

*Leave of Absence**Wednesday, January 19, 2000***HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES***Wednesday, January 19, 2000*

The House met at 2.30 p.m.

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER in the Chair]

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I wish to advise that I have received communication from two Members of this honourable House who have asked to be excused from today's sitting. These are the Member for Diego Martin East and the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West. The leave of absence which they seek has been granted.

PAPERS LAID

1. Accounts and Financial Statements of the Programme of Institutional Strengthening of the Women's Affairs Division of the Ministry of Culture and Gender Affairs for the period July 25, 1994 to December 31, 1994 as required by Non-technical Cooperation Agreement ATN/SF-4348-TT between the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and the Inter-American Development Bank. [*The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (Hon. R. L. Maharaj)*]
To be referred to the Public Accounts Committee.
2. Report of the Auditor General on the accounts of the National Quarries Company Limited for the year ended July 31, 1997. [*Hon. R. L. Maharaj*]
3. Report of the Auditor General on the accounts of the National Quarries Company Limited for the year ended July 31, 1998. [*Hon. R. L. Maharaj*]
Papers 2 and 3 to be referred to the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee.

ORAL ANSWER YTO QUESTION

Signal Hill Lands
(Cost)

14. Miss Pamela Nicholson (Tobago West) asked the Minister of Housing and Settlements:

1. Would the Minister please tell this honourable House whether the Tobago House of Assembly (T.H.A.) was formally informed that the price of land sold by the National Housing Authority (N.H.A.) in Trinidad and Tobago does not exceed five dollars (\$5.00) per square foot?

2. If the answer is in the affirmative, could he give us the date when such information was sent to the Tobago House of Assembly (T.H.A.)?
3. Would the Minister inform the House whether he is aware that the Tobago House of Assembly is still demanding seven dollars (\$7.00) per square foot for the Signal Hill Lands and that at the expiration of the Tobago House of Assembly 90-day deadline, the existing chaotic situation will be further aggravated?
4. Could the Minister of Housing and Settlements inform the House whether it is the National Housing Authority or the Tobago House of Assembly that will be responsible for the issuing of deeds, after the Signal Hill applicants have paid for their lands?
5. Could the Minister state whether he would be meeting with the Signal Hill Land development applicants to address their problems and if so, when?

The Minister of Housing and Settlements (Hon. John Humphrey): Mr. Speaker, there are five parts to this question. They are as follows:

- (1) In a previous response to questions asked by the Member for Tobago West, the Minister of Housing and Settlements indicated that Cabinet had agreed that the price of land sold by the National Housing Authority in Tobago is not to exceed \$5.00 per square foot. The Executive Director of the NHA has since written to the Chief Secretary of the THA advising him, *inter alia*, that “all moneys collected in respect of the execution of the Authority’s functions, and/or powers and/or duties in the island of Tobago are due and payable to the NHA and not the THA”. In that letter, the NHA requested that the THA give in writing, within seven (7) working days:
 - (a) full and proper account of all moneys received and/or collected by the THA on behalf of the NHA for the period October 1, 1998 to date; and
 - (b) a detailed list of any vesting/or dispositions of title whatsoever which the Assembly has purported to effect on behalf of the Authority and additionally, all moneys since collected by the THA should be paid immediately to the NHA. The THA should desist from further collection of moneys and refer all persons to the NHA at their offices, Rollocks Building, Main Street, Scarborough, Tobago.
- (2) The date of the letter referred to at (1) above is January 07, 2000.

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- (3) In light of the response at (1) above, the Minister wishes to inform the House that he is not aware that the THA is still demanding \$7.00 per square foot and has given purchasers a 90-day deadline.
- (4) The National Housing Authority will be fully responsible for issuing deeds after the Signal Hill applicants have paid for their lands.
- (5) The Minister does not propose to meet with the Signal Hill Land Development applicants as the matter has been comprehensively dealt with in a press release that was issued and has been published on several occasions since it was issued.

Miss Nicholson: Mr. Speaker, may I ask a supplemental question? Is the hon. Minister of Housing and Settlements saying that the people who have had a contractual agreement with the National Housing Authority are being only communicated with, on a serious matter like this, through the newspapers? If one does not read the newspapers how would one be able to address that situation?

Hon. J. Humphrey: The National Housing Authority's office in Tobago is instructed, in fact, to communicate with all of its clients.

PROCEDURAL MOTION

The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (Hon. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj): Mr. Speaker, as provided for in Standing Order 64(7), I beg to move that this House now resolve itself into Finance Committee for the purpose of considering proposals for variation of the 1999 appropriation.

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: I need to indicate to strangers in the gallery—those other than hon. Members—that in going to Finance Committee, the Standing Orders provide that the House must be cleared. I am afraid I have to ask you to vacate the House for a short while, while the Finance Committee meets. You will be free to come back afterwards. Thank you.

2:40 p.m.: *House resolved into Finance Committee.*

3:45 p.m.: *House resumed.*

The Minister of Finance (Sen. The Hon. Brian Kuei Tung): Mr. Speaker, I wish to report that Finance Committee has completed its deliberations and will formally present its report to the House of Representatives on Friday, January 21, 2000. On that date, it is proposed to move that the report be adopted forthwith in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order 69(1) of this House.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

EDUCATION (AMDT.) (NO. 2) BILL

Order for second reading read.

The Minister of Education (Hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move,

That a Bill to amend the Education Act, Chap. 39:01, be now read a second time.

On August 12, 1996 the then Minister of Education, Dr. Adesh Nanan, appointed a committee to make recommendations for the establishment of local school boards at government secondary schools. This report was thereafter presented to the Minister in February 1997. The report was taken to Cabinet and Cabinet made certain recommendations. A bill was drafted and the bill and regulations were again taken to Cabinet. Cabinet asked that the proposed bill be put out for public comment. The Minister of Education then invited public comment on the bill and the regulations and the comments were incorporated into the Bill and regulations, which are before this honourable House. The results of discussions held with the Trinidad and Tobago Unified Teachers' Association, from its comments on the Bill and others, as I said, are incorporated in the amendment.

This is just another of the measures that Government proposes to take with respect to decentralization of education and restructuring of both the Education Ministry and the education system.

The essential aspects of the report are to strengthen and promote school-based management; to promote links between school and community; to bring education management closer to communities in a bid to make the Ministry itself more effective.

The local school boards proposed by the Bill in my respectful view would have a profound influence on the way schools will be run, on the linkages between the schools and the communities, and will go a long way in addressing matters concerning the state of the school plant. It is part of Government's policy of promoting decentralization in the school-based management of the education system.

This concept of local school boards is not a new one in Trinidad and Tobago. It has its origins in many earlier education reports. These date back from the Moynes Commission in 1939 through the Maurice Report in 1959, to the local school boards committee of 1987. The primary notion of the proposed local school board is rooted in the concept of broad-based participatory planning in education at the local level, and this is a scenario in which the local communities and interest groups will have a direct input in what is essentially an important part of their lives, the education of the school population of their communities.

This effort towards decentralization has been occupying, and continues to occupy the minds of a number of education administrators. Whilst there have been numerous reports and recommendations over the years for community participation in this way, very little in terms of implementation—except in the case of a pilot programme for local school boards for primary schools in 1998—was attempted. So that since 1988 to the present, there has been a rapid expansion of the government secondary school sector in the education system. The general belief is that the system has outgrown the original structures put in place for supervision and management.

Indications are that decentralization, community and stakeholder participation are the keys to effective management. It is anticipated that the successful establishment and operation of these local boards would encourage and further develop a community spirit which is geared to accepting responsibility for the general education in our communities.

The underlying philosophy for the establishment and operation of these boards is rooted in the belief that local boards will enhance the capability and capacity of schools to achieve the objectives through the involvement, not only of the key stakeholders themselves, but also cross-sectional community, individual and interest groups in managing the schools.

We look at the regulations which are attached to the Bill, the proposed legislation, which, in effect, give flesh to the bones that the amendment represents so that we can see from the regulations what the composition of the local school board is proposed to be. We can look at the proposed regulations at Part II of the Bill which set out the composition of the local board. Part II which is the proposed regulation 3 states:

“A Board constituted by Order...shall comprise—

- (a) the Principal who is an *ex officio* member;
- (b) no more than nine other members drawn from among the following groups, namely:”

It is our intention, based on our proposal for student councils to be set up in schools, that in addition to those listed here, we will have a representative from the student council, if any, of the particular school. So that the principal, and other members who would be:

- “(i) a member of the school staff other than the Principal;
- (ii) a member of the union most representative of teachers nominated by the union;

- (iii) two members of the recognised Parent-Teacher Association of the school, nominated by the members of that Association, at least one of whom must be a female;
- (iv) a representative of the past pupils' association, if any, of the school, nominated by that association;"

And as I have indicated one representative of the student council, if any, nominated by that council in the school.

- “(v) four persons nominated by the Minister as he deems necessary after consultation with the relevant interest groups and stakeholders within the Community.”

Mr. Speaker, the composition clearly reflects those stakeholders in the education system, that is to say teachers, parents and students but, in addition, other persons to be placed on the local school board are drawn from the community after discussions with the stakeholders and community groups. Therefore, they will be able to represent other interests within a particular community apart from the major stakeholders in the education system.

So, I am saying representatives, the major stakeholders, the teachers, the parents and the students would all be represented on the local school board and, in addition, other members drawn from the community.

It is interesting to note that the principal is there as an *ex officio* member, so that the intention is not for the school board to usurp the functions, powers and duties of the principal, or of the teachers of the school. This is why the teachers are represented. The principal is also represented.

- “(2) The Board shall appoint from its membership, persons, other than the Principal, to be the Chairman and the Vice-Chairman.”

So that the principal, being an *ex officio* member, will not at any point, chair the local school board. That person will be appointed from amongst the membership, other than the principal. The board will be composed in this manner.

I have been advised that when the committee was set up in 1997, that committee surveyed principals of government secondary schools and according to responses received, the overwhelming majority of schools—91 per cent of those principals—were in favour of having and working with local school boards.

The principals indicated that the following areas should have local school board involvement—physical facilities management; security; fund-raising; student support services.

3.55 p.m.

Ninety-one per cent were in favour of the school boards being involved with respect to physical facilities management; 84 per cent with respect to security; 80 per cent with respect to fund raising; 82 per cent with respect to student-support services.

In terms of the management of the schools, these schools deal with shaping, moulding the character of the lives of the young adults from all walks of life. Principals and teachers have to manage, in some cases, very large school plant with expensive equipment. So the intention behind the establishment of the local school board is to encourage a much greater co-operation between the community and the school, and to involve a cross-section of the entrusted community, so far as is possible, to contribute to the efficient management of the school.

Mr. Speaker, it is very clear that there have been several problems highlighted, primarily, with respect to the upkeep and maintenance of the plant and the school equipment itself. Problems such as these, more often than not, place a great strain on the resources available to the principal, and it is our vision that the local school board could help to share some of this burden to create a more effective system in which principals, in conjunction with the local school board, can use to manage the schools.

So that we have seen all the difficulties with respect to the state of the plant in our education system; with respect to sewer systems; with respect to roofs. All the physical difficulties with respect to the school plant. Mr. Speaker, I have indicated that we have secured the approval of Cabinet with respect to having \$100 million allocated within this fiscal year for repairs and refurbishment of the secondary schools in Trinidad and Tobago. In addition, we have secured approval from the World Bank under the Fourth Basic Education Project for \$30 million to be utilized for repairs, refurbishment of the primary school plant in Trinidad and Tobago.

Our vision for that, in our negotiations with the bank, was for that moneys to be allocated to the principals of the primary schools, similar to the way in which we have dealt with the sixth programme for a school-based management of the funds for those repairs that are most necessary and essential. So that with respect to the primary schools we have identified funds for repair to the plant. With respect to the secondary schools Cabinet has approved funding for repairs for those. Mr. Speaker, of course, that seems like a great amount of money—much more is needed—but it is our intention, certainly, in this fiscal year and during the summer vacation this year, that we would try to address most of the major problems that exist.

In the interim, between now and then, work is continuing with respect to emergency repairs that are being identified in particular schools, and as those are brought to our attention we are taking steps to deal with them. So I draw this to the attention of hon. Members. I am saying that with the local school board in place, many of the problems which only come to our attention when you tune in to the 7.00 o'clock news, or come to our attention when there is a protest, that in some way we can help to alleviate or eradicate. These things can be brought up before, and dealt with, before it reaches a crisis position of the protest or the shutting down of schools. So that we are hoping that the local school boards would assist us, to some extent, with respect to physical facilities management.

If we look at the duties and powers of the board as set out in the proposed regulations, these include the development of a strategic plan for the school; the development and implementation of the school improvement plans; the mobilization of community support for the school; and the strengthening of community relations with specific members of the community, highlight the areas in which the local school board could have control.

Again, if we look at the regulations we would see the powers and duties of the proposed local school boards and in Part III of the proposed Regulations, (19) (1) states:

“The Board shall have the duties and powers, including but not limited to those listed hereunder, to manage the school—

- (a) in the development of a strategic plan for the school;
- (b) in the conduct of an operational and environmental audit of the activities of the school;
- (c) in the development and implementation of school improvement plans;
- (d) by receiving information, complaints and expressions of concern and hope from the public concerning the school and its members, and to make recommendations as they see fit and relay them to the competent authority;
- (e) by encouraging, promoting, sustaining and fostering mutual understanding, good fellowship and co-operation among the Minister, staff, parents, pupils and other persons associated with the school;
- (f) by requesting the assistance of local government bodies and other agencies to assist in the maintenance of the school;
- (g) by liaising with all relevant agencies in order to ensure that the school is adequately served with water and electricity;”

This is like a recurring decimal that they show off schools that are forced to shut down because no water has been brought in. It is our respectful view that with the local management board on the scene, these things could be addressed more expeditiously by liaising with members of the community in the vicinity of the school, mobilizing community support for the school; strengthening community relations with specific bodies and individuals. It continues, as I say, in Regulation 19, the powers and duties that are proposed for the local school boards.

So that the introduction of these boards, in our respectful view, would allow positive action to be undertaken in a shorter space of time than obtains presently. Often the complaint is that the Ministry takes too long to respond to the needs of the school and perhaps this may well be so in certain instances. It is our respectful view that local boards could help to alleviate problems like this to a significant degree. They could use their initiative to expedite solutions, by mobilizing the resources of the community for the benefit of the school.

Another issue of concern has to do with security in schools; security, not only with respect to plant and equipment but for pupils and teachers in the school. The proposed Regulation 19, again, gave the local school boards the authority to deal with issues relating to security of the school. I speak of Regulation 19(1)(n). A complaint that is heard very often is that the school is poorly maintained and appeals unheard. So that Regulation 19(1)(n) which deals with the issue of security that the school boards will be involved reads:

- (n) in the development and implementation of plans to improve the security of this school;"

and to vest the responsibility in the local school board; and

- (m) in the development and implementation of a maintenance programme for the plant and equipment of the school;"

Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to mention a matter that was brought to my attention which occurred at the Diego Martin Junior Secondary School. I am advised that yesterday at around 1.25 p.m., an armed bandit entered the Home Economics classroom at the Diego Martin Junior Secondary School and robbed the teacher and some students in the classroom of possessions. I am advised further that approximately 25 female students were in the classroom at the time. It is alleged that the bandit entered the compound by climbing over the perimeter fence to the back of the school. I am further advised that he went up a flight of stairs and entered the Home Economics classroom, ordered the students to lie on the floor and then proceeded to rob the teacher of her jewellery and

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handbag, and one student was robbed of her wristwatch. *[Interruption]* Mr. Speaker, does the hon. Member want to say something?

Mr. Panday: He wants to identify the robber.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: Perhaps. *[Laughter]*

Mr. Speaker, this was brought to my attention late last night and I would like to express our horror—in fact, we are appalled at such an incident in terms of bandits actually carrying out robberies in the school itself. What is very interesting is that this school is one in which the Ministry of Education has placed security. You may recall, Mr. Speaker, that there was agreement that security would be placed in high-risk schools and we would continue our investigations into how many MTS Security guards were at the school at that particular time. So that we would continue our investigations and ask for a report from them as to what transpired and how that happened.

4.05 p.m.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I have always said, if there are no criminals, perhaps we would need no law and all that we can do is to reiterate the position of the Ministry, and to say that we would take all the steps that we can in terms of dealing with the issue of security for, and in, our schools.

Mr. Speaker, following the incident yesterday at the school, I would like to advise that, immediately, officials from the Ministry went into the school and counselling of some of the students took place. Mr. Speaker, you can well appreciate, the young students there were made to lie on the floor whilst this incident was taking place, so a guidance officer was at the school at the time and two sessions were held with the students before school was dismissed on that particular day. Today the school is functioning—I am advised—normally, but we do have follow-up counselling sessions planned and I am advised further that one student has been identified as needing further additional counselling.

With respect to security arrangements generally in the schools, a Cabinet-appointed committee had identified over 200 schools as high-risk schools requiring immediate attention. I am very happy to advise that to date, at least 90 of these schools have been provided with some measure of security in terms of the upgrade of infrastructure and the provision of security personnel at a cost of approximately \$12 million. Forty-four of these schools were provided with security in 1998 under Phase I; a further 46 in 1999; and I am advised that during this year we will be moving into Phase III with an additional 45 schools, to put security measures in place for those schools.

I am further advised that with respect to the incident I mentioned, school supervisors visited the school today to provide support and direction to the school administration. Of course, the Patna Police Post, which is nearby, has also provided support.

