

THE  
**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES**

**OFFICIAL REPORT**

IN THE FIRST SESSION OF THE SIXTH PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD  
AND TOBAGO WHICH OPENED ON JANUARY 12, 2001

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**SESSION 2001**

**VOLUME 1**

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**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

*Friday, January 12, 2001*

**10.30 A.M.**

*The House having assembled, and it being the first meeting of the First Session of the Sixth Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, the Clerk of the House read the following Proclamation:*

REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

No. 1 of 2001

[L.S.]

By His Excellency ARTHUR N. R. ROBINSON,  
T.C., O.C.C., S.C., President and Commander-  
in-Chief of the Republic of Trinidad and  
Tobago.

ARTHUR N. R. ROBINSON  
*President*

**A PROCLAMATION**

WHEREAS it is provided by subsection (1) of section 67 of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago that each session of Parliament shall be held at such place within Trinidad and Tobago and shall commence at such time as the President may by Proclamation appoint:

Now, therefore, I, ARTHUR N. R. ROBINSON, President as aforesaid, do hereby appoint the Red House, Port-of-Spain, as the place at which the First Session of the Sixth Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago shall be held and 10:30 a.m. on Friday the 12<sup>th</sup> day of January, 2001, as the time at which the said Session shall commence.

Given under my Hand and the Seal of  
the President of the Republic of  
Trinidad and Tobago, at the  
Office of the President, St. Ann's,  
this 3rd day of January, 2001.

**ELECTION OF SPEAKER**

**Clerk of the House:** Hon. Members, in accordance with Standing Order 3(1) of the House of Representatives, I invite nominations for the Office of Speaker of the House.

**Mr. Maharaj:** Madam Clerk, I nominate Dr. Rupert T. Griffith to be the Speaker of the House of Representatives of the Sixth Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

*Seconded by Mr. G. Singh.*

*There being no other nominations, the Clerk of the House declared Dr. Rupert T. Griffith duly elected Speaker of the House of Representatives.*

**Clerk of the House:** Mr. Marshal, would you summon the Speaker to the Chamber.

**OATH OF ALLEGIANCE**

*Dr. Rupert T. Griffith took and subscribed the Oath of Allegiance as required by law.*

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

**Mr. Speaker:** In accordance with Standing Order 4 of the House of Representatives, hon. Members, I now invite nominations for the Office of Deputy Speaker of the House of Representatives of the Sixth Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

**Mr. Maharaj:** Mr. Speaker, I wish to nominate Mr. Subhas Panday to be the Deputy Speaker of the House of Representatives of the Sixth Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

*Seconded by Mr. G. Singh.*

**Mr. Speaker:** Are there any other nominations?

*There being no other nominations, the Speaker declared Mr. Subhas Panday duly elected Deputy Speaker of the House of Representatives.*

**OATH/AFFIRMATION OF ALLEGIANCE**

*Mr. Subhas Panday took and subscribed the Oath of Allegiance as required by law.*

*Oath/Affirmation of Allegiance*

*Friday, January 12, 2001*

*The following Members took and subscribed the Oath of Allegiance as required by law:*

Mr. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj	Mr. Kenneth Valley
Mr. Basdeo Panday	Mr. Patrick Manning
Mr. Mervyn Assam	Dr. Keith Rowley
Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar	Mr. Colm Imbert
Mr. John Humphrey	Mrs. Camille Robinson-Regis
Mr. Carlos John	Mr. Jarrette Narine
Mr. Trevor Sudama	Mr. Hedwige Bereaux
Mr. Ralph Maharaj	Mrs. Eulalie James
Dr. Hamza Rafeeq	Mr. Martin Joseph
Mr. Sadiq Baksh	Mr. Roger Boynes
Mr. Ganga Singh	Mr. Fitzgerald Hinds
Mr. Winston Peters	Mr. Stanford Callender
Dr. Adesh Nanan	Mr. John Rahael
Mr. Harry Partap	Mr. Lawrence Achong
Mr. Manohar Ramsaran	Miss Penelope Beckles
Dr. Fuad Khan	
Mr. William Chaitan	
Mr. Chandresh Sharma	

*The following Members took and subscribed the Affirmation of Allegiance as required by law:*

Mr. Eric Williams	Mr. Nathaniel Moore
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#### PRAYERS

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, His Excellency the President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago desires to address all Members of Parliament. This sitting is now suspended.

**11.16 a.m.:** *Sitting suspended.*

Prayers  
[MR. SPEAKER]

Friday, January 12, 2000

**11.42 a.m.:** Members of the Senate arrived and took their places in the Chamber.

**12.04 p.m.:** *His Excellency the President, accompanied by the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives, arrived in the Chamber.*

[INVOCATIONS]

**PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS**

*His Excellency the President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, Mr. Arthur Napoleon Raymond Robinson, addressed both Houses of Parliament as follows:*

Mr. President of the Senate, Mr. Speaker of the House of Representatives, hon. Members of the Senate and of the House of Representatives, at this time, in this place and at this historic moment, at the start of the century and at the start of the new millennium, it is meet and right, it is fitting and proper that this should be a spiritual occasion, as a people, as a nation under God, that we should lift our hearts and our spirits in thanksgiving and adoration.

