

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES***Friday, January 24, 2003*

The House met at 2.00 p.m.

**PRAYERS**[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]**ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS****CARE Project  
(Budgetary Allocation for)**

**13. Mr. Manohar Ramsaran** (*Chaguanas*) asked the hon. Minister of Community Development and Gender Affairs:

- (a) Could the Minister indicate to this House what was the budgetary allocation for the CARE project for financial year 2001—2002?
- (b) Could the Minister outline the procedure to access the programme, and indicate how applications are processed and under what authority?
- (c) Could the Minister submit a list of the recipients of CARE subventions for year 2001—2002, the amount paid and for what projects?

**The Minister in the Ministry of Community Development and Gender Affairs (Hon. Eulalie James):** The budgetary allocation for the CARE Project for the financial year 2001—2002 was \$2,200,000.

The procedure to accessing the programme is as follows:

Applications are made by community organizations to the Community Development Division of the Ministry of Community Development and Gender Affairs for funding of projects under the CARE Programme. A supervisor from the Community Development Division evaluates these projects to ascertain their value to the community. Projects, which satisfy the criteria, are submitted to the hon. Minister for consideration and approval.

The Permanent Secretary, who is the Chief Accounting Officer of the Ministry approves the expenditure for the approved projects and submits them to the accounting unit for processing. The cheques are then handed directly to the recipients.

The Supervisor, CARE provides reports on the status of the funds and projects funded to the Permanent Secretary and the hon. Minister on an ongoing basis.

The list of recipients of CARE subventions for the year 2001—2002, which is extensive, will be lodged with the Parliament library.

**Mr. Ramsaran:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, is the Minister saying that the Minister of Community Development and Gender Affairs does not have an input into this programme?

**Hon. E. James:** In answering the question, I said that she considers and approves the projects. She has an input.

**Mr. Ramsaran:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, I heard that the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry has the authority to approve these projects.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** The answer has been given that the Minister has an input.

**Mr. Sharma:** May I be permitted a supplemental and perhaps a clarification from you?

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Not from me. I cannot.

**Mr. Sharma:** Well, can you allow me please? When the Minister answered the question and then says that part of the answer will be lodged in the library, it denies Members on this side an opportunity to ask supplemental questions because we do not know what is laid. When a sitting is held, the answer must be obtained in this sitting, and perhaps what may be required in the future is to give us in advance so we can ask the supplemental questions.

The question I wanted to ask is that it appears that the majority of recipients seem to be in the town areas in north Trinidad and not in the southern, central areas. Is the Minister aware of that, and if this is so, why?

**Hon. E. James:** I am not aware of that, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** The Minister is not aware of it.

Before we get to the Introduction of Bills, the Member for Siparia indicated that she would like to raise a matter of privilege.

**JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE  
(PREMATURE PUBLICATION OF EVIDENCE)**

**Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar** (*Siparia*): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for granting leave under Standing Order 27(2), which reads:

“(2) Any member desiring to raise a matter under this Standing Order shall first obtain leave of the Speaker who shall determine whether the Member is entitled to raise the matter as a question of privilege.”

Mr. Deputy Speaker, you may recall that this honourable House, by resolution, established a Joint Select Committee of the Parliament to consider the Police Service Reform Bills. There were three such bills.

The work of the Joint Select Committee is ongoing, I am a Member of this committee, as is my colleague, the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, and from the other place, other Members of the UNC are Members of that committee, as well as Members of the PNM Benches and the Independent Benches.

To date, no report has been laid, or presented to any House in the Parliament and Standing Order 81 expressly provides against premature publication of evidence before a Joint Select Committee of the Parliament has reported to the House. The heading for this Standing Order reads:

**“Premature Publication of Evidence**

The proceedings of and the evidence taken before, any Select Committee, and any documents presented to, and decisions of, such a Committee shall not be published by any Member thereof or by any other person before the Committee has presented its Report to the House.”

It is clear, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is an express provision of our Standing Orders and, in addition, what is seen as the *Bible* in parliamentary practice, Erskine May’s *Parliamentary Practice*, the twenty-second Edition on pages 118—120 which I will quote with your leave.

This particular excerpt comes under the heading of Privileges of the House and of Members and the subsection of that chapter deals with contempt and the particular contempt of “Premature publication or disclosure of committee proceedings” comes under the heading of “Constructive Contempt” which reads:

“As early as the mid-seventeenth century it was declared to be against the custom of Parliament for any act done at a committee to be divulged before being reported to the House. Subsequently, though the House of Commons found it increasingly difficult to enforce effectively its rules against the disclosure abroad of proceedings in the Chamber, the privacy of committee proceedings and the prior right of the House itself to a committee’s conclusions was upheld, and punishment was inflicted on a newspaper proprietor who published the contents of a draft report laid before a select committee but not considered by it or presented to the House. In 1837, the House of Commons resolved that ‘according to the undoubted privileges of this House, and for the due protection of the public interest, the evidence taken by any select committee of this House and the documents presented to such committee and which have not been reported to the House ought not to be published by any Member of such committee, or by any other person.’”

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Mr. Deputy Speaker, the excerpt continues to deal with it and on page 120, the second to last paragraph of the section with which we are dealing reads:

“The publication or disclosure of debates or proceedings of committees conducted with closed doors or in private, or when publication is expressly forbidden—”

Mr. Deputy Speaker, may I expressly point out that our Standing Orders expressly forbids any such publication or disclosure.

“—by the House, or of draft reports of committees before they have been reported to the House will, however constitute a breach of privilege or a contempt.”

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in addition, the said *May's Parliamentary Practice* at page 123 speaks of another constructive contempt, which amounts to a breach of the privilege of the House. I quote:

“Imputations that a Member nominated to a select committee would not be able to act impartially in that service, and similar reflections on Members serving on private bill committees have been considered contempts.”

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in a newspaper article on page 4 of the *Newsday* of Monday, January 20, 2003 under the heading: “Manning accuses UNC of pussy-footing with Police”. In this newspaper article, the Member for San Fernando East, the hon. Prime Minister, is reported as follows:

“Prime Minister Patrick Manning yesterday accused the Opposition UNC of being involved in an orchestrated plan to postpone debate of the Police Reform Bills until constitutional reform is undertaken...”

Manning said the Committee was receiving letters which requested that the Bills be postponed until there is constitutional reform.”

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is our respectful view that the letters that have come before the Joint Select Committee are protected under Standing Order 81, which forbids the publication—

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Are you revealing the letters now?

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** I am not revealing the letters, I am reading—

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** I am just trying to prevent you from—

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** Thank you for your concern, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Under Standing Order 81, there is express prohibition against the disclosure of any documents, matters, and proceedings before a Joint Select Committee and here it is reported that the hon. Prime Minister, the Member for San Fernando East, is speaking about letters that have been received by the Joint Select Committee. It continues:

“Manning went further to accuse the UNC of knowing about the letters.

‘Clearly its an orchestrated plan by the UNC not to have any decision taken on the Bills’”.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, with those words, it is our respectful view also that that could constitute a breach of privilege and a contempt of Members of the House in that the imputation is being made that UNC Members who are Members of the Committee, those of us as Members of the said Joint Select Committee would not be able to act impartially in that service. I have quoted for you from *May’s Parliamentary Practice* about the constructive contempt which are imputations about the conduct of a Member of a Joint Select Committee.

Consequently, it is our respectful view that there are valid reasons to question whether the hon. Prime Minister or any other person or persons committed breaches of privilege, contempt of the Parliament by the premature disclosure of publication of matters before the Joint Select Committee of Parliament on the Police Service Reform Bills.

Secondly, whether the hon. Prime Minister committed a breach of privilege and a contempt of the Parliament by imputing that those of us who are UNC Members of the said Joint Select Committee would not be able to act impartially in that service.

In respect of these two questions that have arisen, I beg to move that the matter be referred to the Privileges Committee of the Parliament.

Thank you.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Member, under Standing Order 27 I am required—in the event that I believe that a prima facie case has been made out—to refer this matter to the Privileges Committee. Having regard to all the legal arguments quoted, I propose to take some time to consider this, and I shall report in due course.

**CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM  
(JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE)**

**Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar (Siparia):** Mr. Deputy Speaker, I beg to move the following Motion standing in my name:

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*Whereas* more than twenty-six years elapsed since the coming into operation of our Republican Constitution (1976); and

*Whereas* during the said twenty-six years many circumstances have arisen highlighting deficiencies in the Constitution and calling into question the adequacy and/or relevance of many of the provisions thereof; and

*Whereas* there is urgent need to redress the inequity and divisiveness inherent in our first-past-the-post electoral system in a plural society such as ours and which have manifestly militated against the development of a truly cohesive and inclusive society; and

*Whereas* to date there have been several previous Constitution Commissions which have already reported on constitutional reform; and

*Whereas* there have been widespread public calls for constitutional reform to include inter alia, electoral reform, political reform and parliamentary reform;

*Be it Resolved* that a Joint Select Committee of Parliament be established to make recommendations for urgent reform of the Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago and be mandated to receive and consider comments from the public on constitutional reform;

*And be it Resolved* that a non-partisan technical team be established by Government in consultation with the Opposition to assist the Joint Select Committee;

*And be it further Resolved* that the said Joint Select Committee report to Parliament within one year of its first sitting.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I beg to move.