I would also like to indicate that the Ministry of Education, in addition to these security measures—in terms of the placing of security guards and upgrading the infrastructure and the physical facilities of the schools themselves in terms of fencing and lighting and so forth—is looking at the proposal at the moment that goes beyond that kind of security arrangement for the schools. It is a proposal that seeks to enhance the security measures at schools and has to do with electronic measures, electronic security that will tie in with what obtains with the Ministry of National Security under the E-999 Rapid Response Programme.

So that, there is a proposal that is before us, which we are considering. The technical people are looking at it, and we intend to take that into consideration with our colleagues at a near point in the future. That system envisages, as I said, an electronic security system in the school. The link will be with the E-999, so you can have that kind of rapid response with respect to incidents in school. There are several aspects to that proposal. There are measures, which include such things as the wearing of a tag, and that tag can be activated in a particular manner in those areas that are the highest risk in terms of schools.

Let me say again that we sympathize and we are very, very horrified with respect to the incident at the Diego Martin Junior Secondary School and we have gone in there in terms of the Ministry's guidance officers and we are doing the best we can in the circumstances. I have requested from the MTS, the security on the compound, a proper and full report as to what transpired in terms of the security. I am advised—and again I do not know if this is a fact until I get the full report—that at the school there were two officers assigned, but at the time of the incident there was only one officer on the compound. Again, that is something we are looking into to verify what happened and we will be dealing with the school accordingly.

Mr. Speaker, in terms of the issue, getting back to local school boards, on the issue of security—which led me to that particular incident—I am saying that the local school boards will be there to assist in terms of the specific requirements and the particular community regulation 19(1)(m), in the development and implementation of maintenance and the development and implementation of plans to improve school security.

Again, I am saying these initiatives are in place to facilitate decentralization of the Ministry. There are over 70 government secondary schools, and practically, in

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terms of the Ministry of Education having that direct linkage on an immediate basis, it is quite clear that the local school board will be better placed and poised to assist us in the management of the schools.

In the academic year 1999/2000, many schools, as you know, Mr. Speaker, failed to open because of maintenance issues. These have remained unattended during the vacation. Many schools claimed that works, which were scheduled to be done, never took place, leaving the schools in a state of disrepair. I have given some of our plans for a comprehensive repair programme. Again, it is our intention that when the local school boards are in place they can assist us in identifying those things that are in most urgent need to deal with those expeditiously.

The school-based management, and the involvement in the community, are very necessary to ensure that the highest quality education is delivered to our children. Education can no longer be seen as unique and exclusive to the school alone. It is our respectful view that the time has come and long gone for us all to play a part in what is singularly the greatest commodity of any society—our children—and to try to equip them with the tools that will make them useful and viable contributors to our society. It is also our respectful view that the benefits of implementing changes such as these will live long after the pioneers and will continue for generations to come, so our children can benefit tremendously from the involvement of the community and the other stakeholders in the management of the schools. No longer will the managing of the schools be simply the purview, jurisdiction, and prerogative of officials at the Ministry of Education; it will be something that the community will buy into and this is a way in which the community can buy into the management and, therefore, buy further into the education of the children.

May I say that I look forward to comments and suggestions from all Members in terms of any changes that could be recommended. It is our intention that these school boards will be placed in all government schools. As you know, the Government-assisted schools, those belonging to denominational boards, already have a system of school boards in place. They already function with school boards. It is not mandatory for them to follow the system that is being proposed in the legislation. It is their option if they wish to follow our pattern or if they wish to continue with the kind of school board they already have in place.

It is interesting to note, and I think the other day a caller raised this issue. I remember I was on the *Morning Edition* and a caller raised the issue that it is not just the planning, it is not just the structure and repairs; it is much more that determines quality education and prestige education and was making the

distinction between the so-called prestige schools and non-prestige schools. Mr. Speaker, what is very interesting is that those schools that seem to function so well and have students who do so well, are the schools that have two things that are very outstanding: one is that they operate with school boards—that is the denominational schools; of course, the second is the whole business of values-based and spiritually-based education within those schools.

It is interesting. I read that in the United States they have taken religion out of the schools. I have seen that President Clinton, only recently, within this week or last week was talking about bringing back religion into the schools of the United States and finding a way around the Constitution to bring back religion into the schools. Because what had happened there because of their Constitution, they said the schools had to be secular and not religious organizations and they had removed religion completely out of the schools.

It is very interesting to note that two aspects of the very successful schools in this country have to do with: firstly school boards; and secondly, the fact that they have a very strong foundation in terms of spiritual and religious education in the schools. So that, this is one limb in terms of local school boards.

Another initiative that we have been pursuing is the whole issue of values-based education in the schools, and I have already indicated that we have had a curriculum officer to meet with the denominational boards, the IRO, others in the community, all stakeholders, and to develop for us a curriculum for a values-based education.

So, Mr. Speaker, these are some of the initiatives. Of course, there are many others and we have spoken at length on those on other occasions in other places for the local school boards. As I say, I look forward to suggestions and comments from Members here.

I thank you and I beg to move.

Question proposed.

Mr. Fitzgerald Hinds (*Laventille East/Morvant*): Mr. Speaker, we are at a very critical stage in the development of this society. I trust that in all eras of man's existence, man felt that that particular time was critical. It appears, in the context of Trinidad and Tobago, and it is clear from the evidence, that things are not going too well, particularly in the business of education. It is clear to any observer that the outcome, the product, the expectation, that the learned, disciplined—and if I may say loosely again—educated child or young adult is not

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always, and far too often not, realized. So, here we are today tinkering again with the educational system.

Most education in a society, as is well known to all, is informal rather than formal. It is why the example set by the adults and the behaviour by the adults, elders, leaders, high-profile persons in the community, is so very important. Because it is in that informal transition of information that the young people whom we seek to educate, to shape—so that they could make their contribution to our development and preserve the society in which we all live—get most of their signals and messages.

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

So when the Minister spoke a while ago about the bandit and the unfortunate experience of teachers and students at the Diego Martin School only yesterday, I can understand. You must forgive me, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for venturing the view that sometimes these misguided young persons seek justification in what they see so-called leaders in the society doing. If that is so, the question is: “Who did that little bandit pattern?” Who did he mimic? Who was his exemplar?

Mr. Humphrey: You are.

Mr. F. Hinds: Mr. Deputy Speaker, that was a rather horrible experience, but about four months ago I read with dismay in one daily newspaper that another assailant went into a school, but this time he sexually offended a teacher in the presence of her charges in a preparatory school. He raped the woman in the presence and in the face of those children. The list of these horror stories goes on. I heard utterings, mutterings even, coming from the Member for St. Augustine. I could tell him, I could highlight to him some of the more recent very bad examples, but I will not be detained, I will continue with the debate.

4.20 p.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Walter Rodney, a son of the Caribbean, wrote a beautiful book, a very helpful book, that I read many years ago, entitled *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. He pointed out and I wish to paraphrase him—that most education in a society comes from the actual environment and the learning process, he felt, was directly related to the pattern of work in that society. He made the point, and he highlighted the example, of the Bemba people in what was then Northern Rhodesia. He pointed out that in that time six-year olds could routinely identify some 50 or 60 different plant species and highlight the purposes that they served. That reflected the point that that kind of information in that society was necessary and so the children learnt from their environment.

More than that, I think that example demonstrates that education had to be very relevant. If there was some miraculous event of a young man, in that time, understanding the workings of, say, a computer and talking or thinking about it, he would have been seen as rather strange, if not mad. Because that information that he would have been dealing with, would not have been relevant to his society.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I speak about relevance, I could not help but recall only last week the Member for Siparia—the Minister—and I, along with many other people—yes, the Member for Tobago East was present—attended a scholarship awards ceremony, the Fullbright Scholarship Awards ceremony. The feature speaker was one Professor Palmer. I gather that he was Trinidadian—*[Interruption]* Jamaican. He delivered a very searching and thought-provoking feature address. I took the trouble to obtain a copy of it. He made a very important point in the context of relevance and the need for education to be relevant. I am dealing with this because, while we tinker, from time to time, with the system—you may wish to agree with me, perhaps not, the Minister would agree with me certainly—something seems to be going wrong. The outcome, the product, is not yielding that which we hoped it would. Something is clearly going wrong. Therefore tinkering, perhaps, would not resolve the tremendous problems that we are set with, but some fundamental rearrangements would certainly have to be undertaken.

This was a scholarship awards ceremony; Bachelors and Masters degrees for 11 of our nationals who qualified for them. Before I highlight that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to say that in the not too recent past we saw budget allocations of as much as 13 and 14 per cent. When the Minister of Finance, in past governments, allocated the share that went to education, it was quite common to see that that was 14 and sometimes 16 per cent.

This Government, in the last budgetary allocation, allocated a mere 9 per cent of the budgetary expenditure on education. *[Interruption]* I will come to you. That alone tells us how important this Government views that important function. The Minister said, a while ago, it is the most important element of any society: the amount and what we direct towards education—it preserves the society, it takes us into new developments and what have you.

Professor Palmer was making an interesting point, as I was saying. He was making the point that,

“From the very start of the economic development race in the 1960s.”

He was comparing South East Asia and the Caribbean.

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“South East Asian countries made a conscious effort to increase the stock of their human capital by investing heavily in education. This effort widened the access of a large segment of the population to education beyond the primary level. This, combined with a thrust to diversify their economies, ensured the supply of a large pool of trainable labour ready to meet the demand for a wide variety of skills.”

He made the point—in comparison with South East Asia—Jamaica and Trinidad, oil and bauxite and that those were not very labour intensive. He made the point further that it appears—and he has seen the relationship, in the course of his investigation, where countries are blessed with natural resources there seem to be less effort at developing human capital. He found, and his investigations revealed, that in comparison to South East Asia—an area of the world that was not blessed with tremendous natural resources—they made tremendous strides in terms of developing human capital and resulting economic growth. I found his analysis very interesting and I feel that those are some of the issues that we need to take into account when we address this question of education.

Implementing school boards is not entirely new; it is not new at all. It has been around for a very long time in Trinidad in terms of the denominational schools, and certainly in Europe and North America.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, today this is our task, the Minister pilots a Bill, essentially, for the purpose of establishing school boards. The Member for Tobago East, I observe, was keen to make an intervention a while ago and I have no doubt that he would probably participate in this debate. I listened to a few of his comments on a radio programme a few nights ago. He was being interviewed and he made the point that he felt—and many would be inclined to agree with him, in part—that the educational system of our country is no longer geared towards producing people who are really competitive, people who are keen to compete, people who realize that we are operating in a meritocracy, and who must work hard in order to achieve things to be good at whatever they do. That is partly correct. The Member opined, that what has happened to our educational system in this country is, that it has become something of a gravy train so that the teachers, all the participants, professional staff, clerks of the Ministry of Education and so forth—the Member felt that—they are all engaged in the business of education, not to achieving the end that I just described but, rather, it is a gravy train. It is about employment, income and nothing more.

There are three things about the Member’s comment—as I said he is partly correct, because there are some participants—I know teachers who are extremely

conscientious and who work their fingers to the bone—if I could use that metaphor—and who go well beyond the call of duty in order to deliver education to the nation's children. Many of them are—like we will observe, I think the Minister of Finance agreed recently—terribly underpaid, but they sold their own. So the Member is only partly correct on that.

Secondly, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Member did not mention the Minister of Education as being part of the gravy train. I will never suggest that this Minister of Education is. There are people who would suggest that the previous Minister of Education was. I noted that the Member for Tobago East did not speak about the Minister. He spoke from the Permanent Secretary, professional staff all the way down. I want to submit, the Member for Tobago East is certainly a part of the gravy train. When we resume, after the tea break I shall tell you why, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I thank you.

4.30 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.03 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Mr. F. Hinds: Mr. Speaker, before we took the break I was making the point that the Member for Tobago East, as a minister of Government and Cabinet Member, told the nation about his views on the educational system and we cannot discount them; we have to take them into account. He spoke about the fact that it has become a veritable gravy train for teachers, principals, and all the staff at the Ministry of Education.

I was immediately reminded that, in fact, there are about 13,500 teachers in the system in Trinidad and Tobago and all of them that I have met and on every occasion that their voice, the Trinidad and Tobago Unified Teachers' Association has spoken, they have indicated that they get no gravy on the train. So the question arose: where is the gravy on the train for teachers? They are complaining that they are not getting any. It may very well be that the Minister of Education and other ministers are on the gravy train and enjoying it.

For the Minister of Education, the Member for Siparia, things have appeared to have quieted down a bit since she took over the portfolio, perhaps, because she would listen a little more to the professionals there. She understood the benefit of the input that we see in the White Paper. She understood that it was a solid programme of collecting information, collating it and the result was a White

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Paper published, I think, in 1992. She remembered that her Government through the former Minister of Education actually adopted that White Paper as the Government's policy and by so doing they admit that they are, in a sense, very lucky to have come into government and meet a track on which they could quite easily run. The only difficulty is that they are still not able to do that very well—not do it properly.

As for the Member for Tobago East, I do not know what to say further about him. The Minister mentioned the Continuous Assessment Programme (CAP) as she was passing. *[Interruption]* I have in my possession a clipping from a newspaper, which when the idea was published, if I could say so, a long time ago, the very Member for Tobago East was in total objection to that and said that it was an issue upon which he could resign. He said further that he would object to the introduction of the CAP in Tobago. But today, we are on the verge of his Prime Minister's vision—*[Interruption]*

Dr. Job: Mr. Speaker, could I correct him. The Member for Laventille East/Morvant is misrepresenting in a very crass and unnecessary way the statement I had made concerning the CAP. I never condemned the Continuous Assessment Programme. I said that if it was to be used as a mechanism to determine who should be farmed to which school, I would oppose it and it could come to the point where I might ask my constituents whether or not they want me to remain in the Government, and I still stand by that. It is not that way; CAP cannot be for that purpose, so the Member should not lie to the people.

Mr. F. Hinds: Mr. Speaker, let me continue, he can settle that with his Cabinet; they have a way of settling their differences. He is always threatening to resign because he feels a measure of power. He realizes that the Government is hanging on a very thin string made up of some stragglers and otherwise. Let him struggle with his colleagues. *[Interruption]*

The intent of the Bill is to implement these school boards. Clause 3 actually amends section 2 of the Education Act and it replaces the committee of management, which the Minister was able to institute, if he saw it fit. I do not have this information but, perhaps, in the Minister's winding up of this debate she could indicate how many committees of management really operated, because where none existed the school supervisor would have had the responsibility for the particular school. I have not heard very much of committees of management, perhaps, not many were in actual operation though it was open to the Minister to sort that out. At any rate, section 23 of the Act permits the Minister to constitute these committees for the management of schools.

As the Minister quite correctly pointed out there are already school boards in operation for the denominational schools and she opined that they seemed to be working well probably because of the fact that there are boards. There could be any number of reasons for that. I would not venture further on that matter.

Mr. Speaker, section 25 of the existing Act, Chap. 39:01, provides that the school's report must be sent through the Supervisor of Schools to the Minister. Clause 23(iii) of this Bill provides for a situation where the schools must now report directly to the Minister. We have seen much legislation over the last four years in a sense increasing the authority and the power, perhaps, even the responsibility of the various ministers, depending on the legislation that came.

There are about 650—675 schools in the country, I am informed. *[Interruption]* My information is that there are about 650—675 schools. Of those there are about 450—475 primary schools; a lesser figure, about 300 they say, are government primary schools. I want to imagine for a moment, what it would be for a minister to be receiving annual reports from all of these schools; like satellites out in the educational atmosphere, and the minister is to receive reports from each of them. That is a very unwieldy operation.

First of all, in a practical and real sense, the Minister would not be able, he or she, to really study or do anything meaningful with those reports and it would come down to a situation of documents coming in, piling up in the Ministry taking cobwebs and she probably would only attend to the problem areas.

Mr. Speaker, what the White Paper had proposed—this is why I made the point—and this was a position that was supported by the Government of the day, and what we would have recommended and what we, in fact, in this debate recommend, and this is the view of the teachers' union as well, that we should have gone for a system of regional boards. The White Paper actually spoke about regional boards. Let me bring our attention to it more specifically. Under the rubric "School Based Management", Chap. 2.13.14, it states in the White Paper:

"School Boards should help with the support and other programmes within the school. School Boards should not be given the power to over-rule on professional and educational matters. Members of School Boards should be elected/nominated to Divisional Boards of Management to provide for continuity and coordination of efforts between the two bodies."

It spoke about divisional boards.

There was established some time ago eight educational regions, and it might be less unwieldy, if I could say so, if there are boards at the regional level. But

this Government met that in the White Paper and has now opted for individual boards in each school. We must wait to see how it would work; very unwieldy, I think, and unworkable and largely unmanageable, we submit, but we must wait to see.

When they had the consultations last year the teachers' unions participated in the consultations, naturally. We know full well that this Government which some people believe is union-based has many ex-union operatives in the Government, and there are many union leaders in the Senate. Many people would have thought otherwise, but this Government is very averse to the suggestions made by trade unions in this country and the trade unions are now recognizing that, beyond any doubt.

The Trinidad and Tobago Unified Teachers' Association had suggested in the consultations that they go for the regional boards, as we had suggested and the White Paper demonstrated. The process of decentralization, yes, but it should be done in that way, and give it some time before we rush headlong into individual boards.

Trinidad and Tobago Unified Teachers' Association is also saying that we support this and that there should be transparency in the composition and selection of these boards if the Government is working towards them.

5.15 p.m.

