons in the Caribbean.

This would happen on all fronts. It would happen in the free trade movement at this point in time, notwithstanding the fact that we have an agreement for free trade of goods and services in the Caribbean. There are still countries in the Caribbean with negative lists, licensing regimes and non-tariff barriers. We are working towards elimination so that the single market economy could be a reality before long.

We need free movement of services, capital, a common external trade policy and a common macro economic policy framework for harmonization of fiscal incentives. Trinidad and Tobago is ready to run, but it can only run as fast as the smallest neighbour in the Caricom region. [*Desk thumping*] If we try to run, we would trip off all of them and in the long run we would derail the integration movement. [*Interruption*] You know everything. Why did you not do it right when you were there for four years?

One of the most important things which we have to embark upon in this entire exercise—You want to speak, go ahead.

**Mr. Hinds:** Thanks for giving way. I have taken note of your comment that Trinidad and Tobago is ready to run. You said it with great exuberance!

**Hon. M. Assam:** Panache!

**Mr. Hinds:** Panache! I would like you to put on the record of this House which administration has put this country in that proud position.

**Hon. M. Assam:** I can answer you off the bat. The National Alliance for Reconstruction started the economic revolution in this country. You must pay tribute to the NAR for starting the economic revolution in this country. The People’s National Movement destroyed the economy of this country for 30 years.

[*Desk thumping*] It is to the eternal and lasting credit and the gratitude of this country to the hon. Member for Tobago East, that he had the courage to start the reversal of the mess which he inherited from the People's National Movement.

**Mr. Hinds:** Thank you again for giving way. If that great NAR government did as much as you say it did, could you put on the record of this House, who was responsible for “mashing it up” in 1988?

**Hon. M. Assam:** The PNM has such a capacity for destruction, that they only talk about “mashing up”. We are constructive people and we talk about building, initiating, correcting, recovering, promoting, developing and carrying forward. He talks about “mashing up”. That is what they did to the country for 30-plus years. They “mash up” the country.

To come back to the substantive point I was making, we are saying that for Caricom to move forward, not only must we have the free movement of skills, but we must also be people centred and place a lot of emphasis on the consumer and standards. Therefore, a very serious—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, it is quite clear that the Minister needs protection. He is entitled to it if others are speaking while he is speaking. Please, could he now proceed.

**Hon. M. Assam:** Mr. Speaker, thank you for your protection.

I was saying that the free movement of skills within the Caricom region is merely a beginning. It has to be buttressed by a number of other initiatives and mechanisms. There must be a people-oriented programme. We must place the consumer in the forefront of this particular exercise so that the emphasis on standard and quality must be preeminent in the whole exercise. Therefore, we must mount a public education programme so that every man on the street, in every territory in the Caribbean region would understand what is meant by the single market economy; why it is necessary to have the free movement of skilled persons and other persons eventually; and why there must be free movement of goods, services and capital, so that when a Barbadian is coming to invest in Trinidad it would not be said that he/she is coming to take away our land and resources. When Trinidadians go to Barbados, Guyana or Jamaica no such negative statement or sentiment would be echoed by the ordinary man on the street.

We want to develop a harmonious resonance and an orchestration of the values, aims and aspirations of the entire Caribbean people of this region, so that

in time the single market economy, the free movement of persons, skills, capital, goods and services would not only be a theoretical kind of talk shop for parliamentarians who come from time to time to waste people's time, but it would also become an enduring reality. In the words of that great Barbadian poet, H. D. Carberry, in his poem, it would come to the stage as what he said at the time of the breakdown and demise of the West Indian Federation. It states:

“The mould is not yet cast—perhaps,  
That could unite and make my people one.  
But oh what a people  
Are my people.  
And when that steel is smelted  
And when that steel is tempered  
And when that steel is cast  
Oh what a people shall my people be!”

Thank you.

**3.50 p.m.**

**Mr. Colm Imbert (Diego Martin East):** Mr. Speaker, the last part of the contribution of the Member for St. Joseph, in part, could aptly describe the party to which he belongs. Before the mould is cast, the party ‘mash up’.

It is a bit unfortunate that we are here today to debate a piece of legislation which seeks to deepen the Caribbean integration movement, as explained by the Member for Naparima, and the Member for St. Joseph felt it necessary to lower the tone of the debate into puerile trivia.

Let me see if I can deal with some of the misconceptions and misunderstandings of the Member for St. Joseph. What my hon. colleague, the Member for Diego Martin West, sought to have him understand—hon. Member, that is an impossibility—is the whole concept of leverage. I would expect that someone with a smattering of financial training would have some knowledge of the concept of leverage.