From the wording of the Motion, it is felt that the purpose of this Private Member's Motion is not at this time our intention to offer any prescriptions or preconceived formulas for constitutional change and reform. Indeed, it is my respectful view that that would be very presumptuous of any one of us to imagine that we could come up with, and be able to put forward all the proposals that are necessary for meaningful constitutional change in this country.

In fact, when we consider what a constitution is, and what it is for, then we have to understand that those proposals and the development of a constitution have to come out of the wishes, desires and aspirations of the people of the nation and not from any one of us or any group of us. So it is not my intention, as I said, to go into any prescribed formula for the specific provisions of a new constitution.

The Wooding Commission in *Thinking Things Through* gives us a kind of broad framework as to what a democratic constitution is and if we are talking about the need for constitutional reform I think it is important for us to understand what it is and what a constitution is about.

I quote from a booklet that the Wooding Commission had put out, *Thinking Things Through*. I quote:

“A democratic Constitution is a body of basic rules by which the people of a country agree to govern themselves.”

Its major role is to distribute functions, but the right of the people to govern themselves through the institutions which it sets up would not be disregarded.

It is my respectful view that a constitution is a means to guarantee empowerment of a people of a nation, and at the same time, guarantee the improvement of life of the people of that country. So that if we go into the specifics of proposals we can become very easily bogged down with all the competing proposals and lose the true meat of the matter. I want to use a few words of Dr. Kirk Meighoo writing in the *Sunday Guardian* on December 01, 2002 when he said:

“In looking at Constitutional Reform it is too easy to get lost in details and alternative proposals. Many have a favoured reform, a macro Senate, proportional representation, the right of recall, an executive President, the strengthening of local government, the American system and so on.”

Mr. Deputy Speaker, bearing that in mind, the purpose of this Motion from the resolution as is stated is to get the process started, to set in motion a process for constitutional reform and to put into place a time frame within which that process should take place. [*Interruption*] If you will allow me I can respond.

The purpose of the Motion calls upon the Government to articulate its position on constitutional reform. I am going one step further and say that I do not want us to just sit and talk about it. I want this House to resolve to set up a Joint Select Committee of the Parliament, give it a technical team to work with, and a mandate to meet the people and talk with them—because a constitution is born out of the wishes, aspirations, hopes and desires of the people—and set a time frame within which that committee should report.

**Hon. Member:** What is the difference?

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** That is the difference with respect to the Motion that is in the other place and the one that is before this House. If we are

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advocating that this procedure be adopted, or are pursuing constitutional change and reform, the question is why, and why now? It will be very easy to say we have been there for six years and ask what we had done. The answer is very simple. There is no time like the right time as now. The right time is now, it is always now.

Constitutional reform has been on the agenda of this nation ever since the 1962 Constitution and if we look at it globally and nationally—[*Interruption*] I will come back to answer that because I know that is the reply I would get from the other side. We would hear: You were there for six years and did not do it. So what? The question is why not? Why do you not do it? You are in office, you are responsible and you have the opportunity so to do.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am very happy to hear that they will do it, and we hope they will support this Motion in full strength. If we look at the global context—We are asking why? Why now? Worldwide, concerns in Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and right here in the Caribbean are being expressed about a crisis in governance. There is the need for a revival of thinking about constitutional and social needs.

Indeed, if you were to go on the Internet and just punch in the words “constitutional reform”—I did that last night and there are over 28,000 web sites worldwide dealing with the issue of constitutional reform around the world. It is an issue that is not just of national concern but also international. We are part of that global village and if we are to take our rightful place amongst those nations that are termed “developed nations” in this 21<sup>st</sup> Century, then we have to change and deal with issues of governance and the way in which we govern ourselves, the procedures, structures and systems by which this nation brings its people together, empowers its people and guarantees them a better quality of life.

The Motion recites in its preamble that more than 26 years have elapsed since the Republican constitution of 1976 and really, 26 years is a very short time in the span of life of a nation, but historically, if we look at what has happened, and how our constitution came about, and what changes have taken place, we would see that the time itself is not the issue.

It is really the needs, wishes, hopes and desires of the people and a constitution that does not keep a connection and a linkage with those hopes, aspirations and desires, a constitution that has been framed basically with a hand-down with no input from the people of the country. So we say 26 years from the 1976 Constitution is really more than 40 years from the 1962 Constitution, and the 1976 Constitution made no meaningful, real changes to the 1962 Constitution,



except to further concentrate power in the hands of the Executive and the Prime Minister; to take more power away from the then Governor General and created an office of President when the Republic was created. The powers that the Governor General had were taken away and concentrated on the Prime Minister.

You were able to do it because in 1976 you would remember in this entire Parliament—except for directions from two Members— it was a PNM Parliament. So with the requisite majority in the Parliament anything could have been brought and you would have gotten the majority to change the constitution. The opportunity was not used and it is well documented. If one reads articles by Selwyn Ryan, Lloyd Best, all the political scientists, and the history of the constitutional development in Trinidad and Tobago, one will see that the 1976 Constitution basically made cosmetic changes and maintained the 1962 Constitution. So you are looking at them talking about meaningful constitutional change from one that had been handed to us 40 years ago.

Let us look at that one. The 1962 Constitution was a product of the colonial era and a hand-me-down from the colonial masters. It was one for which our people went to London, as the people from around the world. If one looks at most of the Commonwealth nations, it was not out of a desire simply on the part of the nationals of this country to say we want to govern ourselves, it was a worldwide movement that was taking place where Commonwealth nations were all going to London to sit and work out some kind of framework to give power, self-governance, independence to what were British colonies. So our 1962 Constitution has not changed radically in the 1976 one. It was a hand-me-down and a product of the colonial masters with no real input of the people of the nation. And so we need to make changes for that kind of structure that was set up within the 1962 framework and continued in the 1976 framework.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, even when attempts were made prior to the 1976 Constitution to have meaningful contributions from the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, that was jettisoned and lampooned by the then Prime Minister in this Parliament and the *Hansard* would reflect it. A Wooding Constitution Commission was set up and when it reported, the then Prime Minister went ahead and prepared his own draft Constitution Bill and laid it in the Parliament. When it was laid in Parliament, it left out and ignored the major recommendations that had been made in the Wooding Commission Report. It was concerned, as I said, with the further concentration of power in the hands of the Executive and the Prime Minister. So that the 1976 Constitution, with the majority of the Wooding recommendations, is still sitting in that Constitution Commission Report.

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I really want to compliment Mr. Lloyd Best because in doing my research, I saw so many articles that he has been writing on the need for constitutional reform and in the *Saturday Express* of November 30, 2002 on page 11 he says— And he is talking about the Wooding Constitution:

“The Constitution Commission was therefore a manifest expedient. Its chairman was almost certainly chosen for his legal rather than political acumen. Williams was confident Wooding would never see the point. Long deliberations resulted in a compendium of every kind of issue ever raised by the public. The seminal demand for representation was at no stage thrown into the relief it deserved. When it came to be debated in the House of Representatives Williams simply lampooned it and hit Wooding for six.”

So the new 1976 Constitution failed to take into account the major recommendations from the Wooding Constitution Commission.

**Hon. Member:** Guess why.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** Guess why? The history and the *Hansard* reports are there and when one looks at the changes that were made to the 1962 Constitution in the 1976 one, it was to bring greater power, concentration and centralization of power in the hands of the Executive. Maybe that was needed then, but it is certainly not what is needed today. Maybe it worked then for a short while, but clearly, it is not working today. It cannot continue to work today.

Dennis Pantin talked about an explosive cocktail and I would use the words: “We are sitting on a time bomb, on a powder keg that will explode.” We are seeing the beginnings of that today as you see on the headline of every newspaper. I am saying on the basis of the changes from 40 years ago to now, that it is time for us to look at constitutional reform and to seriously consider making urgent reforms to our Constitution.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, let us look at what we have today which is the 1976 Constitution with very little substantial changes made to it from then. What we have is, in effect, an executive dictatorship and more to the point, a prime ministerial dictatorship.

Prime Minister Gonsalves, from St. Vincent, speaking about constitutional reform in the Caribbean in a forum where there were several stakeholders from throughout the Caribbean —and remember generally that in the English-speaking Caribbean, the history of our constitutions are very similar; they came out of the independence movement, handed down by the British masters. They are all basically the same and in the Caribbean, West Indian societies, we are facing the

same kinds of problems in governance. The same kind of crises we are facing here, we can see in some of the other islands.

The Prime Minister of St. Vincent said that a Prime Minister is referred to as *primus inter pares*, first among equals. He went on to state that the phrase may not be applicable to the Prime Minister of Barbados when he said that he is more than No. 1. So there is this concept of the Prime Minister being *primus inter pares* and Prime Minister Gonsalves is saying no, quoting the Prime Minister of Barbados, that he is more than No. 1.