When one looks at the composition of these boards, we see that there are four persons of a nine-person board nominated by the Minister, four of five. A quorum could be comprised of five persons. So in any structured situation, the Government could have its way on a school board fairly easily. Of course, we know that this Government loves nothing more but control and more control. I know the Minister is demonstrating her disagreement with that, but the facts are there, the nation is seeing them and we must be very wary.

There is a call for greater transparency in the selection of the members of the board and that is important. I observe in clause 3(1)(iii), in terms of the composition of the board, some very interesting words. It says:

“(iii) two members of the recognised Parent-Teacher Associations of the school, nominated by the members of that Association, at least one of whom must be a female”

When I read that in this Bill, it took me by surprise. I understand that there is a mood in the country and in the world for women to have more say and more voice in what is happening in what was a male-dominated world. I am also mindful of the fact that in many cases in these Parent-Teachers' Association it is the mothers in our society who largely participate. I am sure the Minister is aware of this too,

but I have never seen in legislation a specific requirement that one person must be a female. That is new to me and I want to know what is the philosophical basis. What is the legal basis? Does it not lend a measure of positive discrimination for women in a sense? Is that necessary? Is this to be seen in other pieces of legislation coming before us henceforth? I have some—not problems with it but these are—legitimate questions and I would particularly like to hear the Minister address us on this point and tell us the philosophical basis for that provision. I would like to hear her deal with that matter. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker, I am not anti-woman I have made that quite clear, Member for St. Joseph, I merely want to hear the rationale for it, and to hear the Minister who is a lawyer, argue the point and to demonstrate that she is certain that that will not be inconsistent with some provisions in our Constitution. That is all I want to hear.

We feel as well that in terms of the composition of the board, we need to have in it some measure of—not gender preference in terms of male or female—but certainly, some measure of expertise and I feel there is no reason why you cannot have someone who is trained in the business of psychology, someone who is an educationist, in a very formal sense, someone who is learned in the business of finance and these kinds of specialist areas on the board. After all, the board is supposed to operate and manage the school and all these elements are very important.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: Would the Member give way for a moment? In your suggestion, how would you deal with the situation in the rural areas where you may not have in that particular community the persons with the expertise of which you speak. For example, a psychologist, as you know, is a specialist skill. What would you do in the back of Penal or in the back of Toco where you may not necessarily have a person with the kind of expertise of which you speak. Remember this is for every school, so you are going into all the rural areas as well. That would be fine in Port of Spain and perhaps in the urban areas, but in the rural areas what do you do if you do not have psychologists and the kind of person of which you speak.

Would you care to suggest?

Mr. F. Hinds: Taking your question on the face of it, I can quite easily understand the point you are making, but then that question is based on an assumption that the North is so well-developed and resourced and the South—

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: I said the urban areas, the urban areas as versus rural.

Mr. F. Hinds: —and rural areas are not. I will tell you something. I was discussing a matter with some of my constituents a few days ago and I quite

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honestly cannot identify a dentist in my community and I am not talking about an office, I am talking about a resident who is a dentist and that is in the Laventille East/Morvant area and, therefore, the assumption on which your question is based may not be entirely accurate.

As a matter of fact, it may surprise you to discover that it is in the very rural areas that you may find the skilled coming to work in Port of Spain on a daily basis. Do not be surprised. But of course, I have no specifics or data on it, so I take your question on the face of it and see that there will be a difficulty in that sense. If the vision for education is what it ought to be, that kind of imbalance should be a thing of the past in fairly short order, because we are seeing a very educated, learned, energized, active, participating society and I will take your warm laughter as a mark of agreement, hon. Member.

Mr. Speaker, another concern is that when we have a look at the duties and responsibilities of these school boards we see that, it employs, if not vague language, language that can be construed in a very wide and varied way. Take for example, the role of the board in clause 19(1) which says:

“The Board shall have the duties and powers, including but not limited to those listed hereunder, to manage the school—

(a) in the development of a strategic plan for the school;”

Mr. Speaker, I am submitting that the word “strategic” is open to such wide interpretation that it can include matters bearing on the school’s curriculum. I am submitting that the words in terms of providing “a strategic plan for the school” can have implications for the curriculum because today in the committee stage of the Finance Committee, I heard the Prime Minister say yes, that may be the case. The Prime Minister agreed today that the Tobago House of Assembly’s legislation was arrived at in 1996 almost as a matter of political expediency. It is now quite clear that it is poorly drafted, and the source of tremendous trouble for the Government. The Minister of Finance admitted today that he finds himself unable to carry out his functions with respect to the Tobago House of Assembly because of the weakness and the frailty of legislation that we, without much pride, passed in this House.

So henceforth, I am taking the position in this Parliament that we need to be particularly careful and certainly more watchful about the things we allow to pass as legislation in this Parliament. I am saying that when we have language like strategic plans in the context of a school board, it is quite possible that you could see some disharmony and conflict arising among the principals of the schools, the

Ministry of Education, and these school boards. We need to tighten this up because in two years' time we may find this is posing problems. We may find that some school board wants to implement the teaching of Swahili in a school.

Mr. Assam: What is wrong with that?

Mr. F. Hinds: Nothing is wrong, I am just giving an example and it may very well be in disharmony with what the ministry and the Minister want. We need to be very watchful about that. That is all I am urging.

Clause 19(1)(b) says:

“(b) in the conduct of an operational and environmental audit of the activities of the school;”

Again, there is the word “operational” which is as wide as it is broad and it can lead to problems. In other words, we need to clearly define in this legislation. Words may never take us entirely there, but we can use better words, we need to tighten this up and clearly define the role of the board so as to prevent conflict in a conflict-prone Trinidad and Tobago in the years ahead.

We need to be sure that the school boards appreciate that their role will be about the administration of the schools, school-based management, administration and management, but matters of instructional methods, curriculum development and those kinds of things are not entirely matters for the school board. Of course, if that is the Government's position, it must say so in this debate so that those who read *Hansard*, including judges, will know when the matter comes up in future, exactly what these roles are.

In England, for example, there are school boards and the law books are replete with cases of conflict between the Minister of Education and the boards. The regional authorities and the schools govern because they do it on a regional basis as opposed to a school by school basis. So you may have Thameside Borough Council operating the schools in the Thameside District or catchment area and the cases are many where there are conflicts arising between them. We have an opportunity, since we are now beginning, to prevent that and I urge that with some measure of force, Madam Minister.

As I prepared myself for this debate, I was told by teachers in the system—and I cast no aspersions on any particular denominational authority or school board—but those teachers in those bodies who are subject to the dictates of those boards find that sometimes the boards have more authority and power than they ought to with respect to matters like transfers, promotions and disciplinary matters. They are upset about that.

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In other words, a teacher in the Government School wanting to apply for a promotion can do so and the Teaching Service Commission has absolute autonomy over it. I am not a teacher, I garner this from my discussions with some. Where there are boards, the board tends to exert much more influence on these matters that should really be within the purview of the Teaching Service Commission. Again, this is an opportunity for us to be careful and define the roles very carefully so teachers and those who operate the legislation would know exactly where it starts and where it stops.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the Member for Laventille East/Morvant has expired.

Motion made, That the hon. Member's speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. [*Dr. Keith Rowley*]

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. F. Hinds: Mr. Speaker, I am indeed grateful to Members for extending my time. One of the duties of the board at clause 19(1)(f) says:

“(f) by requesting the assistance of local government bodies and other agencies to assist in the maintenance of the school;”

Mr. Speaker, recently for the opening of the school term in September, at least the San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation operatives informed this representative that they were called upon more and more by schools which they are told were directed by the Minister to assist in repairs at the schools. All that is fine, and this provision is also fine, but it raises the question of resources.

5.30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, if the local bodies are as strapped for cash as they are, in particular, the San Juan Laventille Regional Corporation and the Tunapuna Piarco Regional Corporation, two authorities that receive most of the Minister's adverse attention—and these days, the Minister is rather cool, he has other matters around him, so he has no time with those matters now—they are not being funded as well as they should be. If the school boards are now being told in legislation that they can seek the assistance of these local bodies then it is important for us to make sure that these bodies are well and adequately funded, otherwise this will remain—to use the words of Bob Marley—a fleeting illusion to be pursued but never attained. So, funding is an important matter.

Madam Minister, you piloted this legislation. If the local bodies must have more responsibility in this regard, you have to ensure in Cabinet that you put a

plug in for more finances and a more reasonable Minister, who will be more equitable in the distribution of his Ministry's resources. The Minister will have to insist on that. I do not think that the Minister will get very far, judging from the Minister's performance, in terms of the Legal Aid Act. The Minister has not been able to get her Cabinet to approve another \$9 million and the lawyers are still frustrated and complaining, but the Minister must try and try again. I know the Minister will meet hard hearts and hard-headed Ministers, as the Prime Minister once said. He said that many of his Ministers are hard-headed. *[Interruption]* The Prime Minister said so. I did not say it. I only agree with him.

Mr. Sudama: You only get legal aid cases. *[Laughter]*

Mr. F. Hinds: Mr. Speaker, we need to be sure of what we are doing, and we need to define well as I said, the relationship between the principal and the school boards; the school boards and the teachers who still come under the Teaching Service Commission, and the school boards and the Teaching Service Commission. We need to get that right and ensure that people understand what is happening in that regard.

Mr. Speaker, there is another issue. You see, the long term vision with the school based management philosophy is that the principals, eventually, should be freed from the mundane task of having to look after management issues, and more long term, these schools should relieve the very Ministry of a lot of the responsibility that the Ministry now has. What we can see is a situation where, eventually, the Ministry's function will really be to advise on policy and to monitor the operation of policy; that is when real efficiency sets in. Of course, that is not possible in the present political climate and a fundamental change has to be undertaken, and it would be later this year, and we look forward to it with relish. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Assam: Do you want to be the Minister of Education?

Mr. F. Hinds: So this is where we are actually heading. We are not strangers to the concept of school boards. It was a PNM administration that oversaw the White Paper, and it was in the White Paper that the genesis of the school board concept arose.

Mrs. Persad-Bissesar: That is not so.

Mr. F. Hinds: Yes, right there.

Mrs. Persad-Bissesar: No.

Mr. F. Hinds: In respect of Government schools, it was a recommendation of the task force, okay? But I would not split hairs over that. I want to bring a matter

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to the Minister's attention because, you see, we are talking about education. There was a pilot project launched with 53 schools, in respect of the Continuous Assessment Programme. I want to tell the Minister, and the previous Minister, that I am aware of, and I have in my possession, a copy of a report from the Ministry in respect of that pilot project. In essence, it demonstrates that every one of the 53 schools in respect of the implementation of the Continuous Assessment Programme failed miserably, but for one area.

Mr. Speaker, in all the areas that we assessed and looked at, they had all failed. The one area that they managed to succeed in is, the question of registering students on entry, which was here from time immemorial and they continue to do it, and the question of the teachers keeping the records. We still have a problem with securing the records and all the other problems. So it will be correct to say, that the Continuous Assessment Programme, an important part of the educational thrust that this Bill is hoping to enhance, has failed. It is in trouble and it is a disaster waiting to happen and the Government is moving full speed ahead again, perhaps, for political mileage and expediency to remove the Common Entrance Examination in this year, when the backbone of it, the Continuous Assessment Programme, is not in place. The pilot project has palpably failed. So it is not too late.

Mr. Speaker, the Attorney General demonstrated his capacity last week to turn his other face, when he took the Bill that we were debating to a select committee. I am saying, notwithstanding the Prime Minister's boastings and ravings at the University of the West Indies, about two years ago, when he said by the year 2001 the Common Entrance Examination would be gone, I am saying, that it is not too late. If we do not proceed cautiously, we will fail a generation coming. So I am saying that we need to be watchful about that. I know that we must do the thing on a piecemeal basis, but we need to start focussing on the macro rather than the micro. I began my short contribution by pointing out some of the thoughts that the Minister and I shared in respect of Professor Palmer's speech. So we need to look at some of those matters.

Mr. Speaker, while we are at it, one of the responsibilities of the school boards will be to raise some finance. Today, even in the face of a situation where the Government boasts of a growing economy, things are so good, I could see the headline now, the Minister of Finance saying, things are really nice. See the Minister with his cellular phone and his dark shades on the front page of the *Guardian* newspaper saying, things very, very, nice. I know things are nice but they are nice for a limited few. Do you understand? They are certainly not nice for everyone.

Mr. Speaker, in schools today—as we heard earlier in this Chamber—teachers are pressed for chalk, dusters and paper. Oftentimes parents have to send foolscap sheets to school with their children, they just do not have, and yet we saw earlier today, money being taken out of it because they could not spend it—an absurdity! What is happening now is that it feeds back into the schools, and the children of many schools are put under tremendous pressure to bring private resources to school to fund public responsibilities.

Recently, in the Attorney General's constituency in Couva, we received a complaint from the Couva Government Secondary School that the A'Level section of that school's department has received absolutely no money from the Ministry, and yet they are conducting the seven-year programme into A' Levels. Children must bring \$500.00 at a time to pay for materials to do their science and so forth. Of course, ambitious parents do it, because they want their children to do well, but we are going to cause local school boards to have responsibility of raising finance in this kind of climate, that Government may absolve itself from its responsibility altogether.

There was an article in Monday's *Guardian* newspapers—a letter to the editor—Analisa Alexander is the person whose name goes under it. The headline: Extortion at South girls' school. The writer is complaining about the fact that her daughter went to school in the new term, just reopened, and when she wanted her report book from the school, they refused to give her, telling her that she did not return a raffle sheet that they gave her to raise funds last term. So they denied the child the report book on her performance last term because she did not return a completed donation sheet. So the child complied strictly and returned the donation sheets. It was handed back to her and she was told that it did not have a minimum of \$50.00 and she should go and come again. It was not until she met that requirement that she was given her report.

Now the writer described the headline as: Extortion. I might not wish to put it so strongly, but it is a result of poor funding for these schools. This Government as I have often said, and I will always say and remind them, is in a better position than any other Government to deal with these social and important matters, because they met a growing, proper and healthy economy. [*Desk thumping*] We had come out of the structural adjustment years. They met it on the rise and, of course, they are dismantling it, but may God help us all. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker, we have raised some of these matters. I hope the Minister takes on board seriously, our concerns and TTUTA's concerns about these school boards. I think the most important issue is to clearly define the roles of these

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boards because we may wind up with a lot of legal problems. We are talking about management of finances of these local school boards. We do not see this and it ought not to be the Government abandoning and absolving itself from its responsibility to properly fund the system. If we are in agreement with the lecturer that we spoke about earlier, we need to be moving to higher heights, in terms of viewing education differently in the country, training the nation for particular ends and lifting them up, as it were.

Mr. Speaker with those few words, I wish to thank you.

5.40 p.m.

The Minister of Tourism (Dr. The Hon. Adesh Nanan): Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of a Bill to amend the Education Act, Chap. 39:01. One would have thought that the Member for Laventille East/Morvant, after spending four years in this Parliament, would have understood the education system by now, but apparently he still has to deal with piecemeal information. I would have thought that he would have read all the *Hansard* contributions so far and understand the education system so he could speak properly. I took this opportunity here to just bring some information for the Member for Laventille East/Morvant when he spoke about the relevance of education. In his contribution he spoke clearly on the relevance of education.

Before I do so, the Member, in passing, made reference to the hon. Minister of Education, that is myself, the former Minister of Education, as part of the gravy train. I will ask the hon. Member for Laventille East/Morvant about the particular course that he went to in Brussels at the Government's expense and it was reported in this House that he never attended any session.

Hon. Members: Gravy train, gravy train.

Dr. The Hon. A. Nanan: I would also like to put on the record here, Mr. Speaker—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Hinds: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order.

Mr. Speaker: What Standing Order, please.

Mr. Hinds: Standing Order 36(5). Mr. Speaker—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: No, no, no, we will deal with it in the normal way.

Mr. Hinds: Mr. Speaker, what I—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Standing Order 36(5), I am looking at it.

Mr. Hinds: Mr. Speaker, if you would permit me, what I wanted to say is that I had observed that—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Please! You have referred me to Standing Order 36(5).

Mr. Hinds: Do you wish to hear the facts about which I am complaining?

Mr. Speaker: No, please. I do not think that the Member for Tobago West could help you with this. We have a procedure here and whether that is accepted by the Member for Tobago West or not really does not matter. I am not satisfied that what has been said has imputed improper motives. Please continue.

Dr. The Hon. A. Nanan: [*Desk thumping*] Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In speaking on the gravy train in passing, I would like to remind the hon. Member about the NHA loan. He is quite aware of that situation, the outstanding NHA loan.

Hon. Member: And the NHA house.

Dr. The Hon. A. Nanan: Mr. Speaker, the Member spoke about [*Interruption*] tinkering with the education system but I would spend a few minutes here to show you how the education system is as it stands now compared to when we met it in 1995 and you will see if it is tinkering. The education system was being driven by a World Bank loan and an IDB loan and it has relevance with respect to this particular Bill that is being debated because the IDB loan is supporting the concept of local school boards for government secondary schools.

He mentioned the situation in respect to funding for local school boards. Part of the component of the IDB loan is to support the concept of local school boards, so that is being taken care of. The World Bank loan is driving a certain process and includes the whole concept of relevance of the education system, and the relevance of the education system deals with curriculum reform. So, Mr. Speaker, the curriculum reform of the primary school has taken place. The Ministry of Education is now in the process, through the loan, of dealing with the curriculum in the secondary schools.

If you look at the landscape from 1995 to 1999 you will see the great transformation in terms of the education system. [*Desk thumping*] You do not have to get a magnifying glass to see that, hon. Member for Laventille East/Morvant. It is quite visible. [*Interruption*] You should not speak, Member for Diego Martin West. We gave you the Carenage Government Primary School for which you clamoured so much. [*Desk thumping*] [*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: “Boof boy, boof”. [*Interruption*] [*Laughter*]

Mr. Speaker: Order please, order please!