What the hon. Member for Diego Martin West was saying is that even though the Republic of Guyana wished to go to the Paris Club to deal with the majority of its debt obligation, and wished to get debt forgiveness, in order to do so there

may have been a requirement that they settle the matter with Trinidad and Tobago first, then Trinidad and Tobago was in a position of leverage.

It was not a case that we had to take whatever we got or to accept whatever deal was put on the table. We were in a very strong negotiating position for the first time. Guyana had options available to it. It could decide that it would not negotiate with Trinidad and Tobago and thereby it might not have benefited from any debt forgiveness the Paris Club may have wished to give. Of course, Guyana would not have exercised that option. The Republic of Guyana went to the Paris Club to seek significant debt forgiveness from the major industrialized countries in the world, but with the knowledge that unless they dealt with the Trinidad and Tobago problem they were not going to get to first base.

I have nothing against the Guyana government. They are obviously very skilful. The political neophytes on the other side have been outwitted and outmanoeuvred by the clearly better-prepared, more capable technocrats in the Guyana Government, and the Trinidad and Tobago Government clearly did not understand its strong negotiating position. If we had told Guyana: We know you want to get debt forgiveness from the Paris Club. We know that it is a condition precedent that unless the Trinidad and Tobago debt situation is settled you will not get any debt forgiveness, let us talk. Then we could have dictated the terms. But for some reason, the present Government held the view that they were in a no-win situation. *[Interruption]* That is what the Member for St. Joseph is saying. We were in a no-win situation and there was nothing further we could do.

One cannot use unparliamentary language. We had Guyana in a position which was very uncomfortable to say the least. If one uses analogy, we had them by a certain part of their anatomy and we could have easily if the debt equity swap was no longer in favour, have negotiated a far more favourable settlement to the debt situation. Otherwise Guyana would have had to walk away from the Paris Club; would have been unable to get debt forgiveness; would have been unable to access loans from major financial institutions such as the IMF, the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank, and they certainly would not have wanted to be placed in that position.

That is it in a nutshell. It is the concept of leverage. Trinidad and Tobago had tremendous leverage on the Republic of Guyana and they would have capitulated. But, the politicians in Guyana, being more skilled and more capable than the politicians in the present Government of Trinidad and Tobago, they outmanoeuvred and outwitted the political neophytes on the other side.



I hope the Member for St. Joseph now understands that his interpretation of the situation is completely lacking in any foundation: it has no rational basis.

Since we are about to adjourn, do we have a few minutes?

**Mr. Speaker:** The Motion is moved by the Government. Nothing has been moved yet.

**Mr. C. Imbert:** Mr. Speaker, I was given the impression that we would adjourn at 4.00 p.m.

**Mr. Speaker:** Until such time, please proceed.

**Mr. C. Imbert:** Thank you kindly.

There are certain aspects of this Bill that I would ask the Minister to look at in the interval, since if the debate is to be adjourned shortly, there will be an interval before we conclude the debate.

One must look very carefully, my hon. ex-colleague from Naparima that we are not opening up a situation where the whole concept of standards and qualifications becomes very loose.

If you look at the end of clause 8(2), there are the words “appearing to the Minister to have technical expertise in the assessment of qualifications.” This section of clause 8 really gives the Minister wide powers to recognize virtually any institution of learning higher or otherwise as giving certain qualifications which could be submitted by Caricom nationals for entry into Trinidad and Tobago. It is extremely wide.

If one looks at clause 8(1), it is very straightforward.

- “(a) a degree of the University of the West Indies or of the University of Guyana ...;
- (b) membership of the Guild of Graduates of the University of the West Indies ...”

Again, these things are specific. Once one presents a certificate from the two universities, or one can show membership in the Guild of Graduates, it is automatic.

We go on:

- “(c) a certificate from the Secretary-General of the Caribbean Community attesting that qualifications possessed by the applicant satisfy the conditions for recognition of Caribbean Community skills qualification.”

*Immigration Bill*  
[MR. IMBERT]

*Friday, June 07, 1996*

That opens the door more. We have gone beyond the University of the West Indies and the University of Guyana to the Caricom Secretariat certifying qualifications and so forth.

**4.00 p.m.**

Then we have (d) which opens the door even more.

“A certificate from any authority, designated by the Minister by Order, as an accrediting authority for the purposes of this section, attesting that qualifications possessed by the applicant ...”

Mr. Speaker, (d) is the real crux of the matter. This is giving the Minister the authority—and it is in 8(2)—to decide which organization, institution and so forth can certify anyone. One therefore goes beyond the University of the West Indies, beyond the University of Guyana and comes down to any authority which appears to the Minister to have technical expertise in the assessment of qualifications.

*Motion made and question proposed, That this House do now adjourn to Friday, June 14, 1996, at 1.30 p.m. [Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar].*

*Question put and agreed to.*

*House adjourned accordingly.*

*Adjourned at 4.02 p.m.*