In reality, the Caribbean, or the Trinidadian version of the Westminster political system, has the propensity to be transformed into a prime ministerial dictatorship when it came into a society such as ours without the political culture with the supporting and supportive operative conventions.

The Wooding Commission from so long ago still has relevance for us today and I quote from the *Report of the Constitution Commission* of January 22, 1974.

“In reality the Westminster political system has a propensity to become transformed into dictatorship then transplanted into societies without political cultures which support its operative conventions. The underlying principle of the Westminster system is that the party which controls the majority in Parliament following an election is invited to form the Government. The person who is leader of the majority party becomes Prime Minister and head of the Cabinet. He chooses his Cabinet colleagues and junior ministers and he can dismiss them at will. He also allocates the portfolios for which they are responsible. Once Cabinet decides on a policy, it can easily be translated into law through the use of the party’s majority in Parliament.

In the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, governments were defeated in Parliament. Nowadays, party discipline rarely breaks down.

Under contemporary conditions the Executive in the Westminster model is so powerful that it has been referred to as a Cabinet dictatorship. Some observers even claim that it is not really the Cabinet, which is dominant, but the Prime Minister himself, assisted by his inner Cabinet, the Cabinet Secretariat and a few individuals who may not even have any formal responsibility in the system. The Prime Minister, it is noted, also has wide powers of appointment and dismissal. Further, he has the power to dissolve Parliament when he wishes, the power to appoint and staff Cabinet committees, ...the power to determine who chairs the committee as well as which committee receives what matter for study. He also determines in large

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part agenda for Cabinet meetings and his oral summation of Cabinet discussions determines to a large extent what policies are actually adopted on behalf of the Cabinet. As leader of the party in Parliament and in the country, the Prime Minister has at his disposal a powerful instrument of control and influence. Those who cross him or fail to support his policies consistently can hardly expect advancement.”

The Member for Laventille East/Morvant and the Member for Tobago West may find some truth in those words.

“They may even be expelled from the party. This has in fact happened on quite a few occasions in British political history.

Looked at from this perspective there is some justification for referring to the British system as being Prime Ministerial government rather than parliamentary government.”

It is said that Parliament has now become a cronyism, which, like the monarch, plays only a fitful and largely ceremonial role, and this is where it has gone under our present Constitution, if we look at what is happening in the Parliament, which I will speak about in a while if time permits.

We have seen a total emasculation of the Parliament when we come once a week, sometimes twice a week as we did this week, and next week maybe twice or three times. We come several times for the week and we rant and rave and maybe you may get one line in a report somewhere and then the Executive, which is also the legislative, because the majority of the legislature of this Parliament comprises the Executive. *[Interruption]* Yes, you say this has been happening all along, but I am saying around the world, and here in Trinidad and Tobago, this is not good enough and it has to change, because if we continue to ignore the concerns of the masses of people as I say, we are sitting on a powder keg.

So in the past, that is the kind of arrangement, the kind of process, the kind of system for political governance that we have had in the country in the 40 years, and I have explained why I am saying it is 40 years because 1976 is not very different from 1962 except for the changes from Governor General to President.

In the many years—as the preamble of my Motion recites— highlighting deficiencies in the Constitution calling to question the adequacy and the relevance of the Constitution. We can look at some of those very quickly because time will not permit us to go through all of them and we could start with Chapter 1 of the Constitution, which sets out in absolute terms our fundamental rights and freedoms that we recognize. It guards these freedoms by prohibiting Parliament

from enacting any law, which will infringe upon these rights. However, the enjoyment of these rights is subject to two things:

1. The fact that whatever rights are enshrined are not absolute, but they are qualified by saying that they existed prior to the coming into force of the Constitution. So basically, these rights were not new rights, they were rights that had been set up under the common law of Britain, which we inherited.
2. The second condition, enjoyment of these rights, other exceptions in cases of emergency, exceptions where Parliament can pass laws if they are considered reasonably justifiable in a society which has a proper respect for the citizens of that country.

When we see what is happening today, it is like a kind of malaise has taken over the land, and I picked up the newspapers today and will look at them with your leave, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if some of us can keep awake. [*Interruption*]

Let us look at the fundamental rights in section 4 of the Constitution. It says:

“It is hereby recognised and declared that in Trinidad and Tobago there have existed and shall continue to exist, without discrimination by reason of race, origin, colour, religion or sex, the following fundamental human rights and freedoms, namely—

- (a) the right of the individual to life, liberty, security of the person and enjoyment of property and the right not to be deprived thereof except by due process of law;”

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is guaranteed in the Constitution, and in Trinidad and Tobago today that has to be a joke, that there is a Constitution which guarantees this and that is why I talk about deficiencies, inadequacies and the irrelevance of the provisions of the Constitution. Because here, a stated right has been granted to us, and every day there are reports of murders.

As I pick up today’s *Newsday* I see: “...3 Murders in 14 Hours” and the number of murders during the course of this year and last year have escalated. Here it is an 18-year-old girl—and we extend our sympathies and condolences to the family. My son is 18 years old; you may have a daughter or a son. The answer to this is that the crimes are gang related. Our women and daughters of this nation are under attack. The *Daily Express* of Friday, January 24, “Women Under Attack—Kidnapped, Killed” and every day we pick up the newspaper we see these things.

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Instead we are hearing ostrich-like and advisory issues in this country. The Prime Minister is saying they are wrong, it is not true and he is sending a high-powered delegation to Britain, Washington and New York. To do what, Mr. Deputy Speaker? I am saying these are the examples that demonstrate the irrelevance, the inadequacy and the deficiency of a Constitution that cannot protect the rights that are guaranteed except by due process of law. This is due process. Is this due process that this can happen and we are powerless when the Executive, rather than dealing with the problem gives the answer that he has sent a delegation to convince them that they are wrong? Spends millions of dollars to allow people to take trips to convince the foreign governments that we are telling untruths. They are telling the citizens advisory it is a lie, it is not true, this is not happening in Trinidad and Tobago. All is fine in Trinidad and Tobago under the PNM.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am asking the question, what has changed? The issue of the Police Service Reform Bills—I know that we are being accused of using those bills as a political football, but I want to make it very clear that the Police Service Reform Bills which came into being, have their genesis during the tenure of then Prime Minister, Basdeo Panday, on the initiative of the Leader of the Opposition. But those bills cannot be a cure- all for crime in the country. That is one level dealing with crime in the country; it is not a cure-all, it cannot be a cure. The question is why has it changed during the last 12 months? There were no Police Service Reform Bills in the last 12 months. Why should those be a cure-all to solve the situation and the problem of crime?

Therefore, the issue has to be with what has changed in the last 12 months. It is a cop-out to say that the crime is because of the UNC because they do not want to support the Police Service Reform Bills. In the last 12 months we have seen an escalation. What has changed? The one thing that has changed is that the leadership at the political level has changed to the PNM in this country. That is what has changed—the leadership—and it is a cop-out to blame the UNC by using the Police Service Reform Bills.

Let me make a point, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I was a teacher; I am not sure if you may have been a teacher at one time as well, but several of us have had the experience of being teachers and if you are in a classroom and you are a weak teacher—I can imagine Mr. Deputy Speaker, with no disrespect, in a classroom with a weak teacher what would have happened. I could just picture it. The children would be pelting paper, slamming books, one may cuff down another. Why? Because the perception is—[*Inaudible*]

**Mr. Ramnath:** Are you saying that the Deputy Speaker was a bad student?

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** No, I am not saying he is doing it.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Member, I can see you are enjoying yourself.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** If there is a perception from those that the leadership is weak, then that problem and the lawlessness is exacerbated. I am saying Police Service Reform Bill or no Bill, in the last 12 months, the change has been with respect to leadership in the nation.

When we look at the editorials as well—and I have gone through all these newspaper clippings over the last several months and a large percentage of them deal and point to this crisis in our society where a Constitution is irrelevant and inadequate and we are saying we are not going to bother with you and your Constitution, it is not important. It is irrelevant, you are guaranteed the right to life, liberty, security of person and so on, not to take it away except by due process of law and citizens are living in fear in this country. What can we do when the Executive continues like an ostrich burying its head in the sand whilst we have become the killing fields in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I quote from the *Daily Express* of Thursday, January 23, 2003:

“Making a bad situation worse

There has been a not surprising public reaction to the latest travel advisories from the Pan American Health Organisation and the Australian government warning employees and citizens of the dangers of travelling to Trinidad (not necessarily Tobago).

The truth is, however, much of the warnings contained in the travel advisories reflect the precautions being taken by our own nationals who have taken to not travelling after certain hours and not frequenting parts of the country which have become particularly crime-prone. The fear has even affected the route employed by mas bands on Carnival day and the rise in all-inclusive fetes which offer greater security to patrons.

Trinidad and Tobago has become an unsafe country. This is borne out in our startling crime statistics with record numbers of kidnappings and murders that seem to have left both the past and present administrations clueless.

Given the stated reluctance of some of our own nationals to return home to be preyed upon by airport bandits, it cannot be surprising that other countries have taken to warning their citizens about coming here...

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It is clear, at least to the international community that the crime situation in Trinidad and Tobago is at a crisis level requiring drastic security measures.”