Dr. The Hon. A. Nanan: Mr. Speaker, as I said, I could stand here and point out to every single Member in this House how in their constituencies they benefited from this Government with respect to education. Again, they are quite familiar with that so I do not want to remind them. I see the Member for San Fernando West smiling again and he is quite aware that he will soon be getting his school in his constituency. The Member for Diego Martin Central raised the matter with respect to the secondary school in his constituency and he got an answer from the Minister.

Mr. Valley: I asked a question?

Dr. The Hon. A. Nanan: Yes, you made the request. You asked a question in this House. [*Interruption*] No, the Member for Diego Martin West, my mistake.

Mr. Speaker: Order please, order please!

Dr. The Hon. A. Nanan: Yes, Mr. Speaker, so I could go on and point that out but I do not want to spend time here bringing up the past. I just want to show you the difference between 1995 and 1999 in terms of what has happened with the education system. For the Member for Laventille East/Morvant to stand up and say we are tinkering with the system, probably that is what he did. I want to ask the question here this—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Valley: Mr. Speaker, if the Member would give way, I just want to ask a question.

Dr. The Hon. A. Nanan: No, no, hold on. The Member is leaving. I wanted to ask the hon. Member for Laventille East/Morvant what happened to the education system in the oil boom era? Why was the education system not transformed in the oil boom era under the PNM, Mr. Speaker? It is unfortunate that the Member had to leave but I will continue with my contribution. [*Interruption*] [*Laughter*]

In terms of the development of the society, he spoke about informal rather than formal. We have actually taken that concept on board. We have not only dealt with the formalized system of education, we have dealt with the informal. You are all familiar with that programme that we ran in almost every single constituency, that programme called “Operation Read Me Now” for the functional literacy aspect of the education system. Of course, the Minister of Distance Learning is dealing with the concept of teaching via distance. That is quite obvious in terms of the approach to education.

So for him to stand up here—and that is why I wanted to talk about the local school boards because it is the concept of bringing the community into the

schools. That is the philosophy of local school boards [*Desk thumping*] which he clearly missed and the philosophy is to bring the community back into the school. The Minister of Education said that and that is the premise on which local school boards are going to be driven. He said that you would not find a dentist in Laventille but you might find a bank manager in Laventille or you might find other aspects. So it is what we call a mosaic that we are putting together for the constituency to benefit. The whole concept is to improve the quality of life for the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. That is what we are doing with the education system. That is what we are doing in every aspect of Government with respect to Trinidad and Tobago, improving the quality of life of the citizens.

He spoke about the situation in terms of what we are producing in the long run in terms of what is coming out of the education system. I want to tell him today that this education system that we have transformed, if you look at the results in 1999 as compared to 1995, you will see a tremendous increase in terms of performance in various areas and you know it is obvious. You could take a survey in your various constituencies and see that you are benefiting from the changes that we have put in place and which we continue to do.

I want to get back quickly to the local school boards and to say why—
[*Interruption*] No, no, I just wanted to—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: No, no, you go ahead.

Hon. Member: Do not worry with him.

Dr. The Hon. A. Nanan: Some of the highlights under the—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Do not let them distract you.

Hon. Member: Talk to the Speaker, Adesh.

Dr. The Hon. A. Nanan: Mr. Speaker, I am a seasoned Member of Parliament by now, so he cannot distract me. [*Laughter*] [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: I advise the Minister, continue to speak to me.

Dr. The Hon. A. Nanan: Yes, Mr. Speaker. The Member for Laventille East/Morvant spoke about school-based management. I do not know if he understands the concept of school-based management but it is something that he should come back into the Parliament to understand how it is going to benefit his and all the other constituencies. This local school board concept is also being utilized in what has been called the school improvement planning exercise and if the Opposition Members are familiar with their constituencies they could actually

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enhance the school improvement planning exercise because they could get involved in the exercise. The committees are being formed with the principal and members of the community. So I urge all Opposition Members to get involved in the school improvement planning exercise so that they could bring that kind of influence.

You are all Members of Parliament. You all have various skills. The Member for Diego Martin West is a geologist; the Member for San Fernando West is a lawyer, so is the Member for Laventille East/Morvant; the hon. Member for Diego Martin Central is an expert in finance, so those are the areas in which you could bring expertise to your various constituencies. That is the kind of encompassing atmosphere that we are trying to create with local school boards. So, Mr. Speaker, with school improvement planning, the local school boards are all being jelled for the benefit of the education system in terms of the performance in the school environment.

The hon. Member spoke about bureaucracy as another area in terms of the duties and powers of the board. I am not sure if he is familiar in terms of how many regional educational districts there are in Trinidad. I know he must know there is one in Tobago but there are seven regional educational districts in Trinidad and one in Tobago. There was a consultancy under the World Bank. I am sure the Member for Diego Martin West is familiar with that. Coopers and Lybrand did a consultancy in terms of the decentralization of the Ministry of Education where the proposal is being put forward to downsize the number of regional educational districts. So some of the proposals being put forward are for either six or four and these regional educational districts would be enhanced in terms of the activities that they would perform.

As part of the continuous assessment programme, the diagnostic and prescriptive services of the Ministry of Education will be part of this regional education district. So everything is being streamlined. So it is not that the Minister of Education will be bogged down with all these recommendations coming forward. There are all of these, what we call, satellite areas. Of course it will be less but it will be more enhanced in terms of their operation. People would not have to travel to the head office to get sick leave and other areas like that. It can be done through the regional education districts. So the whole concept of decentralization is what is taking place. We are looking at the local school board to have the kind of skill that is coming in to give the principal more support in terms of planning for the improvement of the school environment.

That is what I wanted to put on the record, Mr. Speaker, in terms of how the local school boards are going to jell with the downsized regional educational

districts. Of course we are looking at the situation in terms of boundaries—why should the boundaries of the Ministry of Education be different from the local government boundaries. Once that has been sorted out in terms of one boundary, I am sure that everything will be streamlined and ironed out so that the bureaucracy that they spoke about will not be a problem.

5.55 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to the point that he brought up on the Continuous Assessment Programme—one more thing before I do that, he spoke about the remuneration of teachers but he forgot about private lessons and he forgot about the absenteeism rate which is about 20—25 per cent in schools.

To clear up this confusion with respect to the Continuous Assessment Programme, it was a pilot project, as he said, in 53 schools, but it has not failed miserably, as he has said. It is not a programme to select students for schools; it is not a selection project; it is a tracking mechanism. [*Interruption*] Well, I just explained that. He said if it was like that, he would not have accepted it. It is a tracking mechanism that is being put in place; it is a pilot project and it is going to be reviewed shortly.

So, Mr. Speaker, I am fully in support of the concept of local school boards and I ask hon. Members to support it, too. Thank you.

Dr. Keith Rowley (*Diego Martin West*): Mr. Speaker, I rise to make a short intervention on this subject matter of an aspect of our education initiative, but I am wondering if we are having revelations being made to us because my colleague from Tabaquite apparently has just indicated to us that he is already seasoned. From where I originate, a number of things happen after the seasoning. You are either baked, fried, grilled or broiled. I do not know if he is looking forward to any of those developments but, certainly, having been seasoned, we will ensure that one of those categories apply to him and his colleagues in the very near future.

Mr. Speaker, I want to probably pour a bit of cold water on the exuberance of those who, probably unintentionally, would put this development across as some kind of potential panacea for our education system about which I have great concerns.

I am in full support of the initiative to bring the community into the school, to decentralize the administration from Hayes Street out into where the children live, where their parents are, so I do not want you to get me wrong. I am totally in support of that initiative. There is something to be gained by putting

management—because that is what the school board would contribute to—at the school place, but let us not overplay it.

I listened to the Member for Tabaquite and the more he spoke about what is in the pipeline, what is being contemplated by the previous administration, the current administration, I began to wonder if there is not some objective analysis, if one would not find there is a bit of “the cart before the horse” in some of the situations.

But, having said that, this question of putting boards in schools should not, in any way, be put across as some major development which would significantly treat with the real problem of education that Trinidad and Tobago has to face, and I will come back to that.

It has been said in the context of a justification, that one of the reasons this approach is being taken is that the denominational schools have boards and they have good results—something like that was said by the Minister, but I know that point of view is widely held out there in the national community. But that is not in itself sufficient. The church schools are not successful because they have school boards and the government schools fail because they do not have school boards. One has to go beyond that and see what the school boards do and what they bring to the church schools that is not brought to bear on the public school system. Unless we make that kind of analysis in an objective way, and not just say, “Well, okay, the Catholics have boards and the Presbyterians have boards and they have excellent schools, therefore, put boards in the government schools and we solve the problem.” We would be very, very far off the mark.

In fact, I ask the Minister if the people who are going to serve on these boards in the public schools are going to be remunerated, or given any kind of stipend? Because if the answer is yes, what we could end up creating here while we make insignificant contribution to the education problem, is a whole series of peppercorn jobs to be scrambled for in the local community. If I go further to say, Ministers of the type like my friend from Pointe-a-Pierre would see this as a tailor-made situation to put people in positions just to give people something coming from the administration of the day. If that is what school boards are going to be, we might as well forget it now because all we are going to do is to create more problems than we are going to solve.

I want my colleagues on the other side to give us the assurance that is not what it is going to be, because this matter of how our children are treated with by something called a board at a school place is too important to fall into the kind of

category of administration that local government has fallen into. I have heard the phrase “local government” being used with respect to this matter. Until such time that “local government”, as we know it today, is completely resurrected as something new, keep it as far as possible from our children, Minister and the Ministry as we know it today, because it will make no significant contribution to the well-being of our children.

Mr. Speaker, the key to success in the denominational schools has to do with accountability and that is what is greatly absent from the public school system. It also has to do with some modicum of retention of values. That is what the church system gives us. The people who support the church schools, either as practising members of those religions, or the tradition that is handed down, or the collective wisdom of the group that is applying the teaching to the young people, it is that residual value that, thank God, still exists in these schools that is saving us from a total disaster. I do not know that by simply appointing people to the public school system, you are going to automatically transfer that to the public school system.

Let me give you one example, Mr. Speaker, and my friend from Tobago East is very familiar with this. If you are asked to identify the litany of problems that afflict our school system, no list would be complete without reference to teenage pregnancy and male youth irresponsibility. But that was not something that we created in our time. That was not something that this government, or the last one, or the last generation created. Ever since human beings were around and had youngsters, people recognized that young people had to be taught what was right and what was wrong.

In the old days, talking to my grandfather, he would make reference to the fact that there were very few young female teachers because women did not have the opportunity as the males at that time, but insofar as there were young females in the school system and in those days they were largely church schools—I am talking here about Tobago in particular; most of the schools at the time were church schools—it was inconceivable that a young female could be a teacher, be unmarried and be pregnant in front of a class. That was out of the question because the community values were such that they wanted their young females to know that there was something right and wrong and something that could be accepted and something that could not.

With time, those values were revised by God knows whom, and today, if somebody raises that in the community, the person is likely to be shouted down. But the community today wants the same outcome in terms of quality upbringing that my grandfather had. You cannot have it both ways. You cannot eat your cake

and have it, too. If you are going to allow certain things to happen, then the consequences are going to flow from that.

One really cannot expect a situation where it is quite okay to have young people be pregnant in school in the class, come back and finish their subjects, and then say that the people who are encouraging that or who they look up to as role models are being part of that and those persons can instil values in them and say, “Okay, that is what you should not do.” Do you know what happens in the end? Their values are abandoned and, in the public school system today, I do not know if anybody knows what is expected of anybody—not Minister, not teacher, not student.

That is why I said that I am concerned about our education system and I do not want us to believe that we are solving what is for me, a major problem, by throwing school boards up and saying, “Okay, we have hit pay dirt.”

Mr. Speaker, I am sometimes embarrassed when I watch the television and the reporters go out to talk to school children in this country. More often than not, they have something to say but you can see the inability to express themselves and I wonder: How does that square with trotting out how much money we are spending on education? And the Minister was just telling us what great improvement has been made between 1995 and now.

What improvement? If anything, it is worse, because we are spending more money and while in the system there are quite a number of children who are doing quite well, when one looks at it dollar for dollar with the number of persons in the system, I would be surprised if an objective analysis shows that we are preparing more young people now better than we were five, or 10, or 15 years ago. Minister, I beg to disagree with you. I think we have a serious crisis in our education system which is not being addressed. Until such time as we acknowledge—

He is shaking his head and saying, “No.” To me, that is the problem. I am speaking here—if I can do that—as a member of the national community, taking off my political clothes and saying, “Look, I am speaking here as a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago.” I have a view that our education system requires a serious review in terms of what is the problem and how we are going to solve it and also the whole question of allocation of resources. This country right now is way behind what is required for a country which aspires in the way we are aspiring.

6.10 p.m.

Take for example, tertiary education, we are way behind, in terms of putting into the university, or a university, or any tertiary education system, the number of

people that we should be putting if we want to compare ourselves in the way we want to compare ourselves with those countries that are on the track that we are on.

In Trinidad and Tobago today, it is more reasonable to say that tertiary education falls to the privileged few. While the numbers might be greater than they were 20 or 30 years ago, in terms of what is required—what was the percentage, 6 per cent, 7 per cent?

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: It is 8 per cent.

Dr. K. Rowley: It is 8 per cent. What is the target, 15 per cent?

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: It is 20 per cent.

Dr. K. Rowley: Great. If that is the case, look at the expenditure now; we are struggling to pay the university to put 8 per cent of the lucky ones in there. If we do take the decision, at the level of the Parliament and the country, to make it 20 per cent, do you know what that means? It means a significant shifting of resources from somewhere else to education. That debate is not taking place in this country. What is taking place is that, the Minister of Local Government is allowed to squander, and allowed to be stolen, millions of dollars in something called “Local Government” but nobody is saying: “Well maybe that money could be better spent somewhere else.” I see the Minister is shaking her head.

Mr. Speaker, are you aware that there are people in this country today who, every fortnight are accessing hundreds of thousands of dollars out of the Ministry of Local Government under the URP Programme? In my constituency, a few years ago, when the URP Programme was being used there, I could carry you and show you a number of physical projects where some money was being spent, some people were being employed and some material way being used. At the end of the year there was, a step, a drain, a bridge or a pavement; something to show for it. Today the money is being spent, that much I am aware of. Where it is going, God alone knows. When one inquires, what one finds out is that significant sums of public moneys are virtually being frittered away by a small number of people. I am not talking about \$1,000 or \$10,000. I am talking about hundreds of thousands of dollars per fortnight, in a situation where we are funding only 8 per cent of our students at the university.

I am sure the Minister in the Ministry of Finance might know, that we, most likely, at any given point in time, are owing the university large sums of money—under-funding them. They are always coming cap in hand to the Minister of Finance for funds for last year or three years ago. My friend from Naparima

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knows this because he was familiar with that situation. The university is never currently funded for the 8 per cent that is going there. We are short by 12 per cent in terms of the number of persons who we should put into a tertiary system.

Mr. Speaker, until we address these fundamentals, something like the school board is simply a good idea that cannot deliver nearly as much as it could deliver if the entire structure is there. I say this to alert my colleagues that what we are doing here is dermatological. It is not skeletal.

Mr. Valley: I love it.

Dr. K. Rowley: We have to address the fundamentals, and it requires a complete review on what the state spends money on and also accountability for what we are spending. Because even now, even with the current amount of expenditure, the accountability is not there and the end result is an inferior product except that this inferior product is a poorly prepared child, with high expectation, in many cases, and disappointment in the community, in the household and at the personal level.

Mr. Speaker, while I support the idea of bringing this kind of management down to the school house level, I want to let the Government know that we, as parliamentarians, as legislators and as members of a national community, have a far bigger problem before us, which cannot be glossed over by any development like this.

I want to look specifically at a couple of points in the Bill. The Bill talks about management of the school. When I look at what the school board is supposed to do, I am wondering, in some instances, whether there is responsibility without authority, and in other instances, whether there will be authority without responsibility. In either case, it will not contribute.

With respect to some of the things that the school board is supposed to do, let us for one minute look at clause 19 which states that the school board will, take part in developing a strategic plan, conduct operational audits and develop and implement approved plans. I want to ask—this Bill is going to be passed and will become law—what if this law is not complied with, who will be accountable to whom and for what? When this is assented to, it becomes the law. These people who are going to be on the school board, what liability will they have? If their plans are not implemented, who will be responsible for that non-implementation?

Mr. Speaker, when I look at the make-up of the school board, the school board regulations states the principal will be an *ex officio* member. Well I do not mind

that too much because he will be contributing and the board will be managing him. My concern is with article 3 (b)(i) which states:

“no more than nine other members drawn from among the following groups...”

The first group says:

“a member of the school staff other than the Principal;”

Here is a situation where the principal is *ex officio* but any other member of the staff can be on the board in a full membership right, not *ex officio*, and from that nine members can become the chairman. It is possible that the most junior teacher in the school can be on the board and can be the chairman or vice-chairman, while the principal, by law, is only *ex officio*. [Desk thumping] If one understands how school boards work; in the United States of America, where school boards are very highly developed, there is one of the most contentious bits of public administration. The school board elections and programmes are contentious and there are always problems going on.

Could you imagine if the principal does not want something done, because he and his staff do not think that is what is good for the school, but the vice-chairman or the chairman is a member of the staff who is chairman of the school board, and either in cahoots, in league or support of the rest of the board, decides to take the position different from what this *ex officio* principal wants. That is a recipe for disaster in the school.