Mr. President and Mr. Speaker, I thank you for your kind invitation to me to speak at this gathering; this ceremonial opening of Parliament. I shall be brief because I am of the view that this should be a spiritual occasion at this historic time in the life of the nation, in the life of our Parliament, in the lives of our people.

I do not propose to add to the words of blessing, to the invocation of blessing and the adoration given by our spiritual leaders. I accept their words of spiritual guidance and their words of wisdom. It is in this atmosphere I ask that we lift our hearts and our spirits to the God whose supremacy this nation acknowledges and we seek his guidance by prayer, all of us. As we leave this historic opening ceremony and go our diverse ways, let us remember that the supreme God is available to us for our guidance in all our actions and all our thoughts.

I thank you, Mr. President. I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**12.09 p.m.:** *His Excellency the President, accompanied by the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives, left the Chamber.*

**12.20 p.m.:** *Sitting resumed.*

*Paper Laid*

*Friday, January 12, 2001*

**PAPER LAID**

Address by His Excellency the President on the occasion of the opening of the First Session of the Sixth Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. [*The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (Hon. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj)*]

*To be printed as a House Paper.*

**ADJOURNMENT**

**The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (Hon. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj):** Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that the House do now stand adjourned to Tuesday, January 16, 2001 at 1.30 p.m. Mr. Speaker, may I announce that on that date, the meeting of the Finance Committee will be held in respect of an appropriation bill. I indicated to the Opposition Chief Whip that thereafter the House will again meet on Monday, January 22, 2001 at 1.30 p.m. to discuss the report and also to deal with the Bill.

Mr. Speaker, before the Adjournment Motion is moved, may I, with your leave, say a few words?

*The Speaker assented.*

**Congratulations**

**Hon. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj (Couva South):** The Government wishes to congratulate you, Mr. Speaker, on your election to the Office of Speaker of the House of Representatives in this Sixth Parliament. The chief characteristics of the Office of Speaker are authority and impartiality. The Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago is confident that with your knowledge, experience and passionate commitment to upholding the dignity of this House, all Members of the House at the end of your stewardship, would feel proud of your election.

You bring to the Office of Speaker a distinguished academic record. You hold a Ph.D. in Education Administration, a master's degree in Education, Career and Industrial Technology Education. You also have a varied parliamentary experience. You were an elected Member of Parliament from 1991—1995 and served as Deputy Speaker and Speaker during that period. That was a period in which you represented the country at regional and international levels. You served as a member of the Executive Committee of the Trinidad and Tobago branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association.

*Congratulations*  
[HON. R. L. MAHARAJ]

*Friday, January 12, 2000*

Mr. Speaker, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago pledges its support and cooperation with you so that you, as Speaker, in the discharge of your duties, can truly be the representative of the House of its powers, proceedings and dignity.

**12.25 p.m.**

Mr. Speaker, may I also with your leave, on behalf of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, congratulate the hon. Deputy Speaker and give to him the same commitment, support and cooperation of the Government in the discharge of his duty as Presiding Officer.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. Deputy Speaker brings to this House a varied experience. He was a public servant, a teacher; he is an attorney-at-law, a social worker; he was an alderman and councillor and a Member of Parliament. The Deputy Speaker has worked with all sections of the community.

I would also like with your leave, on behalf of the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, to say thanks and pay tribute for the service to the people of Trinidad and Tobago of the Speaker of the Fifth Parliament, Mr. Hector McClean, who is with us in this Chamber. Mr. Speaker, he has also brought vast knowledge and experience to the Office of Speaker, and he has represented the country at several regional and international meetings.

On behalf of the Members of this side of the House, permit me please to place on record our appreciation and thanks to the Speaker of the previous House of Representatives, the distinguished Mr. Hector McClean, for the commitment and dedication to duty as Speaker of the House. We consider ourselves highly privileged to have served under him. Indeed, we all do wish him peace, good health and success in the greener pastures in which he will soon be residing and hope he takes with him fond memories of the time spent with us in this august Chamber, while he sat in this most honourable and humble seat.

Thank you very much.

**Mr. Patrick Manning** (*San Fernando East*): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is a convention in Westminster whereby there is consultation between the Government and the Opposition in the selection of a Speaker; in our case, it is a Speaker for the House of Representatives. That is a tradition that has been honoured in this Parliament for many, many years. I would like to place on record that on this occasion such a convention was not honoured: the Opposition was not consulted on the selection of the Speaker for this honourable House.