**Hon. Member:** What newspaper is that?

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** It is the *Daily Express* dated January 23, 2003.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Member, I would appreciate if you would connect what you are doing with the constitutional reform.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** Certainly. I will be guided, Mr. Deputy Speaker. In the preamble of my Motion I recited in preamble two:

“*Whereas* during the twenty-six years many circumstances have arisen highlighting deficiencies in the Constitution and calling into question the adequacy and/or relevance of many of the provisions thereof;”

I am looking at section 4, which deals with our fundamental rights and I am saying that section 4 of the Constitution is guaranteeing me the right to life, liberty, security of the person and enjoyment of property and not to be deprived thereof, except by due process of law. The Constitution is inadequate, it is irrelevant, it is deficient because whilst it states it, it is written there, that is not happening. I am not guaranteed that life and, therefore, it is not working to give me that guarantee.

In reading these editorials I am pointing out the danger to every citizen for security of person, property and so forth. I read in the *Trinidad Guardian* of Thursday, January 23, 2003:

“On a single day, an Assistant Commissioner of Police receives death threats, and yet another murdered corpse is found. It’s no surprise that foreign governments and the UN are advising their nationals and employees about staying alive in T&T.

Since early December, when the UK Government issued a travel advisory about this country, at least 40 murders have occurred, including 12 this month, by early this week.”

That 12 was yesterday, now I see there are three more so that has now gone to 15 in the month of January alone.

“The police are being called upon for a special protective effort during the tourism high season of Carnival.

On the basis of such plain facts, only Tidco remains mandated to portray T&T as a place to visit without constantly looking over one’s shoulder...



Prime Minister Patrick Manning can hold that the UK advisory is ‘unwarranted’, because it led to the cancellation of visits by two cruise lines. That cancellation is bad news for the tourism industry, and it sends a worse signal abroad about conditions in this country.

The Government’s sharp reaction to the advisory and to the consequent cruise ship cancellations identifies culprits...

While the gloves are off at home, a high-level diplomatic mission has been dispatched to Washington, London and New York to ‘counteract the effects’ of the British and other advisories.

It is not clear how Foreign Affairs Minister Knowlson Gift can reassure the British Foreign Office enough to cause a withdrawal of their advisory. British officials had been more persuaded by reports from their T&T-based diplomats than by representations from this country’s High Commission in London...

Foreign decision makers are less likely to be moved by talk from Mr. Panday and Mr. Gift, and more likely to be instructed by the objective conditions discernible on the ground in T&T.”

That is the issue. It is not the scapegoating and saying Mr. Panday went to London and whatever he said there is why the advisory came out. It is not enough to say that Sadiq Baksh spoke to some reporter and that is why it came out. Are the British so foolish that they will listen to one or two men speaking? They have their own intelligence and they will use and make their own advisories. We should not be trying to convince them that they are lying, because that is what we are doing by sending a delegation; to tell them what you are saying is not the truth. We should be finding out why the advisory came out. What are the facts? What information do you have that allowed you to write such an advisory? There must be something there that you have found frightening. What is it? Give us those facts and then the Prime Minister must deal with the situation internally.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, if we look at the *The Probe* of January 26, 2003, it says: “Trini ties to Margarita terrorist cell”. I do not know if it is true. All the newspapers: *The Trinidad Express*, *Trinidad Guardian*, *Newsday*, *The Probe*. I do not know if it is true, but again it is frightening and I am saying that Trinidad and Tobago has become the killing field and the Executive has done nothing about it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have looked at the fundamental rights and if we were to go through each one, we would see here it is we have a Constitution guaranteeing those rights and we cannot enjoy them given the state of malaise that has enveloped the country.

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I now look at Chapter 3, which deals with the President. It establishes the office of the President of the Republic, and decrees that he “shall be the Head of State and Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces.” It provides for the qualification, disqualification from office, the procedure for removing a President from office and the immunity from answering in any court for the performance of any of the functions of his office.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, again, I am talking about the inadequacy, the deficiencies in our present Constitution, which demand urgent reform. I am looking at the deficiencies of the office of the President. We live in this country under the perception that the Office of the President is a very independent office, outside of political influence, when the very manner in which a President is elected is clearly one of pure political process.

Let us look at the Electoral College to elect a President. The Electoral College is made up of this House and the Senate. In the Senate sits Opposition, PNM and Independents, in this House, the Opposition and the PNM. The majority of the Electoral College—and we all know it, it is a fact—is one and the same as the Executive. Therefore, the person to be elected as a President is the person who is the nominee of the Executive and therefore, it is a farce, in a sense, for us to convene an Electoral College because the result is already known.

In one sense, given the prime ministerial dictatorship that we spoke of, the Executive dictatorship that has taken place under the transformed Westminster system in the Caribbean where the majority in the legislative, the majority in the Electoral College is one and the same as the Executive.

When the Executive was set up—and this is another issue that we need to look at—it said:

“There shall be a Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago and it shall be accountable to the Parliament.”

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am not saying this is only for you. This is for any government under our present Constitution and that needs to be changed. Accountable to the Parliament, but who is the Parliament? The majority in the Parliament is one and the same, the Executive. So it is “himself” accounting to “himself”. When the Executive comes to the Parliament it is the Executive, which is the Government accounting to “himself” which is the Parliament because of that parliamentary majority.

**Mr. Manning:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, I thank the hon. Member for giving way and for giving us her perspective and that of the hon. Members opposite on how

this should work. It is an Executive dictatorship as you see it and I just want to point out that with respect, our view is different. There is also the very important process of consultation and the way we see it is there must be consultation between Government and Opposition and a meeting of the minds. So when an election of a President takes place, there should be consensus and everybody supports a candidate that is acceptable to both sides, which is very different from their own perspective of it.

**3.00 p.m.**

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** I thank the Member but, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the provisions within the Constitution allow for such a procedure to take place and it will take place, despite the protestations. The majority of the Electoral College is the Executive and the nominee will be the nominee of the Executive.

When that 1976 Constitution was set up, if the President was to be elected, in a sense it would be truly consensual, which is what you are saying, that there will be consensus, but if there is no agreement, what happens? We remember what happened with the Speaker in this House, where there was no agreement, you go ahead with what you have to do. I

In the 1976 Constitution—if you were really concerned about getting the consensus—and I am not saying you, it is the provisions in the Constitution which allow for that—what would have happened? You would not need a simple majority. You would then have put in place more than a simple majority, in which case you would have had to have the consensus of the Members of this side and the Members on the other side. Once it is a simple majority, the pathway is there for the Executive, with its majority in the Electoral College in the Legislature, for the person to be the nominee. [*Crosstalk*]

This is not to be taken personally; it should not be taken personally. It is not to say that you are doing that. This is what the Constitution provides and we will see if that is what you, indeed, will do. We will find out. In fact, I understand consultation could not take place because somebody was waiting for a phone call from Barbados. I do not know how true that is—[*Interruption*—concerning the consultation with the Leader of the Opposition. I read something about that. If the newspaper is correct, I do not know. Eventually it may well take place.

There is a second issue which is also very vital, and we saw it happening, where you have no position fixed and election of a Vice-President. The question arises whether, under our thrust in constitutional reform, we should establish an office of Vice-President to be elected by the Electoral College. [*Crosstalk*] I am

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not advocating. I am saying that is a formula, in terms of having a special majority rather than a simple majority, for the Electoral College to elect a President or Vice-President. I am now proposing. I am not putting forward that as a fixed proposal. It is a suggestion that has been made, as other suggestions, for the manner in which the Electoral College should be convened. There are other ways for the election of a President; for example, an Executive President to be elected by the people of the country. So there are several scenarios and alternatives and, as I said, I am not going into those at this time.

We need a Vice-President of the country because, given the order of precedence, the Vice-President of the Senate acts for the President. But, again, Vice-President of the Senate is definitely the nominee of the Executive. If there are lengthy periods, as we have seen, should a President fall ill or for whatever reason, there could be very important matters to be decided. Therefore, the suggestion has been made; it is something that has to be looked at. Should we also have an elected office of Vice-President of the Republic who would act in the absence, under those conditions, for the President as would be prescribed?

Time will not permit us very much, but I did really want to speak a little about the Parliament. I am saying that the Parliament, over the years, has become emasculated; it has become a talk shop. Again, it has to do with the fact that the Executive and the Legislature are one and the same. So once you have that majority in the Legislature, which is the way the system is made, the Executive, the majority in the Legislature in the Parliament, is the one that forms the Government.

The party with the majority forms the Government, becomes Prime Minister, and sets up the Cabinet. This is what is there and we really seriously need to look at that in terms of providing change, because the Parliament was to be the watchdog. The Parliament was to be the overseer. The Executive, the Cabinet is accountable to the Parliament and through the Parliament, to the people of the country. But here it is, we can see where the Executive acts with impunity and acts illegally and then comes. If you pick up the Order Paper for the past few months since we have been here, almost every Bill has to do with validating some illegal Act. An Act to validate, an Act to enact, an Act to validate and so on; on the Order Paper for the past several months since October. So that an Executive knows that it can come to the Parliament and get a simple majority—which it has, because that is why it is the Executive in the first place, a government—you know you can get a simple majority. So what do you do? You can spend money any way, anytime and you can come with an Appropriation Bill. A simple majority is

all that is needed. That is all that you need in here, which you have, because that is why you formed the Government in the first place; so you go with it. You spend the money as you wish and bring an Appropriation Bill. You would have acted outside of the law, but you validate it because you have the majority here.