Mr. Valley: It makes the principal irresponsible too.

Dr. K. Rowley: The principal can throw his hands up and say: “Look not me, I am *ex officio*. They are the ones in charge, let them do what they want.”

While the intention is good to have the school board, this kind of arrangement will, in itself, be an incentive to discord. I am asking my colleague, the Minister of Education, to look at this very carefully and see whether this is what she wants to do. This, surely must be an oversight. If the Minister wants to go that way—if the Minister wants to make the principal *ex officio*—then the other member who can be on the board, must also not qualify to be chairman or vice-chairman, they both must be *ex officio*. There would be two teachers—the principal and one other—on the board but none of whom can serve as chairman or vice-chairman.

6.20 p.m.

Now, the reason I would not worry too much about the chairman being *ex officio*—[Interruption] Well again, a case can be made for that. If you make them

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ex officio, that term in itself means that you are just in an advisory capacity. So, it may be that you want to hold these two school officials more tightly to responsibility at the level of the school board and since there are seven other people there, they are not managing themselves. Really, one would want to consider that at least the principal and his other colleague would be *bona fide* members of the board, with a vote to go with their presence there.

Another point I want to mention is 3(1)(b)(ii). You are going to put a member of the union on the board. I do not have a real problem with that, except with listening to the pious bleatings of my friend from Tabaguite here this evening who got up to try to explain to us what education means. Would you believe that? I want to remind him that putting a member—I did not know that there was any great benefit to be gained by being in a union. Because according to him, a union was a negative. It was under his stewardship that teachers who were identified for scholarships to go and do geography to fill vacancies in the education system, he, by his own handwriting, struck them off the list because they stayed home on TTUTA days. [*Desk thumping*] So, with a Minister with that kind of attitude—

Mr. Sudama: Encouraging indiscipline.

Dr. K. Rowley: So if you are going to strike off a teacher for responding to a union's call, how do you want me to view you telling me you want to put a member of the union on the board and that is a good thing? You cannot blow hot and cold! You either have confidence in the union and its decisions and what it stands for or you do not! You cannot have it both ways.

Mr. Hinds: That is right, and they do not. Window dressing.

Mr. Assam: The PNM refused TTUTA's establishment. What is the matter with you?

Dr. K. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, that kind of thing, we have to rise above that.

Another thing I want to ask. I know for a fact that many schools try to establish PTAs and, unfortunately, many parents do not see it as a responsibility of theirs to be that involved in their children's school. What would happen if you do not have functioning PTAs? I see here that two members of the nine-man board should come from—[*Interruption*] So, if you do not have PTAs you are going to end up with a seven-man board. Is it possible that parents in their own right, without being members of a PTA, can somehow contribute or become eligible? I know the Minister can appoint four persons. But if there is no PTA, could there not be a mechanism by which two other persons can be probably selected by

whoever, the principal? Again, that might be an incentive not to encourage the PTA formation, so we need to think that one through.

With regard to the question of accountability, if we are to go the way of school boards, is the Minister prepared to say that this is a trial situation where we will try it out at this level, with this level of responsibility, and after a specific period of time, based on the kinds of results that we are seeing, we are going to look towards giving greater responsibility to school boards? Because, if we are going to stop here, this is not going to get us very far. Right? I want to hear the Minister say that we are going to start with this. Because, ideally, I have no doubt that this system would throw up in some schools some excellent boards that would make positive contributions to some schools, but then, on the other hand, I have no doubt that there are other situations that are going to be very unsatisfactory.

Now, what guarantee do we have that the fact that the school board system that exists is not going to be allowed to remain there, the very fact that there are some people there who can say, “Okay, it is a school board”, but it requires management, monitoring and upgrading. So we should be moving against a strategic plan of some sort which says where we want to get, over what kind of time-frame and, ultimately, what is the position.

You know, ultimately what we really want is to put back authority into the school place. I remember when I was a boy, schools were known by the principal’s name. I went to Beard School. Such was the stature of the principal that the school was known, at the time when the principal was there, whoever the Principal was, that was his school. I think as we hanker towards a turnaround from the disaster that is our current education delivery system—

Mr. Assam: That you contributed to.

Dr. K. Rowley: Well, you could say so, I would not debate that now. That might very well be true.

I heard the Prime Minister saying last week—and I was very surprised to hear that—to his faithful that his Government is made up of humans and it is only those who did nothing have done no wrong and made no mistakes. Human beings make mistakes. Only the PNM humans are not allowed to make mistakes!

Mr. Assam: Because they are so colossal. *[Laughter]*

Dr. K. Rowley: I was so surprised when I heard that. Because you know, Mr. Speaker, there was a time when one would have thought that once you were elected to government you did not have that excuse available to you. Even Bill

Clinton had that excuse: I am only human. When I hear the Prime Minister say that UNC Ministers are only human and they will make mistakes, I want to ask: “So when did this new development come about?” I think now we are on the same side, but yes, mistakes were made.

In fact, it indicates to the PNM, as my colleague mentioned the PNM and the education system, some of the things that we find unsatisfactory now in the education system were as a result of taking expensive expert advice. This whole thing that were became the junior secondary rotating nonsense, that was not a cheap fly-by-night thing; it came to us having been studied by the experts. How many of you remember New Maths? Remember when schools were put to do New Maths? Somebody came up with something called New Maths and we had books with series and whatever. From time to time we get bad advice and it works poorly, improperly, unsatisfactorily; but that is not the issue.

The issue is, if after a period of time we are big enough to come to the conclusion that it is not working, we must be big enough to say so and to say that it requires attention; and that is what I am trying to say here now. That I hope that this initiative is but one of many to come which will put the education system and the education of our children and the preparation of our country in front of the national community. I go further. I am saying that there requires to be full, open and extensive objective debate as to what is to become of our education system. What should go into it. How would we set about to re-establish values? Because unless we are prepared to do that we are spinning top in mud. Personal responsibility.

I remember a Minister of Education of recent past saying to children that “Children do not fail exams. The system fails you”. Now, Mr. Speaker, anybody telling children that: that is misadvice. That cannot be serious. Children ought to be told that they have a responsibility to take advantage of what is available to them. If you could not be bothered to focus on your reading, you could not be bothered to give up liming for reading, how can you expect me to tell you that when you fail, the system fails you? I heard one of our Education Ministers telling that to the national community. Until we put aside that kind of new age nonsense and get back to telling children when they have a responsibility and telling parents where the responsibility lies, we are forever going to be amazed at what goes on in television when they talk to the camera at nights, what goes on when we see the crime that comes out of them, when we look at the examination results, and tell me that we are doing so well.

I have a problem with CXC results. Because when I look at them and I see all this mass of distinctions, I am asking myself: “Have children suddenly become

very bright these days”? When I was going to school and somebody got a distinction that person was in the crowd and you could point him out, “That fella got a distinction!” Now distinctions are knocking dog all over the place. Even then, most people, by my standard, the ones with the standards that I have been accustomed to and the ones that I would like to see young people now aspire to, I do not know that it is the same thing. We need to reassess these things.

It cannot be that you pass through school, which is what most of our children are doing now, sad to say, they are passing through school. It is not cheap; it is very expensive. They pass through school and they come out with great expectations and those of us who are responsible for them are helpless at that stage.

So I want to exhort my colleagues on the other side, yes, let us do this, it is an experiment which we are going to support. I urge you, Minister, to resist—if you are there when the appointments are to be made—the temptation or the entreaty to put people on these boards for any other reason than their competence and their potential to contribute positively, and to let the interest of children prevail at all times; and also, not to let it lie here, to let this be seen as a timed response and as the other programmes kick in, that these things be dovetailed into there.

I hear about the coming of the regional bodies and so forth. I am a little concerned as to whether, in fact, we have not gone the wrong way first. Maybe we should have gone that way, agreeing on what our regional subunits should be and then deciding how the units should fall within the subunits. Having said that, I will pass on that and see how it goes.

One thing I want to say, Mr. Speaker, is that when one looks at the overall administration of Trinidad and Tobago, if one looks down from above, I get the feeling that what one would see is a ball of wool that has been played with by a miserable kitten. You would see a number of layers all knotted with not too many directions in between. Because, everything we do in making changes, those things do not seem to dovetail with other things.

Take for example, here we are talking about school districts. We passed a law in this country to create regional corporations. When that law was passed, some of the thinking of the Parliament then was that you would create discreet bodies that would have responsibility for community action in those bodies, of which schools were a part. I am sure, when these school districts are demarcated, that you would not find that the school districts will bear any resemblance to the regional bodies.

You have a district revenue officer who has a kind of boundary. You have a local government body that has a different boundary. You have the Elections and

Boundaries Commission that has different boundaries. You have the local health authority. So every institution, every officer who is dealing with a particular service to the public is operating against a different boundary, and that creates overlapping confusion. It does not simplify in the public's mind how these agencies are supposed to interact. I am saying this so that if there is any possibility that these education districts can be made to somehow mirror the local districts as we have demarcated them by another law: that should be done.

Ideally speaking, I think my colleague here made reference to the British system and the ex-Minister mentioned something else. The ideal state, as far as I am concerned, will be for these regional corporations, boroughs and cities to have responsibility for their education units; that is ideal. Why did we come here and pass laws to create the Tunapuna/Piarco and Diego Martin corporations, and go through all that we went through to create that and now say, "Okay, having created that, you are not useful or good enough to be in charge of your school districts"?

Greater Los Angeles is a new city, but when you look at the map, Los Angeles, *per se*, is a conurbation of a series of cities and in each of these small cities is its own education district. So if you are in Monroe over here and Arcadia next door, the streets separate the two cities and two separate school districts. Each district is independent of the other one. Some are very good; some are not so good. Persons move from one area to another area in Los Angeles, in many cases, to get their children into a school district that they believe is better than the one they are in. The quality of the school district is the biggest pull in moving people from one area to another in Los Angeles because of this independent management of their school system.

6.35 p.m.

We have a small scale of that here, where we have 14 local government bodies including Tobago. Since we are going this way, why do we not go the whole way? Why do we not give the people of North Eastern such as Sangre Grande and Manzanilla the responsibility of their schools? Of course, in that situation, you may not have had to put a board in every school but you could have had a school board that covers the school in that area. Give Diego Martin control of Diego Martin schools—was it 20 schools in the Diego Martin Corporation? Let them be responsible and let the parents of that area be responsible. Give them authority with the responsibility. We are always fearful to go the whole way.

Whether it is Caricom, where we keep talking all the time about single market and economy but we are mortally afraid of it. Or, the West Indies cricket team

where we are getting 9—nil, 20—nil, 5—nil, 3—nil but we are afraid to do what we have to do. We are just timid, timid, timid! This is now the year 2000. We have had a long time in practising being an independent people. Timidity should no longer be our hallmark. There were those who felt that we could not manage independence; there were those who felt we could not manage an economy; so far we have done reasonably well. I think we should not be timid in going the full way with respect to things like education and health, especially education, and even more so, in the face of what I would call chronic under-performance of the existing system.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to give the assurance to my colleague, the new Minister of Education, that she has our support for anything she comes with which is meant to improve our education system. Let us think big and let us rise above anything which will not contribute significantly and positively to Trinidad and Tobago especially through our youth.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker:

The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources (Hon. Trevor Sudama): Mr. Speaker, I rise to make a very brief contribution to this debate. I am very happy, indeed, to hear from the Member for Diego Martin West, at least he was implying that we should not make education a political football, there is too much at stake. We wish to endorse that. I think the mission has come up too late, given the history of his government in dealing with the question of education. There is no doubt that the future of this country would be decided by the quality and the comprehensiveness of our education system.

I am afraid that in the past, while the previous PNM regime did make some attempt to have education reach out to larger and larger numbers, not much thought was given to the issue of quality in education. Having provided the physical structures they did not think that it was important to find out what went on in those physical structures because the problem that we are experiencing in education today has not emerged overnight. There has been a legacy of the lack of accountability, mismanagement and lack of perspective as to where we go with the education system in this country. I am surprised again, to hear him talk about accountability, and we have to be accountable in whatever we do.

While he speaks about the need for accountability, he is condoning the fact that teachers should not be accountable. He is condoning the fact that teachers should listen to whatever wild schemes or proposals the union representatives may put to them and follow those instructions and directives without any thought of how those actions would impact on the children they teach and on the system

itself. Accountability, yes, but there must be accountability for all and that is, you could not exempt teachers from this whole requirement to be accountable. I am afraid it is that sort of attitude which, as promoted by the previous PNM administration, has been partly responsible for what is happening in the school system today.

In response to what was said about the currency of payments to support the University of the West Indies, I was again surprised that the issue was raised that we should be current with our payments and so forth, and thus give the fullest support. I want to endorse that. I want to remind this honourable House that when we got into office the Trinidad and Tobago Government was owing the University of the West Indies close to \$300 million.

Arrears were accumulated under the previous PNM administration and other administrations, and we had to decide that if we wanted to maintain this regional institution—I want to say something more about the University of the West Indies as a regional tertiary institution—certainly, we should meet our obligations, as they were not met by previous administrations including the administration to which he belonged from 1991 to 1995. It was this Government that decided that within the period of five years, at the rate of \$60 million a year, that it was going to liquidate the arrears to the University of the West Indies and keep our payments current.

6.45 p.m.

I would also say in the same breath, having been a representative of the Government on the university council, that if we are to get the most value for the money that we are spending, then the university itself has to be accountable in terms of value for money and look at the product that is being produced at the tertiary level. It is at the tertiary level, perhaps more than any other level, that our fate would be determined and the mention of the fact that at the tertiary level we are only producing some 7 per cent of the cohort in that 18 to 30-year group with tertiary level education.

Again, this is something which did not come overnight because previous administrations did not have the vision to see that except you spend money effectively at the tertiary level, then you are not going to be in the forefront of countries that can compete in the world today; they never had that vision. Therefore, it is obligatory on us, at this juncture in our history, to be very careful, concerned and conscientious that we address this problem of the stark deficiency at the tertiary level.

We have been trying to do things and I will dare say that, while we have attempted a number of initiatives, of course, they are not adequate. We have to—

as we have tried to do in developing a college of applied arts, science and technology—attempt to partially fill that gap and to bring into one umbrella organization, educational opportunities provided at the post-secondary level. That has to be expanded. We have to expand the range of skills to which we expose our post-secondary students. We have attempted, as a short-term measure, to be engaged in national energy skills development focussing on the needs of the energy sector, and that is another initiative. We have to look at this question of supplying the needs of the tertiary sector in a more holistic fashion and this Government has been taking steps in order to achieve that.

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

As I am on the tertiary sector, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I just want to make this comment, that many people associate tertiary level opportunities merely with University of the West Indies. I want to make it absolutely clear, while the Government is thinking about this matter, that the University of the West Indies is a regional institution. Our advance in Trinidad and Tobago, if we rely solely on the University of the West Indies, has to go along with the pace at which the university is improving itself.

It is my view that while we support a regional institution and we give whatever reasonable resources we can afford to that institution, Trinidad and Tobago has to take a national focus in terms of the provision of tertiary education. This is why we are giving consideration to the question of establishing a university of technology that will make that initial thrust into the provision of tertiary level opportunities in this country. It is critical, it is urgent and we have no options in this matter. Quite apart from that, there are other areas where we are able to train people into the respective professions and skills which an emerging economy is demanding, but also which, if we are going to diversify our economy, will demand a diversified range of skills at the tertiary level. That is clear and indisputable.

I think we should insist that the University of the West Indies becomes a centre of excellence at the tertiary level and there is a lot of ground to cover in order to reach that point. If you listen to the views of the layman and you talk about the University of the West Indies and you ask in what area the university has distinguished itself, they might come up and tell you, “Well, they throw a very good carnival fete.” In the past there were efforts at distinction but apparently, in recent times, we do not seem to have any sort of positive moves to put that stamp of excellence on what the University of the West Indies does, and that is an element.

Do they expand knowledge, do they get into the new areas of research on the basis of which we would make some advances in the industrial field or in the field of petroleum technology or agricultural science and so forth? Are they doing this? I am afraid there is not a great deal of evidence that the University of the West Indies identifies the urgency, both of expanding the numbers that it trains and also of engaging quality tertiary education and focussing on areas of science and technology. So we want to insist on that and we want to know that a policy we have which supports the regional institution also focuses on our needs here in Trinidad and Tobago.

I also want to indicate, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the difficulty by which previous administrations had been burdened was to look at education in compartments. You have tertiary education, secondary education and primary education, without realizing that you must have a holistic approach to education. If you do not have a sound primary school education which then feeds into a relevant secondary education from which you derive your tertiary level student population, and if you do not have an integrated system in which you seek to strive for quality and excellence at all levels, then, at any given level, you are going to have failure; and that has not been quite appreciated. This is why, while we look at what is happening at the primary level, we are paying some particular attention to the secondary level where we embarked on a secondary education modernization programme at considerable cost, but it is a cost that we could ill-afford not to undertake.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to assure the House—I would not have spoken except that the Member for Diego Martin West felt that his government had done so much and his government was so aware of the needs of the education system and that we should look at this thing in a rational and objective way and see that whatever we do, we do it in the best interest of all concerned. It is as if the government in Opposition has come up with certain revelations which have occurred to them, given their history over 34 years and given the damage they have done to the psyche of the people of this country.