*Congratulations*

*Friday, January 12, 2001*

There are reasons the consultation takes place, because the other convention is one in which there is agreement between the Government and the Opposition in selecting the presiding officer, because what it seeks to do is to emphasize the neutrality of the person sitting in the Chair presiding over the sitting of Parliament; neutral as between Government and Opposition. That is an essential of the system that guarantees the system's successful operation. It was not done on this occasion, but even if it were, we would not have agreed on the selection that was made.

Mr. Speaker, there is another convention associated with the Westminster system: that if someone sought the authority of the electorate to sit in the Parliament and the electorate said no, then it is not proper for such a person to sit in the Parliament by a different means, in the same session, in the same Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, it is bad enough when somebody who faced the polls is now brought to Parliament, but in the case when somebody who faced the polls is selected for the position of Speaker, it offends the system twice: not just sitting in Parliament, but sitting in the same House in respect of which the electorate—*[Inaudible]* These are fundamentals of the system and these are selected for the proper operation of the system itself.

It would be a most unusual development if one day in this Parliament, in your capacity as Speaker, when you exercise your casting vote, that casting vote is exercised in a way that is different from the vote exercised by the distinguished representative for the constituency of Arima, Miss Penelope Beckles. These are questions arising in matters of this nature.

Mr. Speaker, in September 1999, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association met in Trinidad and Tobago in session, and under the chairmanship of Mr. Speaker, Hector McClean, considered this whole question of unsuccessful candidates holding the position of presiding officer in the Parliament. Without going through all that transpired in that momentous plenary session of that day, suffice it to say that the conference frowned on the practice; a practice that is inconsistent with the Westminster system.

May I also say one more thing, Mr. Speaker, that in the conduct of our affairs, we do not operate with malice or in any personal way. This morning—*[Inaudible]*—if someone else occupied the position of Speaker. However, Mr. Speaker, you find yourself as Speaker, and what we were seeking to do was to protest—merely to protest in a way allowable for us—the continued undermining of the integrity of the system and to make it clear that we will have no part of it; no part of it!

*Congratulations*  
[MR. MANNING]

*Friday, January 12, 2000*

As you know, Mr. Speaker, the composition of this Parliament is not something that is accepted by us; it is a matter before the courts. We sat here this morning to hear Member of Parliament after Member of Parliament come forward and take an oath, and it rang very hollow when certain Members of Parliament pledged to uphold the Constitution and the law. How did it sound, Mr. Speaker, in the context of the antecedents to the holding of this first sitting of Parliament? This thing could easily be seen as a joke, and so we want to make it absolutely clear that even if we protested this morning, it is our intention to do nothing to further undermine the integrity of the system. We would do nothing to do that.

We will continue to operate in the best interest. I assure you that in your capacity as Speaker we will accord to you all that is required under our system to be accorded to a presiding officer. We will have the greatest respect for the Chair, because we believe, Mr. Speaker, that it is not a question of individuals or personalities, we feel that it is a question of the conventions and the preservation of the system. [*Desk thumping*]

Permit me, as is traditional, to congratulate you on your election to the exalted Office of Speaker. I also wish to take the opportunity to congratulate the Deputy Speaker, the distinguished representative for Princes Town—[*Interruption*—and the representative for Ortoire/Mayaro. He was with us before, and I would like to welcome him back. I have very fond memories of sitting in this Parliament and watching him being escorted out by a very heavy Sergeant-at-Arms on one occasion. [*Laughter*] It was as if it was a fight between David and Goliath, except that on this occasion Goliath won.

I want to welcome Mr. Subhas Panday, our Member for Princes Town, back to this august Chamber, and to wish him well in the discharge of his responsibilities to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, in his capacity as Deputy Speaker of the House. [*Desk thumping*]

### **Vote of Thanks**

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Leader of Government Business in the House for nominating me to serve in this august House. Thank you, Leader of Government Business in the House and Leader of the Opposition, for participating in that exercise. [*Interruption*] I also want to thank all of you for the kind words of commendation. I also want to thank and congratulate the Deputy Speaker for being elected here today. I have no doubt that with his parliamentary experience and his legal acumen he would serve this House *par excellence*.



*Vote of Thanks*

*Friday, January 12, 2001*

I also want to thank the outgoing Speaker, Mr. Hector McClean for his service over the last five years and for the very eloquent way that he controlled this House so that we could enact legislation in this august body.

I believe that in the composition of this House we have Members, save and except four, who all have had experience in this honourable House. I believe that would augur well for the types of debate and the quality of legislation that we would pass for Trinidad and Tobago.

Having said those words, let me thank the Members of the diplomatic corps, members of the clergy and members of the various bodies and organizations represented here today. Ladies and gentlemen, I thank you for being here today.

I now move the adjournment of this House to Tuesday, January 16, 2001, at 1.30 p.m.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*House adjourned accordingly.*

*Adjourned at 12.37 p.m.*