Having the majority here, what happens in the other place? The Senate was supposed to provide that check and balance, but then a casting vote is held by the President of the Senate. “Baboolal’s vote saves Minister” So that where you even have the Independents and Opposition both voting together, at the end of the day, the Executive has its way.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, you may know the saying, “Let the Opposition have its say, the Government will have its way”. In other words, rant and rave. [*Crosstalk*] Talk as long as you like. At the end of the day the Executive majority—and sometimes, as I am reminded, we do not even have our say; archaic Standing Orders which do not even allow us to raise issues in this House. I am not questioning your conduct, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but it has happened; the record is there. [*Interruption*] No, I think he is doing a fine job, so far. [*Crosstalk*]

You know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Member is making a very interesting point. He said that I just left government, that is why I am familiar with some of what happens both from the Opposition and Government, because I came from the Opposition. In 1995 I was in the Opposition in the Senate. From the Opposition I went into Government and I am back in the Opposition. This is why I am familiar with some of the processes, from both the Opposition and from Government. [*Crosstalk*] Well, to ask why we did not change it when we were there, does not allow you to escape your responsibility of doing what you have to do.

With respect to the Parliament, the Standing Orders are being subverted and the most we can do is raise voices again; rant and rave as I said. I recall in this House a particular matter had been on the Order Paper for answer; a motion that had been on the Order Paper for several weeks and each week the Member just did not show up; total contempt. I saw what happened in the Senate with a question. Yet in yesterday’s *Guardian* an entire page gave the whole answer, but the Minister could not give the answer the day before.

In the *Newsday* of Thursday January 23, 2003:

“Answers, Mr. Dumas

Questions laid in Parliament for Government ministers to answer are a traditional and vital feature of our two-party system. They represent an inescapable way of forcing the Government to account for its actions, of

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extracting facts and information with respect to any aspect of the administration's operations, particularly those that may appear dubious or controversial. Ministers, faced with such questions, no matter how revealing or embarrassing, cannot evade the obligation of replying to them; indeed, they are expected to respond promptly, truthfully and comprehensively.

Why the reluctance to provide such simple information? The Minister's difficulties may well lead many to suspect that WASA has something to hide."

I do not know. Parliament is the watchdog and overseer of the Executive; the Executive is accountable to the Parliament, but you can subvert those processes. The Parliament has become totally emasculated. [*Crosstalk*] There are several other issues. How much time do I have, Mr. Deputy Speaker?

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** You have 20 minutes more.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. There are other issues with respect to provisions of the Constitution; Chapter 8, for example—still talking about inadequacies, deficiencies and irrelevance—deals with Executive powers. A lot of controversy has arisen with respect to the number of persons who are non-elected Members sitting in a Cabinet. Prior to the 1962 Constitution, I believe it was fixed as four nominated Members in the Legislature. Thereafter, that was changed to seven, but by the time we got to this— This is why I say, again, that history will record. With a majority in this Parliament with the “no-vote” campaign, an entire House of the government or a complete legislature of the PNM, save for the two defections, do you know what happened in the 1976 Constitution? Again, the concentration of power; the centralization of power in the hands of the Prime Minister. There is now no restriction whatsoever on the number of persons coming from the non-elected House who can sit in the Cabinet.

**Mr. Manning:** Why is that so?

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** We have to ask the question. [*Crosstalk*] Should we allow this to continue or is this something we need to address and deal with in constitutional change? [*Crosstalk*] They like to go backwards, but we need to go forward. Whether it is this Government or another government, the Constitution is inadequate to deal with the problems that we are facing in today's world. It is something we need to look at. How many persons, non-elected— There are other systems in the world. There are other models in the world where, for example, you have a larger Parliament as it were, a House of Parliament, made up of more Members, some of whom come in on the first-past-the-post system, others come in under proportional representation.

There is a saying, which I do not recall exactly. When “yuh buying cat in bag”; you do not know what you are getting. When you elect a government, half of them turn out to be people you did not even know existed. Some of them turn out to be financiers, the friends of financiers, children of financiers and so on.

Some countries have a different model. They go in with the first half of the Parliament—a House of Parliament with all elected Members—and then they go in with proportional representation for another half, but those names are put forward on a list prior to the election, so you know that you are not buying “cat in bag”. You have an idea of who the persons are when you set out to elect a party to form the government. So there are different procedures. [*Crosstalk*] There is nothing in the Constitution which talks about the size of a Cabinet. So that in a nation of 1.2 million people, we can have a bloated Cabinet of 24 people, or we could have 30 or 40. There is nothing in the Constitution about that. Do we still want that? [*Crosstalk*]

With respect to Executive powers, I think the most startling deficiency of our Constitution came in the last year following upon the 18/18 deadlock. Even when it was demonstrated in the Parliament that the person selected as having the majority in the Parliament did not have that majority, there was nothing in this Constitution to deal with a situation like that; had the country for a year, no accountability whatsoever. This Constitution allowed that and, therefore, we need to look at it.

I know some people have suggested that we should have an odd number of seats and that would solve the problem of a deadlock. No, it will not, because we can have an odd number of 37 seats and if we have 37 seats there can be different combinations which will end up with a deadlock of two majorities, none outstripping the other and one or two of the others saying, “I belong to a third party,” and there could still be that kind of deadlock. So to suggest just adding a seat or get an odd number, is not going to solve the problem.

There are different models in the world. In some countries they have talked about power sharing, where you have one Prime Minister for half the period and another Prime Minister for the other half of the period. [*Crosstalk*] I think that has happened in Israel. There is another model in Malta. The Malta model is to say that the Parliament runs first past the post—[*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Members, the Hansard reporter is not hearing the hon. Member for Siparia. Would you please allow her?

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** The model in Malta, for example, in breaking a deadlock, is that you go first-past-the-post and if there is no deadlock, fine, the majority forms the government. If there is a deadlock, you then take the party with the largest number of the popular vote and that party is given an additional seat or two seats or Members in the Parliament and in that way you can break a deadlock whenever it arises. So there are several models for dealing with a deadlock. The answer does not simply lie in increasing the number of seats to make it an odd number; that will not solve the problem, because a deadlock can still arise.

There is one other issue I would like to deal with very quickly, as time is beyond us, and it has to do with the chapter which deals with the Director of Public Prosecutions and the office of the Attorney General. There are models in the world where the office of the Attorney General is not a political office, it is held by a public officer. Mr. Deputy Speaker, that allows for the Attorney General looking after the criminal, civil, legal matters and matters brought against the State, handled by the Office of the Attorney General. Of course, the perception is always there and we saw that controversy earlier this year when announcements were made about a gift given to a particular Member of the Executive. It created a whole furore, because how can you sit in the Cabinet with your colleagues and you are also the person having the direction and control of the court case in which he or she is involved? In any government, there must be some way in which, when there are matters involving Members of the Cabinet, that it cannot be the Office of the Attorney General that has direction and control of that matter, because the conflict of interest that arises— I said last week that justice must not only be done, it must be seen to be done. [*Crosstalk*]

This is not to impugn any particular officer, but we saw the discussion only because it came out into the public domain on that issue of a gift. It was only then that it was pulled back. So that concerns the question about the office of the Attorney General. When we look at the office of the DPP there is an ambiguity again. This is a very, very serious matter, because the DPP deals with criminal matters, but there is ambiguity in the way the Constitution is worded. The Attorney General said, “I have direction and control over the DPP,” and the DPP says, “No, no, nobody has direction and control over me.” Again, we saw another controversy erupting over the past year, with respect to whose office was independent, whether or not it was the DPP or the Attorney General. So this is another office where that needs to be cleared up. When you look at all the reports, the intention clearly was for the office of the DPP to remain totally insulated from any kind of political interference.



I have talked very quickly and very briefly about some of the deficiencies, irrelevancies and inadequacies in the existing Constitution. There are many more. My colleagues will speak on some of these at a later point. There is just one other issue with the Preamble recited:

*“Whereas there is urgent need to redress the inequity and divisiveness inherent in our first-past-the-post electoral system in a plural society such as ours, which have manifestly militated against the development of a truly cohesive and inclusive society...”*

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is no secret that our system is based on “winner take all”. Whether it was the PNM Government or the UNC government, that is what the Constitution allows. [*Crosstalk*] But when this provision is abused it creates tremendous difficulty. [*Crosstalk*] [*Interruption*] When it is, there is divisiveness, there is this inequity.

I remember discussing this with my colleague from St. Augustine. When you start speaking about divisiveness and inequality and you are from this side of the House, the first thing said is that you are a racist and you are dealing with racist statements. But I am talking about divisiveness, not simply with respect to ethnicity or race, but with respect to religion, age, gender, cultural and economic differences; generally, that we must take that diversity, a multitude of diversity that we need to harness, which is our true strength. That is not happening under the present system at all.