The gross damage they have done to the psyche now has to be repaired, and that is not going to be a short-term exercise: to repair the damage of 34 years of the People's National Movement rule in this country, particularly as it relates to the education system. We have to undertake that. It might take us maybe 10 to 15 years in order to completely reform and put in place what is required to restructure the system but, more importantly, to restructure it at the level of the psyche. That is the burden left for us to undertake.

I hear the Member from Tunapuna grumbling as he normally does. I do not know what he has to contribute to this whole debate on education, but that is another issue. Apparently, when the PNM is in Opposition they see things a little more clearly than when they are in government. The Member for Diego Martin West comes here to preach all the time. When it comes to even seeking his own interest in Diego Martin West he could not have a school built in Carenage for the four years he was there as the Member for Diego Martin West, but directly he went into Opposition there was great agitation for a primary school in the Carenage area. I really do not understand.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we wish to make it very clear to the country, this House and to everybody, that this Government is serious about reforming the education system, about bringing down the cost of education to the parents of primary and secondary school students. It is serious about making education reach every corner, every nook and cranny of Trinidad and Tobago. If you see the construction programme that we have on the secondary education modernization programme, you would see that this Government is intent on bringing secondary education to all.

We are looking at the option of expanding tertiary level to the point where we can say that, perhaps, 10 or 12 per cent of that age cohort have, in fact, accessed tertiary level education that would then be the building block on which we would put this economy, this society and this country in a mode to take off and to be more competitive in the world of the 21st Century. I am afraid that as we start this century it is the duty of this Government to provide the leadership in the sphere of education.

Thank you.

Mr. Kenneth Valley (*Diego Martin Central*): Thank you. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think the last statement made by the Member for Oropouche is really where I want to begin. While he spent his contribution looking back and looking at the PNM over the last 34 years and so forth, I think the Member, and really all of us in this House, should realize that before Christmas we were all scared about this Y2K bug. However, I think the real realization of the year 2000 is the fact that we are about to enter a new century.

We need to look at how we do things in Trinidad and Tobago and how as leaders in the society who would not be around at the turn of the next century. What really can we do? What are the structures and so forth that we can leave as a lasting mark to our country, as our contribution to this country which we claim we love so much.

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Mr. Deputy Speaker, I had merely a few issues to deal on the legislation, but after listening to my friend, the Member of Parliament for Diego Martin West, he really set me thinking.

The significant point is that we have moved from a system where we had shared values of the religious schools, and in our quest to make education available to all, we emphasized quantity and to some extent compromised on quality.

7.00 p.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have to see now jointly what is required to ensure that we can improve the quality of the education, especially in our primary schools, and I speak of the value system because as a fact, in the religious schools whether it be the Hindu Schools, the Roman Catholic Schools, the Muslim Schools, there is that shared value system and our young people in those schools are socialized into that value system.

The government schools, however, I do not even know if they say prayers. I remember as a kid, I had a principal—God bless his soul—who every morning after prayers he would speak about some aspect of life. He would address the school. I do not know whether that obtains in government schools. What I do know, because of the fact that different religions—even the teachers belong to different religious groups so that even in political parties we have to say different prayers and so forth. In the government schools there is the situation where perhaps there is no prayer, there is no teaching or emphasis on the value system. The emphasis is merely on reading, writing and arithmetic, and the question is: what can we do as a group who want to help?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, you would remember sometime last year we passed legislation about the establishment of committees and I thought that perhaps there are certain areas in our national life—and education is one of them, and I would think that the health sector is another—that we ought perhaps to depoliticize and really have some joint select committee on which we could possibly have persons from outside Parliament to really examine the structures and systems and see what is required to provide the required infrastructure. When we see what has happened coming out of our junior secondary schools we know something has to be done, and let me disabuse the Member for Oropouche's mind by letting him know that the PNM Manifesto of 1995 listed 21 policy initiatives that the PNM government would have undertaken. A very prominent one was the continued efforts to deshift junior secondary schools and to convert senior comprehensive schools into five and seven year schools.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, on the subject matter at hand listed also in the Manifesto, is the deepening of the process of decentralizing the management of the education system with the eventual goal of greater school and community-based management. You would know that the Inter American Development Bank loan, as well as the World Bank loan about which the Member for Tabaquite spoke were both negotiated. The Inter American Development Bank loan was started by the PNM government.

By the way, I must say that the Member for Tabaquite may very well be—I saw this evening that unlike previous presentations where he read somebody's script, he spoke from his notes. I thought he did quite well. [*Desk thumping*] We may not agree with all that he said, but I think if he continues in that vein, he could be a candidate for the most improved new Member of this House.

Another significant point coming out of the debate this afternoon is the need for us to take a closer look at the local government bodies to restructure them to make them efficient and work towards the decentralization that we talk about so glibly. I see this move to have school boards in government schools as a right move with respect to getting communities involved in what we do, but I think it ought not to be *ad hoc*. We need to go further and we need to use that as the central theme in our community based development.

I think the vision for local government—that is what it was when I was in local government in 1992—is to move local government to get the communities involved in what is happening. I would think it is really the local government bodies that should have some nexus with the school boards rather than the Minister of Education, because my understanding is that these school boards would see about the management of the schools in getting the community involved and so forth, and it seems to me that the Minister on Hayes Street is far removed from that and we ought to try to get as quickly as possible—yes, you may need to restructure local government, but get the local government bodies involved.

Again, the point made by the Member for Diego Martin West: I thought that the Member for Tabaquite alluded to that and the area with respect to these regional school boards would be the same as the local government boundaries.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I thought also that we ought to have the local government bodies playing some role in the composition of the boards. I do not know whether you may want an officer or a councillor, but I thought we need to emphasize that in fact, these are community-based organizations. The local

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government bodies are bodies which ought to have that nexus with the communities within their electoral area, so I thought we need to look at that.

I do not know whether legislation is the right way to go with respect to school boards. I do not know that the denominational school boards need legislation. I would think that, perhaps, we should have started on some type of voluntary basis encouraging the local government bodies to get involved.

There are some other issues. The Member for Laventille East/Morvant raised the issue with respect to teachers' pay to which the Member for Tabaquite responded that he did not speak about private lessons and absenteeism. I submit, however, that unless we deal with the issue of teachers' pay you would find that the absenteeism rate would increase and private lessons would become the norm. As a fact, if we had teachers and other public servants who have not been given an increase in salary since 1983, we have to know that at present they are highly compromised, they have no debt capacity, they are really extremely poor.

If we are going forward, we need to deal with the issue of pay for teachers and other public servants very quickly. If you look at the budget for the fiscal year you would see that the current surplus is supposed to be about \$900 million and that was based on an oil price of \$17.00 which has been very much more favourable. Understand, that over the last few years the current surplus had been wasted on all types of grandiose projects like the airport and so forth. *[Interruption]*

I do not know whether you can look at any project in anybody's constituency and say: "This was built by the URP over the last three years." *[Interruption]* Perhaps in your constituency, not in mine. Tell me. I know you fixed the Sierra Leone Road before the election. Tell me, let me know what was done in Diego Martin Central.

As we move forward, we need to look at increased compensation for teachers and other public servants. Specifically with the legislation, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to go through a few of the clauses and the first one on the Composition and Procedures of Board, the issue of the principal being an *ex officio* member and the fact that there could be another staff member on the board. Obviously we have the problem alluded to by my colleague again.

If we make the staff members *ex officio* then we may run into the difficulty of allowing them to escape responsibility for what happens—the "not me" syndrome. So we need to look at that very carefully.

Again, what is the intent of clause 3(1)(b)(v), the appointees by the Minister. I think we need to be a bit clearer because we would want these persons to come

from the community groups and/or the stakeholders. I think that is the intent. I suggest that clause be redrafted to say: “four persons nominated by the Minister from among groups and stakeholders in the community after consultation with the relevant groups.”

7.15 p.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, one wants to ensure that they come from those groups within the community. In clause 5(1), it allows the Minister to appoint a temporary member if the member is ill or away for some reason. I think that can be taken also with clause 6, which allows the Minister to appoint a person to fill a vacancy on the board for the unexpired portion.

Since the original appointments are made by different groups, for example, a member is appointed by the union, two members by the Parent-Teacher Association and a member of the past pupils’ association and so forth, it seems to me, that really, it is the group to make the new appointment. For example, the temporary appointment, if it is the union member that has fallen ill or is away, it seems to me, that it is the union to make that replacement and, similarly, if it is the past pupil nominee, then it is the past pupils’ association which ought to make that appointment.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: They cannot make the appointment but they could make a recommendation because they must meet the statutory requirements.

Mr. K. Valley: That is the intent but that is not what it says. It does not say, for example, in clause 5 or in clause 6, “after consultation with the respective or relevant association”. So I think we need to look at that.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there are other small issues, with respect to the legislation that I would want to deal with later at the committee stage, but there is one that is significant, I think I ought to mention it here. Under clause 19, which speaks about the duties and powers of the board, one that is not mentioned is, the need to give the board the authority to identify and implement programmes for staff development and also to cater for the needs of both the parents and children of the schools. If we were to look at clause 19, I would think that we ought to, at least, add those to the list of powers and responsibilities of the board. The other matter I think we need to look at, with respect to the school board, is to give them the specific power to appoint sub-committees in the carrying out of their functions. One may say that they have that implicitly, but I think we need to state that explicitly in the legislation.

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Mr. Deputy Speaker, just quickly, and again, my friend from Oropouche, the Minister of Agriculture, made the point that in 1995 when they came in, the indebtedness to the University of the West Indies was some \$300 million, and they took the policy decision to liquidate the arrears by paying some \$60 million a year. Now there are two matters: the Minister did not indicate what was the indebtedness when the Opposition came in at the end of 1991; nor did the Minister say, that while the economy of Trinidad and Tobago was in decline over the period 1983—1993, that in fact, the economy was in a growth stage since 1994, and it continues to be in a growth stage. So that Government's revenues improved considerably, so that, the Government today can, in fact, liquidate that liability based on decisions taken by the previous Government. I mean, it is old hat, and I am one really to go back but as a fact, if we look, we would see that this Government really has reaped without tilling the soil. They have planted nothing new. They have done nothing to move Trinidad and Tobago to the next level of growth.

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Mr. Speaker, what has happened in fact, they have compromised our growth initiative because of what they have done in water, in electricity. *[Interruption]* Yes, I will tell you about that. They are aware because in the Point Lisas area, they were buying water for some \$404.50 and selling it to the plants at \$770.00, and they came here stating that the companies down there agreed to that price. When we went down there they were complaining that the Government is making them uncompetitive and that is the reality of the situation. The Government is aware of it because they have written them to that effect. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker: Continue talking to me.

Mr. K. Valley: Mr. Speaker, thank you. We have to remember that foreign firms look to Trinidad and Tobago because of certain things. Our labour rate is competitive *vis-à-vis* the United States, because we have the natural resource of energy. But look at what is happening with our energy and we need to correct it. It is the problem that caused the PCS Nitrogen plant to close. Here, there is a situation—let us take the case of Fertrin, the older plants and PCS Nitrogen—the older plants natural gas is based on a base price plus an escalation. Every year it went up by a certain amount. *[Interruption]*.

Mr. Assam: What that has to do with schoolbooks? *[Laughter]*

Mr. Speaker: Order please.

Mr. K. Valley: What has happened now, is we have moved to a situation, where the pricing is based on the market price of the end product, so that an older

plant such as PCS Nitrogen is tied to that old system. The newer fertilizer plants are tied to the new system, market related pricing, so that PCS Nitrogen is no longer competitive. They are now looking at closing down and putting persons on the breadline. So I am saying, that when we look at the University of the West Indies situation, and the funding for the University, because of the policy decisions taken by the previous Government, the Government now in power has the funding to liquidate that indebtedness. If the Government continues to undermine the competitiveness of Trinidad and Tobago, then they would retard our growth initiative and put us years backward. Electricity, water, natural gas are extremely important with respect to decision-making. They determine our competitive advantage.

Mr. Speaker, there is a well-known book by Michael Porter: *Competitive Advantages of Nations*. When we look at Trinidad and Tobago that is what we have, in addition to a competitive labour rate. If the Government compromise that, they are compromising the future of our children—school children, Member for St. Joseph—but the Member would not understand that, would he?

Mr. Speaker, as a whole, I think that the school boards would help. I agree it will not be a panacea. I suggest that one of the committees that this Parliament ought to look at rather quickly—Mr. Leader of the House—is a committee on education, a committee on the health sector and, perhaps, also on local government.

7.25 p.m.

I think we need to look at that, make those non-partisan if we can, and let us see whether, as leaders in this community, knowing full well that we are lucky to be around at the turn of the 21st Century, but being conscious of the fact that we would not be around at the turn of the next century, we can do something for mankind. Let us do something for Trinidad and Tobago. I thank you, Mr. Speaker.
[Desk thumping]

The Minister of Local Government (Hon. Dhanraj Singh): Mr. Speaker, having listened to the Members of Parliament for Diego Martin West and Diego Martin Central, I feel obligated to stand here and make a contribution in support of this Bill which seeks to establish school boards. The Ministry of Local Government is playing an increasingly greater role in the education system in Trinidad and Tobago. The Ministry of Local Government has been given the responsibility of school repairs and in the last financial year the Ministry of Local Government repaired well over 30 primary schools based on requests made by the Ministry of Education and on requests made from the schools themselves.

The school repair programme was transferred to the Ministry of Local Government and the local government system because it was felt that the local

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government system, in a more timely manner, was better prepared to address the need for school repairs. The reason being that the local government system, being a decentralized system, would mobilize resources much more quickly to address these problems that occur in our schools on a day-to-day basis. I say this in response to what the Member for Diego Martin West said earlier that in the local government system, through the Unemployment Relief Programme (URP), millions of dollars are being spent fortnightly—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Rowley: Stolen.

Hon. D. Singh:—“are being stolen”, those were his words, through the URP system. But, Mr. Speaker, it was through the URP system that most of these schools were repaired so I want to put on the record that—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Valley: Would you just give way to a question? Would the Minister inform this House how many schools were repaired in the Mayaro area under the URP system?

Hon. D. Singh: Mr. Speaker, there is the Marac R.C. School, the Oropouche School and several schools that I can name that were repaired in that area, [*Desk thumping*] using the combination of the local government resources and the URP resources. Now, I am making the point in response to what the Member for Diego Martin West had said that millions of dollars are being stolen. On a fortnightly basis, several thousand people are employed through the URP. The funds are given to each of the regional corporations and they manage these funds with regard to the employment of individuals. It is therefore left up to the corporations to oversee—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Rowley: No!

Mr. Speaker: No, please, no. [*Interruption*] No, I must appeal to the Member for Diego Martin West to restrain himself and behave in a manner that he knows is befitting of this place and this honourable Chamber. I ask you please, and I ask hon. Members to distinguish as between the political platform. I am told that this is an election year. There is going to be ample opportunity for that type of behaviour on the hustings. We do not have to behave like that in here.

Hon. D. Singh: Mr. Speaker, this is a point that I must—[*Interruption*] Yes. Mr. Speaker, I will have to apologize for the behaviour of the Member for Diego Martin West. [*Laughter*] [*Desk thumping*] This is a very important point that I have to put on the record. On a monthly basis, the allocation with regard to the URP budget is released to every single corporation. It is within their accounts. They manage the money aspect of the URP programme. If there is any illegal

spending of that money, it is through the corporation and not through the Ministry because we give them the allocation on a monthly basis. [*Desk thumping*] So I must make that point.

Now, I must tell the Member for Diego Martin West that it was the URP and the local government system that repaired Smith Hill and Scorpion in his constituency; places he could not fix in four years while he was there. We did that for him. We intend to go down there and do a community centre in Point Cumana under the URP. [*Desk thumping*] We have done work all over Trinidad and Tobago, Mr. Speaker, through the same URP system. The reason why we have had such tremendous success in local government and the URP is because of the concept of decentralization and this is why I am standing here to make my contribution with regard to the system of local government and the system of school boards.

The system of local government is one where there is decentralization of decision-making, where the community is involved in the decision-making process and, therefore, problems that arise are quickly addressed and the solution is community-based or community-oriented. The school boards that are being proposed here are being established along the same lines. School boards will be community-based. They will be able quickly to address the concerns that would arise in a particular community or in a particular geographical area and, therefore, the success that we have enjoyed in local government will be the same success that the school boards will deal with in addressing the education system of a particular region.

Mr. Speaker, I stand here totally in support of the establishment of the school boards. In his address the Member for Diego Martin Central spoke about many things. Some have no relevance to this debate at all. What was important in what he said is that he saw a great similarity between the operation of local government and the school boards. I have just alluded to what are some of the benefits of establishing school boards. Resources will be better spent under the school board system. There would be greater community involvement in the education system as there would be a greater scrutiny of what is being done in the schools.

I could remember when I went to school. I went to school in a church school, Mr. Speaker. If we, while going home, did misbehave on the way walking down to get the taxi or even walk in the rain going to get that taxi, the very next morning that information would be brought to our attention and names would be called because that school operated in a closely knit community. The concept behind the church board and the school board is for the greater involvement of the

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community in the decision-making processes. So, Mr. Speaker, I wish to state that I am in support of this Bill and, having been involved in the local government system, I see great successes down the road with this system. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Education (Hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar): Mr. Speaker, I was advised that another Member on the other side would have spoken for a while, but I do apologize. I want to thank all Members on both sides of the House for what is clearly their support for the legislation before this House. It was very heartening to hear both the Member for Diego Martin Central and the Member for Diego Martin West clearly admit that they had failed with respect to the education system in certain regards and to really—they say confession is good for the soul, Member for Diego Martin West and Diego Martin Central. What was even more heartening, Mr. Speaker, was to see that the Bill, which is in fact a one-page Bill, evoked so much debate on both sides and it can only be because of the concern for the education of the children of the nation. I thank Members, as I say, for that concern and for the suggestions that they have raised.