Whilst, again, that may have worked when people were more ignorant, and ignorant in the sense of not knowing, that is what I mean by using the word “ignorant” in that context, when our electorate did not know, were not fully informed, were not aware of what their rights could and should be. Because of technology now we know what is happening elsewhere in the world. We know that as a citizen you are entitled to have your hopes, dreams and aspirations be that of every other citizen, that you have an equal place, that the words— We sing in the anthem, “Every creed and race find an equal place,” when we know that is not happening.

I have to ask a question. I remember, as Minister of Education, that we had secondary schools earmarked and moneys provided for them to be built under the Secondary Education Management Programme; many schools to be built. Now I am seeing one year later, that all these schools have a start-up date of construction, all these schools can say where they are at and what is going to happen next, except two schools. Every time I raise it, I will be told I am raising it

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because I am a racist, but I have to raise it on behalf of the children who are suffering. The only two schools under that programme, up to today, that they cannot give a start-up date of construction for, nothing has happened, are the two Maha Sabha Hindu colleges. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, if you remember, under the building programme there were no secondary schools given to the Hindu community, except one, the Lakshmi Girls' College; none to the Muslim community except the ASJA Boys' and ASJA Girls' schools. [*Crosstalk*] We opened that up. None was given to the Pentecostals, but we say, "Every creed and race". [*Crosstalk*] The Constitution says no discrimination by reason of race, colour, creed or religion and, therefore, if we are to ensure that there is equity, then we have to put into place a Constitution that will guarantee that kind of equity for all the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

So we must frame and form a Constitution that will acknowledge our history; a Constitution that will take into consideration our history, our past and present and will allow us to shape our future, so that this nation can truly be said to belong to every citizen. We must have a Constitution such as will engender and sustain loyalty, commitment and dedication. It is always interesting when you travel abroad and you go to other countries, you meet Jamaicans. There are so many problems in Jamaica, but they are so dedicated and patriotic. I see you nodding your head, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You meet a "Trini" and it is the exact opposite. Why is that?

Is it that we do not feel that we brought in and we are a part of this system? If that is lacking, our youths have to be brought in. There is a disconnection; there is a gap; there is a gulf, between the processes and the systems and structures of governance and our youths who are largely outside the system. They have to be brought in, because that alienation, that disconnection could only lead us to further strife—[*Crosstalk*—]could make the kinds of problems we are experiencing seem like nothing, in terms of what is to come next. The youths of the country must be brought in.

Finally, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you will note that we have asked in our resolution for a joint select committee of the Parliament to be set up. We are asking for a joint select committee rather than a Constitution Commission for a very simple reason; it is that there have already been several constitutional commissions, so that instead of taking that time going through what they have done before, let us take what they have already done, build on it and go out to the people and have the consultations. The joint select committee will work together with the technocrats to frame and draft the kinds of reforms that are needed.

In conclusion, it is all very well and good for the Opposition to shout across the floor to me—[*Interruption*—to whisper across the floor to me, “You were there for six years and you did nothing,” that is fine. But it is their responsibility now; they are in government. Given the kind of headlines we are seeing, and I have pointed some of them out to you and there are others—I see more doctors have resigned. The Minister of Health was very happy when he heard that Dr. Fortune resigned; I hope he is just as happy to hear that these others are now resigning. When we see what is happening with respect to jobs at Caroni, TSTT and so many other places—[*Crosstalk*—if we do not deal with this issue of changing the way the systems, structures, processes and the way in which we govern ourselves—we are sitting on a powder keg. We are sitting on a time bomb that will explode.

I trust my colleagues will expand on other areas with respect to specific provisions that we would like to see changed, the difficulties we are experiencing with them. I look forward to the Government not simply saying, “You did this, that and the other.” I will be very grateful if the Government would give us an idea of what is their view on constitutional reform, are they interested in constitutional reform and will they get it done.

The PNM as a party promised in its manifesto widespread constitutional reform and widespread consultation for constitutional reform. I asked them today to put their money where their mouth is and set up this joint select committee of the Parliament and get the job started.

I thank you.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Members, this Motion requires a seconder.

**Mr. Subhas Panday** (*Princes Town*): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I beg to second the Motion and reserve the right to speak.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** The motion has been seconded by the Member for Princes Town.

*Question proposed.*

**The Minister of Legal Affairs (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis):** Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me from the inception of my contribution establish that we in the Government of Trinidad and Tobago are motivated by the innermost conviction that change is necessary and that reform is progressive since it is inherent in the evolution of any society. A definition of the word “reform” suggests, among other things, that it is a transformation, amelioration, a remodeling and a metamorphosis,

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if you will. As you well know, metamorphosis is a slow process driven by the desire for perfection, beauty and determining the best outcome. Contrary to the belief of some of those on the other side, the Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago is, in fact, sacrosanct.

If we consider the Constitution to be sacrosanct, it must be that any attempt to amend it must be done in a particular way. When we consider something as sacrosanct or hallowed, something like God or a supreme being, we honour that and we are always particular about the things that we say in relation to something that is sacrosanct. In like manner, constitutional reform cannot and must not be taken lightly and with the type of flippancy of the Member for Siparia who said, in this very House on February 24, 1999, during her contribution at that time to the Constitution (Amdt.) Bill, and permit me to quote from the *Hansard*:

“It is very clear that the past PNM administrations, legal advice for them was totally inadequate, suggesting that it is very clear that in every respect of constitutional change you need a special majority.”

I quoted that particular statement by the Member for Siparia because with the penchant that they on the other side have for frivolity and for changing what they say from day-to-day, the Member for Siparia at that time, waxed passionate during that contribution, accusing the former PNM administration of being incapable throughout their administrations of making any changes to the Constitution.

On the contrary, when you explore the history of the PNM in government, we are the only party that, historically, sought the interest of the people and the direction of the people whenever we wanted to change the Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] On every occasion, we determined that we enjoyed the well-placed confidence of the people of Trinidad and Tobago and ensured that their values, wishes and beliefs were taken into consideration prior to making changes to the Constitution. As a Government that has such a history, we on this side are not about systemically changing the Constitution without obtaining the support of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

It is, unquestionably, not the word “Constitution” or the idea surrounding it that intimidates us, as the Member for Siparia is suggesting. On the contrary, I would like to submit that our history shows the awesome restraint and reasoning that we consistently exhibit in determining what is in the best interest of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Permit me to give you a history of how we have done this before.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in 1960 while advocating for independence in Trinidad and Tobago in the context of the Federation of the West Indies, it was our

Founding Father Dr. Eric Williams who established that the principal goal of the PNM at the time was that of securing independence for the island States of the entire region; 1960. Dr. Eric Williams pronounced that 1960 was the year of decision. "There is only one issue to decide, independence." [*Crosstalk*]

While I ask, what do we make of the fact that in 1960 when Jamaica pulled out of the Federation and Dr. Williams was faced with the dilemma that produced the ever famous hypothesis "One from 10 equals nought," how do we of Trinidad and Tobago measure his labour over the year, in a people process, which required from 1960—1962 continuous dialogue to gain the representative view of the people of Trinidad and Tobago? The PNM under Dr. Eric Williams was well equipped to bring Trinidad and Tobago to independence in a shorter space of time, but in his wisdom he and the PNM applied wisdom, restraint and passion and embraced the views of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. In fact, it was not until Dr. Eric Williams and the PNM obtained the concurrence of the then Democratic Labour Party, that the entire team presented its position to Marlborough House to ensure that all were on board with the independence Constitution for Trinidad and Tobago.

This was no different with the 1976 Constitution. In fact, in 1971, as the Member for Siparia pointed out, during the "No-vote" campaign, we of the PMM had all the seats in this Parliament and could have ridden roughshod over the people of Trinidad and Tobago. What did we do in attempting to come to the best Constitution for the people of Trinidad and Tobago? Again, the views of the people were solicited and elicited before any decision was taken. In fact, when the eventual Constitution was written, quite a number of the powers that were in the hands of the Prime Minister were taken away and vested in the office of the President, contrary to what the Member for Siparia is saying. I repeat, office of the President; not in the hands of the man, the office of the President that is so important to the country of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, you will, I am sure, recall the 2001 situation, when we were faced with that 18/18 deadlock. In less than one year after that crisis which came about because of the accusations of graft and corruption against that administration, they were forced to call an election, because three of their own moved away from them and decided that the country should know what was happening and should take no more. We had to have an election four years prior to its time, because of what was taking place. One year later, we are here today being asked to support a motion which talks about inequity and divisiveness and that from the same people who frustrated this country by their irresponsible decision to stymie the entire democratic process by denying the country the right to a functioning Parliament.