There are a few minor matters that have been raised. I think other matters have been dealt with by my colleagues on this side and I want to thank them. I totally agree that the Member for Tabaquite has become one of the most seasoned Members of the House. [*Desk thumping*] We really enjoyed listening to his contribution. As you would know, Mr. Speaker, when the Member for Laventille East/Morvant said that the principle and the concept of local school boards had been around for a long time and it was initiated by the PNM, he would realize that was not so because I had indicated when I started that the concept of local school boards in Trinidad and Tobago had its origins dating back from the Moynes Commission in 1939. So, unless he was around there in 1939, I really cannot say otherwise because what he used to support that view was the White Paper which they put out during the last administration.

If there is anyone who should take credit for the introduction of local school boards I think it would be the former Minister of Education, the Member for Tabaquite. [*Desk thumping*] It was that Member, Mr. Speaker, following the mandate of the hon. Prime Minister, the urges, I may say, of the hon. Prime Minister, who set up a committee to deal specifically with what we had put in place with respect to local school boards in 1997. What we are seeing today is the end product of the efforts that the hon. Minister, the former Minister of Education, put in to bring this legislation before Parliament. We have always said, give credit where it is due, and it is very clear, in my respectful view, that the Minister deserves praise for his efforts.

Mr. Speaker, as I say, in principle all Members are in agreement that this is a good concept, that this is a concept, contrary to the view of the Member for Laventille East/Morvant who said that we are concerned about the formal structure of education and not the informal structure. I think it was made very clear again by the Member for Tabaquite when he said that this is clearly an initiative and something that is going to bring the informal educators in the community within the education system. So it is very clear that both the formal and the informal are being looked at.

He mentioned other initiatives in terms of the informal aspects to education. However, it is true and at no point in time, in our contributions on this side, did any of us attempt to mislead anyone or to give any impression that we ourselves believed that this concept and this proposal was a panacea for all evil. It is not.

7.40 p.m.

I never said that. I said clearly that this was one of the initiatives; it was one of the things that Government was moving into, in terms of dealing with some of the problems in the education system, and I totally agree with the Members on the other side. All of us here do agree that there are problems in the education system. It is very clear that there are problems in the system. This is why we are taking steps to deal with those problems.

The Member spoke about tinkering with the education system and, again, it is so very easy to say that each time you bring one measure. We cannot bring 10 at a time to the Parliament; we cannot deal with 10 measures at the same time; we cannot debate 10 at the same time, or 20 at the same time. Every time we bring a measure to the Parliament, Members on the other side get up and say, "We have no holistic view. All we are doing is tinkering and coming piecemeal."

Mr. Speaker, the way I know this Parliament works is that it is linear and we can only do things one at a time. We cannot do all of it at the same time. This is clearly not the be-all and the end-all of our thrust in education and our colleagues on this side have spoken of some of the other initiatives in education.

The concerns that were raised were with respect to specific provisions within the regulations. There was no concern really raised with the Bill itself, an eight-clause Bill. There were no concerns about that. The concerns were with respect to the regulations. All I can say is, we will take some of those concerns on board. We will look at them again because the regulations will not be approved here in this honourable House. The regulations will be made by Order after the Bill

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becomes law and is proclaimed, so that the concerns that were raised will definitely be taken into account.

There were concerns that I can deal with very easily with respect to the composition of the board. I thank the Member for Diego Martin West. That is clearly something at which we will look, the issue that if we have the principal as an *ex officio* member and the principal is debarred from being chairman or vice-chairman, then the issue also arises: what about the other teachers on the board? I have spoken with the Attorney General with respect to that and it is something that we will reconsider in light of the comments that were made.

In terms of the concerns raised by the Member for Laventille East/Morvant on the composition of the board; again, I do not think the persons nominated by the Minister when he talked about giving expertise, for persons to come in from specialist areas and we should demarcate those or identify them now within the legislation; I think we dealt with that in the question I asked him: if those persons were not within the area, then it means that this would not work.

So that the most important thing is where those persons are available, where there are specialist educators within the community, where there are specialist persons in terms of guidance and counselling, it is obvious that we would seek to include those wherever possible where they exist, but in communities—and many communities we all know, would not have specialist persons in these areas—those boards should not be short of members because of that, or we should not defer or put off putting in a school board because we cannot find a particular person with expertise in one area. What we will have is the community coming together for the betterment of the school and for the children in the school. So I think we can deal with that concern very easily.

He raises the question of why we are saying at least one of the PTA nominees should be female and the Member for St. Joseph asked him whether he was against women. It is very clear why this provision is there. We are asking for two members of the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) and we want to avoid the possibility that we end up with two fathers. It would be good, obviously, to get the input of both a mother and a father within the system, so two PTA nominees. It is clear why we require one of them, at least, to be female so that we have both the father and the mother representing the PTA.

The concerns about the representative of the union. I do not think the Member for Diego Martin West was very serious about those concerns. It is very clear that the members of the Trinidad and Tobago Unified Teachers' Association (TTUTA)

or any other majority union representing teachers must be within a system like this because, again, we are looking at all the stakeholders in the system. In the same way that the parents are stakeholders in the system, the teachers clearly are in such regard and, certainly, the union representative on the local school board could help to deal with many of the concerns raised generally by the union and by TTUTA. I do not think that was a serious concern.

What was, however, another concern with respect to the composition of the board by the Member for Laventille East/Morvant was to say that the way the board was constituted what would be happening was that the Minister would have control of the board because there are nine members, or 10 members, or whatever the case might be.

“no more than nine other members...”

So there are 10—one *ex officio* and nine others. So there are 10 and out of those, five are appointed by the Minister so the Minister will control the board. Well, I cannot see how one *ex officio*—I have told you that we are including another person here, that is the person from the students’ association—the students’ council in the school—so we will end up, apart from the *ex officio* member, with 10 others, or nine others. We will have to look at that now that we are including the student representative. But I do not see how that balance says that the Minister has the most people on the school board to control the school board and the whole issue of whether the Minister will use it to plant people there to create a whole battery of persons all over the country on local school boards and they will be looking for handouts. I do not think, in the case of the local school board, that applies.

The Member for Diego Martin West asked whether they would receive any money for their services and I understand that the intention is that they will receive a stipend for serving on the school board. The persons who are from outside the school system will receive a stipend.

On the issue of values-based education, again, the Member for Diego Martin West raised it and the Member for Diego Martin Central raised it. In my opening presentation, I made it very clear. In fact, from day one when I went into the Ministry of Education, that is one of the things with which I was very concerned. I repeated that concern here again today, on values-based education. I have said that we have put into place and, in fact, when I went there, this had already gone as a proposal to Cabinet. I did not know it at the time but the former Minister of Education had taken the proposal to Cabinet to have someone appointed to deal

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with curriculum in values based education. When I went in there, I did not recall that had gone to Cabinet, but I know I made that statement, that what we needed to do was to bring back values based curriculum into the schools.

In my opening statement, I mentioned very clearly, in the United States where they had taken religion out of the schools, that the President there was looking for a mechanism to put back religious education, values based education into the schools. So, it is very clear that this is only one limb.

PROCEDURAL MOTION

The Attorney General (Hon. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj): Mr. Speaker, I must thank the hon. Minister and Member for Siparia for giving way. I intervene merely to put forward a procedural motion. I beg to move that the House continue to sit until the completion of the debate on this matter.

Question put and agreed to.

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Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: Mr. Speaker, I was on values based education. We are very clear that it is something which we will be proceeding to bring back into the curriculum. Therefore, this is only but one limb of the thrust in education. As I say, others have spoken of some of the other areas into which we are looking.

The question arose as to whether we stop here. Do we move further with this issue of decentralization? Married with that, was the issue of whether boundaries should not coincide with those of the local government authorities, the boundaries of the regional corporations for districts and, of course, those are things that we will simply look at, but I think the Member did indicate that he was prepared for us to run with this as it is, taking into consideration comments he raised and that at some future time—nothing is fixed in stone—if this is not working in exactly the manner intended, it can be amended. If it is and it is working so well that we want to go further, we can then develop it and decentralize even further, empower the communities, empower the school boards even further. So, yes to the Member for Diego Martin West, we can go further. It depends on how this pans out; how this works out.

On the issue with respect to the Continuous Assessment Programme, I really would like to say something on that, because there is a total misconception about the CAP. There seems to be a view that the CAP, that is the Continuous Assessment Programme, will be used for placing students from the primary school into the secondary school. We talked about abolishing the Common

Entrance—the Member for Laventille East/Morvant talked about that—that we are so locked into this vision of abolishing the Common Entrance and we have not thought out how the CAP is going to work; the CAP has failed everywhere in all the schools and so forth.

First of all, the CAP will not be used to determine placement in secondary schools; the CAP will not be used to replace the Common Entrance examination. That is not going to happen at all. The Continuous Assessment Programme is to enable educators in the system, teachers in the system, parents in the system, to determine what levels their child would have reached or may have reached, and where are the weaknesses of the child. So, if a child is weak in certain areas, the child can be given additional help in those areas. If a child is very bright, then the child can go forward faster.

The Prime Minister put it very clearly when he talked about if there is a genius in the system, that person can move much faster. He or she does not have to move according to seniority, according to age, because the way the system is you go into Std. 1 and next year you go into Std. 2 and then you go into Std. 3. Whether you are ready or not, you keep moving forward in the system. When you reach the 11-plus, you write the 11-plus between 11-plus—12. That is it. End of story. No more chances. You have failed it. You have not got a place in secondary school. You move out. That is what happens now.

The Continuous Assessment Programme is to say you are ready for the next level; you are ready to take the Secondary Entrance Assessment and that is what will determine—the SEA—placement. So the CAP is really to decide if you are ready. If the CAP fits, then you wear the CAP and you move on to the next stage; if it does not fit, then you stay where you are and you get help in terms of your weak areas. That is the purpose of the CAP. So the Secondary Entrance Assessment is what will place you elsewhere in the schools so when you are ready to write that examination, whether you are 9, 10, 11, 12, 13 or 14, then you move forward.

The Member for Laventille East/Morvant talked about—or was it the Member for Diego Martin West?—interviewing children on the cameras and their being unable to express themselves. Well, I am very happy to tell you that we are revising the curriculum in the primary school to deal with exactly that kind of problem. The whole curriculum is being revised because what has been happening is, we have been turning out—and the product that the Member for Laventille East/Morvant talked about—one-third; over 30 per cent of the children coming out of our schools are functionally illiterate. Yet, they go through Form 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5; they come out functionally illiterate. They do a Common Entrance

examination at the moment; as I say, they move. Just because they have reached the age, they write the examination, whether they are literate, illiterate or otherwise, they write it. Why? There is an examination that is structured as the Common Entrance examination; they tick boxes.

What we are doing is revising that curriculum to concentrate on mathematics, essay writing and comprehension. What is tremendously significant is that you are no longer going to be ticking boxes. The answers are going to be free response answers. That was one of the things. If it is that both Members have admitted that there were obstacles along the way and mistakes along the way, that was one of the mistakes we made in terms of that Common Entrance examination when we said they tick or shade boxes. So that the expressive ability, the creative talent of our young children in the primary school system training for that examination was lost. They were no longer required to express their responses. The responses are now going to be free responses.

The Member mentioned bad expert advice that was had; we went into shading and ticking. In mathematics, it was the same thing—shading and ticking. In maths now, based on the curriculum and based on this new Secondary Entrance Assessment, a marker is now going to look at the working of the entire answer. They are not just going to say the answer is (5) or (6); three plus three equals, tick the box, six. It is not that. We are going to look at how the child arrived at the answer so they can be given marks along the way for working through that problem.

The curriculum is being revised to pick up functional illiteracy and functional innumeracy. One-third of our children is coming out, illiterate functionally, innumerate. That is a fact. So, when the Member speaks of tertiary education and this country has only 8 per cent—I admit it. I said that only last week at the Fulbright awards about which the Member for Laventille East/Morvant spoke, that in tertiary education, I agree in this country that it is only 8 per cent, but the Member for Oropouche explained some of that, why we are at that position now. Why we are at that 8 per cent when we really need to be at 20—25 per cent of our students in that age group going into tertiary education.

7.55 p.m.

The Ministry of Education does not deal with tertiary education. It is not within our portfolio; it is in another ministry. But, there are plans within that ministry to deal with aspects of tertiary education.

The Member for Oropouche made the point again: if one does not have a basic foundation at the primary and secondary level, which tertiary education would

one go to? Would one be prepared and in what way would one be prepared to enter into tertiary level education? One would not be. The primary system has to give that foundation firstly, and secondly through the secondary system.

The Member for Tabaquite spoke about what the Government is doing in the secondary—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Rowley: I thank the hon. Member very much for giving way. I think we are very much on track in following your winding up, with great interest. But, even with the present shortcomings in the existing system, there are many people in the country who would qualify and can benefit from tertiary education but we do not now have the resources allocated or displaced. It is not a question of the primary and secondary system have not created people. We have many people in the country right now who qualify to enter university to do all kinds of things, but the places just are not there because the national resource allocation is not catering. That is the point I was making.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: I take the Member's point on that and I would say, again, it is both things: one is the level of preparedness, yes, and there would be those who are prepared and still not getting the spaces.

Again, with due respect, it comes back to the point again; in no way did the PNM expand that tertiary level. When the PNM was there, in no way did they expand it. What is happening now, under the Ministry with distance learning, with the open university—university with no walls—many people would be able to access that tertiary level. I am saying those things do not fall under the Ministry of Education but since you ask I do know of the plans there.

There are plans for COSTAATT, for the community colleges. There are plans within it. We have been here four years and those plans are on track. Things have started with distance education. COSTAATT has put their structure into place. Those things are happening.

I take the point that we need a greater thrust in tertiary education. It is my respectful view, given the limited time, that steps are being taken to put things in place for that. That is the assurance I can give you—through the community colleges, COSTAATT and through distance learning—that we would be able to reach more persons.

It is very crucial, I do not know if we remember, that in Trinidad and Tobago now, over 60 per cent of our population is under the age of 29. Do you know what that means? They are all at that level in terms of needing and seeking education. The majority of our population is within that group, where education is the most

important thing: for them to become, thereafter, the ones who would produce and create and make this country grow.

The Member for Laventille East/Morvant spoke about the figures given by Professor Palmer when he was here last week. I, too, was taken by surprise. I knew it in theory and I knew it in reading, but when he gave us those statistics it was very clear that whilst Trinidad, Jamaica and the Caribbean have 8 per cent at the tertiary level and so much at the secondary level and so forth, those countries that have forged way ahead, three things are very significant. Firstly, citizens are showing, clearly, that the gross national product in those countries like Singapore and Malaysia—where there are very high levels of tertiary and secondary education—is exceedingly high, as you know.

Secondly, the per capita income, the statistics reveal, is very high in Malaysia and Singapore, where there is a very high turnout in secondary and tertiary education. Of course when one looks in terms of productivity, as a whole, it is very clear that if we do not invest in education, if we do not invest in that 60 per cent of our population that is under 29, we will be doomed in the next round.

When the Member for Laventille/East Morvant said: “This Government has given only 9 per cent of the budgetary allocation to education,” the question is: how much did you give? How much did you give in terms of absolute numbers and in terms of percentages? How much did you give? If one looks at the 9 per cent one would see that it might be three or four times higher than any figure allocated by the PNM, for education. In this time the question is still, what is the result.

I know the Member gets upset because he believes under the PNM, education was so great and everything was so great. The last time I stood here and spoke the Member told me to stay in the cane field. I remember that! What the Member meant was that education—you said it is because I have an education and who gave it to me, the PNM. That is the product. That is what the Member was saying.

Mr. Assam: What about the quality? The quality is what is important. Not only in what you say, the quality yields. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Order please!

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: You want to go home?

Dr. Rowley: I am very grateful to the Minister for giving way. I do not know that we really should be carrying on with these my fault/your fault, debates.

Hon. K. Persad Bissessar: No, no.

Dr. Rowley: I think how I would like us to look at this is that there are interventions that are required and if one looks at the time when this question of secondary education was the major intervention, one would see at one point in time, where the education budget for Trinidad and Tobago was as high as 17 per cent, and that was—you can call it phase one or stage one. That was when the PNM embarked on expanding the number of places. What I am asking the Minister—*[Interruption]* I am not speaking to you. It may be that we are at the point now for another intervention of some sort, but that would require an agreement to put more resources, not 9 or 10 per cent. That is the point I am making.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: As far as I am aware, one of the largest allocations in the budget has gone to the Ministry of Education in this fiscal year. It is one of the largest for this fiscal year and last year as well. The moneys are allocated there.

The Member spoke about the thrust. In fact the sod has been turned and work has been started for the construction of those ten-year schools; that is what is happening. Again, those are through loan funding, as you know.

In addition to the \$9 million that the Member is seeing there—under the four basic education projects which deal with primary schools and under the Secondary Education Modernization Project which deals with secondary schools—there is more funding that is available, and we would go for more. We may not get all that we need in this one year, but we will keep going for more funding.

Just on a final note, Mr. Speaker, in terms of the suggestion for a joint select committee on education, I am a little surprised to hear this. The Member for Laventille/East Morvant stood and told me: “Here is our White Paper. You have adopted the entire White Paper. This is the Bible on education” and so forth but he says there is a crisis in education and we need another White Paper.

Mr. Speaker, at this point in time, it is my respectful view that we do not need a joint select committee to stop us from moving forward. There are many projects put in place by the former Minister of Education and by Government. There are others that would be put in place and are being put in place for education in this fiscal year. I thank Members for their support. A joint select committee is not what we need at this point in time with respect to education. Once again, I thank Members for their concerns. The suggestions with respect to the drafting and wording and so forth, in the regulations, would be looked at.

One other point about the supervisor being in charge—under the old system—of the school and so forth. Local school boards are not there in any way to

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preempt, take away, or wipe out the powers, duties and functions of the principals, supervisors or the Teaching Service Commission. This is most important. They are not there to do that at all. These are to assist in the management of the school. They will in no way interfere with the powers and duties of the supervisors, or the principals.

In terms of the complaint that this whole thing is going to be very unwieldy: that there are going to be over 500 local school boards or whatever the number may be—there are 100 government secondary schools. I am sure there would be 100 for the secondary schools. The complaint was that it would be unwieldy and all these people would have to report to the Minister. At the moment, what happens? At the moment the schools report to the supervisors. The supervisors report to the Director of School Supervision and the Director of School Supervision reports to the Permanent Secretary, who reports to the Minister.

8.05 p.m.

You know what is happening? By the time I find out a school is shut down, by the time it goes through five and ten people and reaches me, the school is shut down and a few days have gone. Or, I put my television on and I see it on the news. That is what happens. The process is so long and bureaucratic. Yes, it may be unwieldy in terms of the numbers that have to report. Yes, the Minister cannot read every report that comes on her desk in a single day—there are 500. But, Mr. Speaker, we will have to put systems and mechanisms in place to make sure when those reports come that we can get them instantly and we can see where the problems are.

At the moment, it is not working. It has not worked. That is why every time the term reopens and school starts, we see all the schools are shut down. The schools all over are shut down. Because the system of reporting right now goes through too many steps before it reaches those of us who have to take policy decisions on the matter. I am hoping that this method will also assist us in having first, faster feedback to us, and of course, the response will be more expeditious than it is.

So, Mr. Speaker, I want to thank Members again, and I beg to move.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a second time.

Bill committed to a committee of the whole House.

House in committee.

Clauses 1 to 4 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 5.

Question proposed, That clause 5 stand part of the Bill.

Mr. Valley: Mr. Chairman, under clause 5, section 23(1) speaks of regulations:

“The Minister, shall, by Order, constitute Local School Boards...”

Mr. Maharaj: Which clause?

Mr. Valley: I am looking at clause 5 which repeals section 23 and substitutes a new section. I am saying that the new section 23(1) talks about regulations by Order, and I am saying that with respect to the Order, should we put it there or should we insert a new clause 9?

Mr. Maharaj: Mr. Chairman, this Bill is amending the Education Act. The Education Act, I would think would make provision for other regulations that are to be made. We will see what the Education Act itself says. It is made under section 86 of the Education Act. So let us see what it says.

“The Minister may make Regulations generally for the purpose of carrying this Act into effect and in particular for prescribing anything that is by this Act required to be prescribed.”

So it does not say that it has to be laid in Parliament.

Mr. Valley: With respect to this new section 23, therefore, I would say under the new section 23(1) we insert a section 23(2) indicating that regulations made pursuant to section 23(1) should be by affirmative resolution of Parliament.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: I wonder if the Member would be minded to accept “subject to negative resolution of Parliament”, so that way, if you have a problem you can raise it, but if not, it can go through.

Mr. Valley: All right.

Mr. Chairman: It is, therefore, the wish of the House that clause 5 should be deferred and revisited.

Clause 5, by leave, deferred.

Clauses 6 to 8 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 5 reintroduced.

Mr. Maharaj: Mr. Chairman, a new clause 9 is to be added, so we will not amend clause 5.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 5 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

New clause 9.

Mr. Maharaj: Mr. Chairman, a new clause 9 is to be added. Can I read it? New clause 9 read as follows:

“Section 86 of the Act is amended by adding the following new subsection:

- (2) regulations made with respect to section 23 shall be subject to negative resolution of Parliament.”

New clause 9 read the first time.

Question proposed, That the new clause be read a second time.

Question put and agreed to.

Question proposed, That the new clause be added to the Bill.

Question put and agreed to.

New Clause 9 added to the Bill.

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

House resumed.

Bill reported, with amendment, read the third time and passed.

8.20 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Before we get to the Adjournment there is a private Bill before us.

NATIONAL CHUTNEY FOUNDATION (INC’N) BILL

Question put and agreed to, That a Bill to provide for the incorporation of the National Chutney Foundation of Trinidad and Tobago and matters incidental thereto, be now read a second time.

Bill accordingly read a second time.

Mr. Valley: Mr. Speaker, you appreciate that the Bill should be read a third time before the appointment of the Special Select Committee.

Mr. Speaker: Indeed, it should be, please, we should adopt the correct procedure.

Bill referred to a special select committee of the Senate chosen by the Speaker as follows: Mr. Fuad Khan (Chairman); Mr. C. Sharma; Mr. R. Ali; Mr. J. Narine; Mrs. E. James.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I am grateful to the hon. Member for reminding me to do the right thing and we shall do the right thing for the rest of the year. *[Laughter] [Interruption]* You were perfectly right.

ADJOURNMENT

The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (Hon. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj): Mr. Speaker, this honourable House stands adjourned to Friday 21st January, 2000 at 1.30 p.m. On that date, the Government intends to take through all its stages, the Finance Variation of Appropriation Bill. I did indicate to the Opposition Chief Whip, on the last occasion, that the Environmental Management Authority Bill would also be debated and I wanted hon. Members to know that the correct Bill was distributed today. On the last occasion the wrong Bill was distributed. I am sure we would have time, with the co-operation of the Opposition, to take the other Bills that we wanted to do today. We are also hoping to do the National Art Gallery and Museum Bill.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, before we deal with the Motion for the Adjournment I had given leave to the Member for Diego Martin West to raise a matter. This was deferred from the last sitting and the matter is the consequence of the non-renewal of the contract of Roy and Jennifer Orr, in respect of the School Feeding Programme, and the effect of the ruling of the High Court in this matter. I call upon the Member for Diego Martin West.

School Feeding Programme (Non-Renewal of Contract)

Dr. Keith Rowley (Diego Martin West): Mr. Speaker, I am very grateful for the opportunity to raise this matter which, for me, is quite a disturbing development. Mr. Speaker, in the limited time available I will try to be as concise as possible. The matter which I seek to raise today has to do with an injustice having been done to a member of the national community by officers and an agency of the state. I am raising it with two purposes: one, is to alert my colleagues as to the kind of thing that happens or can happen, and also to ask the Attorney General, more than anyone else, to be compassionate to these people who have suffered at the hands of the state.

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When the Government decided to embark upon the School Feeding Programme as a way of providing all the many benefits to our children, one of the encouragements that came from the state, was to individuals and families to use the opportunity of the funding of the School Feeding Programme, to get involved in small business by providing the facilities to cater for schools operating kitchens and so forth, and a number of persons across the country took up the Government's exhortation to do that.

One of these families was the Orr family, Jennifer and Roy Orr. Jennifer, being a trained person in the field of food management and nutrition, saw the opportunity to put her training to bear, not just to be an employee of the state but to work for herself as a small business person and put her nutrition training to work in providing these meals for children of the area in which she lived. To do so, they had to find the resources. At that time, the current arrangements for small business loans were not available, and these people had to mortgage their newly built home, deprived their children of many opportunities and mortgaged their home—great debt—and they embarked upon providing meals to schools in the neighbourhood having won a contract so to do.

Incidentally, I happened to be aware that as far back as 1987, certain corrupt elements in the School Feeding Programme at that time, sought to extract certain favours from these people. When that was resisted, there was a certain amount of requirement on the part of certain officials to replace the Orrs with other persons of their choice, quite improperly.

Mr. Speaker, I think it was in 1988 when this matter came to my attention—I was serving in the other place—I went to the Minister of Education, along with Mr. Orr, who, at the time was feeling tremendous pressure from these public officials who were pressuring him in this way. The then Minister of Education, Mr. Clive Pantin, saw what was going on and to his credit he intervened and stopped what was, in fact, the beginning of this injustice. He was replaced by another Minister and—do you think the elements in the School Feeding Programme at that time got the message? As soon as the Minister was changed, they restarted what they were doing and successfully expelled the Orrs from the School Feeding Programme.

They sought relief by going to the Ombudsman and it took years. At one point in time they were even denied access to tendering in the programme and eventually the matter got to the court and recently a judgment came down from the court after great expense to the court.

In the meantime, Mr. Orr has lost his family, he is probably about to lose his home because he lost the business in which he and his wife invested all that they

had. I want to read a few excerpts from the judgment of the court. Let me read this paragraph. Mr. Speaker, this is the judgment I have in my hand here. It says:

“Although I have found breach of the statutory duty and malfeasance by a public officer, I am of the view that civil action does not lie, but judicial review should have been pursued as the decision of the Central Tenders Board was an administrative one.”

After going through the entire process seeking relief from this wrong that was being done by the public official, when he had his day in court after the system eventually delivered, it turned out that he could not be properly compensated because of this administrative legal nuance.

Mr. Speaker, let me read some of the findings of the judge and you would understand what has happened to these people. Before I read the findings, what was submitted to the court as the case of Roy and Jennifer Orr, they told the court about instances of the officers unfairly stopping their programme. One officer told them that their slot was required by the Minister, who had instructed them to provide their slot to somebody else and so forth. At that time there were 62 caterers involved and of the 62 caterers only this one family was thrown out of the programme. The court found that this was particularly strange, given the record as presented to the court where the court could find no real reason for what they had done.

8.30 p.m.

At the end of it all, the judge summed up by saying that Mr. James, who was not on the programme at the time:

“Mr. James was accused of bias against the Plaintiff because of favours which he sought and the fact that he told the Plaintiff that Diego Martin area should be left for a constituent favoured by a Government Minister. In that case it was the duty of the Central Tenders Board to give the Plaintiff a hearing in respect of reports adverse to her and by failing to do so I hold that they breached their statutory duty.”

Here is the court finding that the Central Tenders Board breached a statutory duty in treating with these people and in not doing what the board was supposed to have done, it allowed officers of questionable character to expel them from the programme, suffering tremendous losses.

Mr. Speaker, the judge goes on to say:

“I find that Mr. James acted with malice and accept the evidence of the Plaintiff and her witness in preference to the Defendant’s witnesses wherever

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they differ. He as a public officer abused his powers and was guilty of misfeasance. Mr. James could not be cross-examined as his statement was admitted under the Evidence Act. I find it difficult to believe that none of the other 61 caterers were guilty of deficiencies and irregularities which were corrected, but in the case of the Plaintiff although her deficiencies were corrected and she performed satisfactorily thereafter, she was not recommended for the third contract.”

What the summing-up agrees with is a whole series of persecution and prosecution and as the judge himself said misconduct on the part of a public officer resulting in a citizen who had heeded the Government’s call, mortgaging their life, being expelled from an opportunity to continue.

The end result is while the judge was allowed, under the restrictions of the law, to make a ruling in favour of Mr. and Mrs. Orr on a specific sum for a particular contract, he did find that they had been denied access to the programme. Since that day they were denied access in 1991 to this day, they have not had the opportunity because other people have come into the programme making similar types of investments.

Mr. Speaker, these people have suffered tremendous losses as a result of what I have just tried to put in a nutshell. I think that in keeping with what the Attorney General said, and I would like to just refresh our memory on what the Attorney General said in this House on Friday 6, December 1996, when he was a young Attorney General, still wet behind the ears, but still wanting to impact on the system. I think he was talking about specific instances of this nature and I am sure that this is not an isolated instance, but in this case this is an instance where the people believed they had rights and were strong enough to stand up to the wrongdoers.

They stood up to the officers at the school feeding programme and they took their matter to the Ombudsman. They stayed with it and when he could go no further they went to the High Court because they believed they had rights, and in the end, as this judgment shows, they were correct. Their rights have been shown to be abridged and they have been shown to have been wronged. I think it is because of our knowledge that these things happen in our system that the Attorney General had this to say on Friday December 6, 1996 when we spoke on an Ombudsman’s report.

Mr. Speaker, I am quoting our current Attorney General here:

“Mr. Speaker, one of the arguments in favour of providing damages for maladministration in providing compensation for maladministration by public

officials is that it would create a greater awareness by public or state officials of their duties and of the need for them to exercise power in accordance with law.”

The court has found that by Henry James of the school feeding programme not exercising that power according to law, he has caused severe hardships and hurt to the Orr family. Today, the family is a broken family. The wife and children are outside the country trying to make ends meet and the husband is here as a lonely man trying to save his home, which he had mortgaged when the government invited him to become a small businessman.

The Attorney General went on to say, and I am quoting again:

“Mr. Speaker, what governments obviously have to do, in considering this question, is to consider whether it is important to send a signal so that public officials who violate and abuse power would know that the state would be liable.

As a matter of fact, there is another point of view which is that where the state is made liable and the public official has, in effect, clearly misused and abused power, the public official should pay the money instead of the state.”

I do not think that we have much of a chance of having Mr. James pay any money.

I gave a copy of the judgment to my colleagues on the other side. The Minister of Education and the Attorney General would have read this judgment and throughout they would see what has actually happened in the summing up. You would see the court’s ruling of the administrative shortcoming on the part of the Central Tenders Board. You would see the persistent wrongdoing on the part of the officials in the school feeding programme and you would see the final ruling.

Under the circumstances, I would like to ask the Government, through the Attorney General, to consider making some kind of compensation available to this family in acknowledgment of the fact that the state’s agency and its officials have been found in a court of law in this country to have so wronged this family.

Mr. Speaker, they got some money with respect to the particular life of the contract, but I am saying that in itself does not change the picture. The real hurt that was done to them was their expulsion from the programme, because that denied them the access to use the kitchen they bought. They funded that kitchen with an expectation. The court found that there was an expectation which was legitimate, but no compensation could be awarded at the level of the court for that. Given how this thing happened and what has happened to the family and the

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distress that is being experienced now, I am asking that the state provide some form of compensation from another source.

Since the judge was constrained in the way of law and could not do it, I ask the Attorney General and his colleagues to do it on the grounds of compassion and an acknowledgment of the responsibility of the state, in keeping with the Attorney General's position that the state has a liability where its officers have been found to be guilty of misconduct in this way. I appeal to my colleagues on the other side to consider this matter. They do not have to give an answer this evening; all I would settle for is an acceptance, an undertaking that they would consider this matter in a humane and compassionate way, and provide some kind of compensation to take this family out of its current predicament which they have found themselves in, through no fault of their own.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Minister of Education (Hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar): Mr. Speaker, let me first make it very clear that this incident that has been referred to occurred in September 1990. [*Interruption*] The matter was listed as H.C.A: No. 4094 of 1990 and the judgment was delivered on November 17, 1998, which is within our time. Therefore, when the Member spoke of the Minister of Education, at the time it was Mr. Clive Pantin and he said another Minister of Education. I want to make it very clear that this was within the purview of the administration which was in office in 1990. I think the second Minister of Education referred to was Miss Gloria Henry. The immediate consequence of the non-renewal of this contract was, obviously, the High Court action.

There are many other matters that have not been raised by the Member, but they have to do with the procedures that were put in place thereafter to make sure that something like this does not happen again. I am advised that there are two limbs. One is to make sure that the programme operates in a manner that is just, fair and equitable and in accordance with the law and ruling that has been given. The other has to do with the issue he raised of additional compensation for the Orrs.

The Member read from page 12 of the judgment of Justice Bharath which reads:

“Although I have found breach of statutory duty and misfeasance by a public officer I am of the view that Civil Action does not lie but Judicial Review should have been pursued as the decision of the Central Tenders Board was an administrative one.”

In spite of that, the judge went on to give judgment on other limbs within the argument—this is how I understand it—within the case that was put forward in

the sum of \$131,812.50 with interest at 3 per cent per annum, so that some compensation has been given.

The issue then is: one, should further compensation be given in the light of the fact it appears that the wrong procedure was utilized by the plaintiff in this case; whether it should come by judicial review or whether it should have come in the manner which it did, by civil action; and whether in law there is compensation or damages that can be awarded for misfeasance on the part of a public officer?

I have spoken with the Attorney General and he has advised me that the judgment is with the Solicitor General and they would be looking at it to see whether in light of the fact that, perhaps, a wrong procedure may have been used, it does not excuse the action of the public officer and, as I said, whether there are damages due for misfeasance, whether in those circumstances a further award of compensation could be made. All we can say with respect to this matter, is that it is being considered by the Solicitor General and we would let you know in due course.

With respect to procedures, I am advised that what was happening at the time was that one person who ran the programme could have awarded or withdrawn the contract. But since then, the administrative practice is that there is a panel of persons who interview and deal with the awarding of the contracts, made up of the Chairman of the Control Committee, the Chief Nutritionist, the Director of Public Health, the Chief Public Health Inspector, Control Committee member, the Central Tenders Board representative and so forth. So the revised procedures have been set out, forms and all those are in place.

In fact, it is very good to note, and we should acknowledge the work of the current Director of the School Nutrition Programme, that there have been no further High Court actions with respect to contracts or no further issues that have arisen in a similar manner to these. [*Interruption*] As far as I am aware, I have seen none and there are none on our records with respect to the award of these contracts. So procedures have been put in place to take away the power that once fell into the hands of one person, to have a wider range of persons in a panel to give greater equity and fairness.

On issue one, the matter is with the Solicitor General. On issue two, unless there is anything else, we have put some other procedures in place to deal with it.

I thank you.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 8.43 p.m.