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As I talk about denial of a right, I must, at this point, refer to some of the issues raised by the Member for Siparia. It is amazing that the Member seems to have a case of amnesia, because quite a number of the issues that she has raised were situations that occurred during the tenure of those on the other side in governance in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, if you would permit me, let me refer to one issue that was raised. You will recall that the Member indicated that in a new Constitution maybe we may think of placing the Office of the Attorney General as non-political. Perhaps, she may have some good reason for making that suggestion. As you may know or you may recall, it was during her tenure as Attorney General that Mr. Lindquist, who was making enquiries into the corrupt activities of their administration, was supposed to come to Trinidad and Tobago to continue those enquiries. It was that politically appointed Attorney General who indicated to the people of Trinidad and Tobago that Mr. Lindquist's foot was broken. Contrary to her decision that because Mr. Lindquist was injured he could not come, Mr. Lindquist indicated, quite clearly, that that was not preventing him from coming to Trinidad and Tobago; in fact, he was waiting for the same Member for Siparia, the then Attorney General, to give him clearance to come to continue his work. Because his work was pointing in a particular direction, the politically appointed Attorney General did everything in her power to stymie Mr. Lindquist to frustrate his efforts at getting to the bottom of his enquiry.

So the Member knows exactly what she is talking about when she says that, perhaps, the Attorney General should not be politically appointed. We on this side are saying that once you have someone of a character that cannot be questioned, you should not have any problem with your Attorney General. [*Desk thumping*] Again, I refer to the post of Attorney General, because it was while the Member was Attorney General that she tread to the house of the President of Trinidad and Tobago to try to convince him as to whom he should decide should be the Prime Minister, a decision which the President should have made in his own deliberate judgment.

As a matter of fact, the Member in her office as Attorney General offered the President—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Alleged to have.

**Hon. C. Robinson-Regis:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will defer to you, is alleged to have offered [*Crosstalk*] the sitting President a life presidency. I will go further and indicate that when Prof. Bogdanor's advice was not totally accepted by the

sitting President, the government at the time refused, and I repeat, refused to pay Prof. Bogdanor's fees. As a consequence of that, we in Government had to pay those fees. So when the Member for Siparia stands across there and pontificates, we on this side have to ask: Why is she suffering from amnesia?

When I spoke about the history of the PNM between 1960—1970, you may notice that I did not yet speak about 1980. Only to say, that whilst in the decade of the 1980s, the aberration of 33/3 was saddening for the PNM, a party that had been in government for 25 years consecutively and the national feeling was that we would never recover and that we would never come out of that humiliating defeat, within a mere five years, that recovery is a shining example of how a party should operate in Opposition. [*Desk thumping*]

We, as a party in Opposition, stayed and worked in the best interest of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. At no time did our political leader or any of our Members in Opposition threaten to destroy Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] At no time did we cry out and say, three months after the election, that there must be constitutional change. At no time did we go abroad and ill speak the country of Trinidad and Tobago. That is the legacy of the PNM, a party whether in Government or in Opposition, works in the interest of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. I repeat, a mere three months after their defeat at the polls, they are coming to this Parliament and moving a motion to change the Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Crosstalk*]

At no time during the last election did they suggest to the people of Trinidad and Tobago that they would want to change the Constitution. As a matter of fact, it was the PNM people who placed that on the election agenda; [*Desk thumping*] it was the PNM who did that. This Motion talks about changing the electoral system, political reform and parliamentary reform. Three months ago it was that same UNC Opposition that was upholding the Constitution, that was upholding the electoral and parliamentary system and, in fact, saying that when the President selected the political leader of the PNM they were the previous properly elected government and as a consequence of that, their political leader should have continued in office as the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago. They are now having difficulty with this system; a system that they never called into question just a few months ago.

I want to remind this Parliament that it was a mere five days after the 2001 election that those on the other side called on the country to observe the Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago and to ensure that public authorities observe the Constitution and to ask for fresh elections. They moved a resolution at their

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conference that upheld the same Constitution that they are now pillorying and upheld the same electoral process. They are now asking this House to agree with a motion which says that the electoral process, the political process and the parliamentary process are all to be reformed.

The irony of the fact that five days after the 2001 election they were upholding that same Constitution, is that they, in fact, were reaffirming their belief in the Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago. They were then accusing the President of taking away government from them; taking away government from them. In the same way that the Member for Siparia is talking now about “winner takes all”. [*Crosstalk*] It is clear that they misunderstood what winner takes all means. They thought it was “tief” all for themselves; that is not what winner takes all stands for. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, may I take the opportunity to indicate that it was at this very conference [*Crosstalk*] that the issue of terrorism—

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Please, hon. Members, the Member is having difficulty and so is the Hansard reporter. Could you please keep the talk down.

**Hon. C. Robinson-Regis:** As I refer to the electoral process, I would like to make the point that government is not something that anyone owns. When a party is elected into governance, it is for the benefit of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] [*Crosstalk*] They felt that the government was theirs. It was taken away and they would use any means necessary to get it back, and that is why the Constitution, [*Crosstalk*] the electoral system and the political process are now being labelled by them as fostering inequity, divisiveness and militating against the development of a truly cohesive society. Once they are not in governance, the Constitution is militating against a truly democratic society.

It is very clear from their utterances, once they are not in governance, they claim that they are second-class citizens. When they are in government, everything is okay, they are first-class citizens. Once they are not in governance, they feel that nothing should be done by those who are in government at the particular time. When they are in governance they are willing to support the Police Reform Bills; once they are out of governance, they oppose for opposing sake.

**Mr. Imbert:** “Crybabies.”

**Hon. C. Robinson-Regis:** For seven years they sat in governance and never saw the need for this radical change. In fact, as I stated at the outset, the very Member for Siparia insisted that at the time that they were in governance they had absolutely no problem with incremental changes to the Constitution. So when they



sit on that side and tell us that unless we do a radical change to the Constitution they will not support the police reform bills, we on this side say, when we were in Opposition and they brought—and if I may be allowed to look at the evidence—In 1996, one Constitution amendment bill was brought. In 1998, two Constitution amendment bills were brought; in 1999, they brought one Constitution amendment bill and in the year 2000, they brought four Constitution amendment bills.

Now they sit in Opposition, they are telling us that unless we do a radical change to the Constitution they will never support any incremental change to the Constitution. [*Crosstalk*] However, during the time that they sat in governance, they brought eight Constitution amendment bills to this House. Let me make the point that one of these was an amendment that looked toward changing or interfering with the independence of the Judicial and Legal Service Commission. How easily they forget. And with your permission, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will like to quote from the *Trinidad Guardian* of February 24, 1999. [*Crosstalk*] They were in power at that time. I quote:

“Statement on the Constitution (Amendment.) (No.3) Bill, 1998 Independence of the Judiciary, ‘Serious Danger’

Two former Presidents and four Chief Justices said yesterday they were gravely troubled by the Constitution (Amendment) (No. 3) Bill, 1998 now before Parliament which will subject the proceedings of the Judicial and Legal Service Commission to investigation and report by a select committee of Parliament.

The Bill, which is to be presented in the House of Representatives today by Attorney General Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj, has been criticized in all quarters.”

I repeat.

“...has been criticized in all quarters. The Government needs a special majority if the Bill is to be passed.

The four Service Commissions have already responded to the Bill asking that it be withdrawn in the public interest.”

**4.00 p.m.**

I continue:

“These eminent citizens said:

‘Since Independence it has been a fundamental policy of our Constitution to isolate and insulate the Public Service and the Judicial and Legal

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Service from political influence by vesting the power to make appointments of, and to discipline, persons in those services in independent Service Commissions.””

I end the quote there, just to make the point that those persons, the two former presidents and the four chief justices, had no political axe to grind, but they did, in fact, have the interest of the people of Trinidad and Tobago at heart. [*Desk thumping*] I ask the question now, as I asked the question then, when in the history of Trinidad and Tobago were such eminent citizens moved to come to the defence of the Constitution and, in fact, to the defence of the people of Trinidad and Tobago? It was only under the administration of those who now sit in the Opposition.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is very clear that once they are not in charge their objective is to stymie any progress and to mash up the country of Trinidad and Tobago. I want to make the point that the Member for Siparia raised the issue of the advisories and indicated that they are talking about crime and the situation in Trinidad and Tobago. I want her to recall that the advisory that came out from Britain talked about terrorism. Let me remind this honourable House about what has been said in relation to terrorism. You would recall that I indicated that five days after the 2001 election the UNC held a conference. At that conference they all cheered lustily when a Maulana Abdul Salam of the Muslim faith spoke at their conference and drew reference to the spiritual leader of the Taliban whom he said, “in the face of adversity did not back down. Salam expressed his full support for Panday.”

For the record, allow me to read the caption in the *Newsday* of Sunday, December 30, 2001, where there is a photograph of Maulana Abdul Salam talking at the UNC conference. Maulana Abdul Salam said, and I quote:

“...Maulana Abdul Salam of the Muslim faith who likened UNC leader Basdeo Panday’s stance ‘not to back down’ to that of the Taliban Spiritual leader.”

I am hearing the Member for Couva South and the Member for Chaguanas saying that Maulana Abdul Salam did not say anything.

**Mr. Ramnath:** He did not come to the Rienzi Complex.

**Hon. C. Robinson-Regis:** No, he was not at the Rienzi Complex. The Maulana was not the only one, however, who identified this link between the Taliban and the UNC. In fact, the former heir-apparent, the former right-hand man, the former Attorney General, the former Member for Couva South, in the *Express* of Friday, December 07, 2001 said, and I quote:

“Panday talking about crime. Panday decide to put up a candidate who Panday knows has links with an international terrorist group. He has links with Bin Laden and the Al-Qaeda movement in Afghanistan. Panday is Minister of National Security and knows that.”

This quote was under the headline in that newspaper which said:

“UNC Minister has Taliban links, says Maharaj”

What is truly farcical about the Motion that is before the House today is the proposed process by which the mover of the Motion suggests that we agree to institute constitutional reform. The mover of the Motion suggests that there should be a joint select committee of Parliament established to make recommendations for urgent reform of the Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago and that a non-partisan technical team be established by Government in consultation with the Opposition to assist the joint select committee.

I call this farcical because this is the same process that is being used for the police service reform and they are the same persons who are saying that they are not supportive of the police service reform. What will make that process acceptable to them in this Motion and the same process not being deemed acceptable to them as it relates to the police service reform legislation? I am of the view that they are not truly in favour of any kind of reform. Their objective is what serves their needs at a particular point in time. [*Desk thumping*]

I say that against a background of their history, because their history is that when it served them they were willing to put a highly political person in the office of President against all the concerns of the people of Trinidad and Tobago and of those on this side. But it served them at the time. Now they are against—when the same person made a decision based on moral and spiritual values, he was the worst person in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Members for Nariva, Laventille East/Morvant and Couva South, please let us have some quiet so that the hon. Member for Arouca South can speak. Continue.

**Hon. C. Robinson-Regis:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me also say why we cannot trust what is said in this Motion. The mover of the Motion said today that in the spirit of the Constitution we must look at the issue of losers in an election—and winners—and how we treat with those two sets of people. But they are the same people who, about two years ago, said that losers should be ministers and in the Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago. Now they are talking about who are losers and who are winners. They are the same people who are now talking about losers

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and put losers in the Speaker's chair against all good advice. They are the same persons who, by each whim and fancy, once it does not suit them at a particular point in time, would bring a motion of this nature three months after an election condemning an entire Constitution that they upheld in various ways for the past seven years.

Of course, they would say now that that is not the point, but they never thought that constitutional reform should be on the agenda, in the same way that they criticized commissions of enquiry, and now when it suits them, think that commissions of enquiry are a necessity. In the same way that they talk today about where there is a situation if there is a need for change and we bring the office of President for an election, we should be electing the President by a special majority.

They are the same persons who took someone straight out of the Cabinet and brought him to be the President. They are the same persons who, when this country was in a state of deadlock, came to this Parliament and would not facilitate the election of a Speaker because it did not suit them at that time. So when they talk about, they would do this at a particular time, their history shows that they consistently lack credibility.

When the Member for Siparia stands on that side and says that there is too much power in the hands of the Prime Minister and the Cabinet, I would like to take this opportunity to remind her that it is their Cabinet, acting illegally, that instructed Nipdec to award the airport contract on a sole selective tender. That was a clear instance of overbearing executive power, and they did not ask for change at that time. They just acted willy-nilly, not even listening, when the President—

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** The speaking time of the hon. Member has expired.

*Motion made,* That the hon. Member's speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Hon. C. Robinson-Regis:** I would like to thank hon. Members for their kind indulgence.

I am on the issue of the President. It was that same administration when they were in governance who, when the very President insisted that there should be a commission of enquiry, indicated that under no circumstances were they agreeing to a commission of enquiry. The Member for Siparia is telling me that is why you

need to change the Constitution. That is why you need to change your attitudes, not the Constitution. [*Desk thumping*] For 26 years, as you rightly said, we subsisted in Trinidad and Tobago under a republican constitution and, in fact, the widespread calls, as you call it, for constitution reform, only became evident when you made efforts at every turn to destroy Trinidad and Tobago [*Desk thumping*] by using executive power willy-nilly, by acting in a way that was not in the interest of Trinidad and Tobago.

It is clear, and I repeat, that once they are not in power—[*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Member for Oropouche, I would like you to read your newspaper down, please.

**Hon. C. Robinson-Regis:** Once they are not in power they agree to nothing. Let me remind you, if you will, what happened between 1991 and 1995. You would recall when in governance the amendments to the financial year were brought to the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago, we said it needed a special majority; they disagreed and they did not vote with us, despite the fact that it was in the interest of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. By the next year after they got into governance, they brought it and it was perfect at that time. They never act in the interest of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, only in their own narrow self-interest.

So when the Member for Siparia talks about advisories damaging our image and our reputation, permit me to identify one classic example of how these advisories are ill-informed. One of the advisories talked about airport bandits. The Member for Siparia talked about airport bandits today, to the extent that she quoted from the editorial of the *Express* newspaper of Thursday, January 23 under the headline: “Making a bad situation worse.”

[*Dr. Nanan rose*]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Excuse me. The Member has risen on a point of order.

**Dr. Nanan:** Standing Order 36(7). The Member continues to make reference to “her” and “she”. Call the Member by her proper title, “hon. Member”.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Point taken. Could you please continue?

**Hon. Member:** Is that a point of order?

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Well, he has identified the proper Standing Order.

**Hon. C. Robinson-Regis:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, I repeat. The *Express* of Thursday, January 23, 2003 and I quote:

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“Given the stated reluctance of some of our own nationals to return home to be preyed upon by airport bandits, it cannot be surprising that other countries have taken to warning their citizens about coming here. If our own people no longer feel safe, why should we expect anyone else to?”

Can you imagine a local newspaper talking about that situation of airport bandits and the Member for Siparia also quoting the issue of the airport bandits? However, permit me to set the record straight in relation to that particular issue, because it is the issue that was raised by the Member for Siparia and by the *Express* newspaper. The police records indicate that the last time there was a report on airport bandits was on April 22, 2002. The time before that was in March 2002. If it is that they have stopped reporting, that is one issue, but the police records indicate that for almost a year there have been no reports of airport bandits. That is the same type of reckless behaviour that causes countries to talk about advisories for Trinidad and Tobago.

So when they refer to these advisories, it is left to us on this side to indicate that there has been a certain amount of recklessness in terms of what is said by those in authority. The point must be made—[*Crosstalk*] The Germans who were robbed, it was not a situation of airport bandits. Maybe it was port bandits. [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Please, hon. Members, and in particular the Member for Couva South, why are you behaving like this? I think many persons will see you on the television, so please, let the hon. Member continue with her contribution.

**Hon. C. Robinson-Regis:** The point that must be made is that the true airport bandits sit on that side, [*Desk thumping*] because they have used the airport of Trinidad and Tobago—\$1.6 billion taken from the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, on a point of order. Standing Order 33(5)—I am no airport bandit and neither is any Member on this side—imputing improper motives.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Go ahead, Member, but let us stay away from that. That is why, hon. Members, when you start with the crosstalk, what you find is, for every action there is usually a reaction. So address me, hon. Member, and let us move forward.

**Hon. C. Robinson-Regis:** That is why on each occasion I come back to the issue of credibility. They say that they are not airport bandits, but it was their Cabinet that sat and instructed Nipdec to award a contract to one of their own for \$1.6 billion for the construction of the airport of Trinidad and Tobago, and every

single day in the newspapers we are seeing their type of behaviour being spoken about during the airport commission of enquiry.

Do you know what is amazing? The Member for Siparia came today and talked about three murders in 14 hours, and the Member for Siparia linked that to the reason we are having these advisories, and so forth. But the question that I want to ask is, when two persons were murdered at the Prime Minister's residence, why was there not an advisory? You had two persons in one minute, no advisory. When one government minister was charged for murder, there was no advisory. When two government ministers were charged for making false declarations, there was no advisory. When one of their councillors was charged with assault and robbery, there was no advisory. When one of their councillors was assassinated, there was absolutely no advisory. I repeat that there is an amnesia that exists on that side, and I repeat that once they are not in power, they will not support; they will come with ill-timed motions to change the Constitution, to upset the Constitution, to say that the Constitution is leading to divisiveness. [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Member for Nariva, would you please be quiet?

**Hon. C. Robinson-Regis:** Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The Member for Siparia, I repeat, indicated that there are widespread public calls for constitutional reform. Let me make the point at this juncture that the Independent Senators went on an outreach to the public to solicit requests for constitutional reform and the record of those meetings indicates that when they went to Arima there were 20 persons and 10 speakers; when they went to Chaguanas there were five speakers; when they went to San Fernando, nine persons; Tunapuna, seven persons; Sangre Grande, 11 persons spoke; Port of Spain, 13 persons spoke; Rio Claro, four persons spoke; Diego Martin, 13 persons spoke. In fact, the total attendance throughout Trinidad and Tobago in relation to constitutional reform, was a turnout of 750 people out of 1.3 million people of Trinidad and Tobago.

#### ADJOURNMENT

**The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley):** Mr. Deputy Speaker, I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to Monday, January 27, at 1.30 p.m. On that date, I would like to inform the House, we would be debating the report from the Finance Committee which met earlier today, as well as the Finance (Variation of Appropriation) Bill.

*Adjournment*

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*Question put and agreed to.*

*House adjourned accordingly.*

*Adjourned at 4.30 p.m.*