

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES*Friday, December 05, 2003*

The House met at 1.30 p.m.

PRAYERS[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]**FAMILY PROCEEDINGS (NO. 2) BILL**

A Bill relating to family proceedings, brought from the Senate [*The Attorney General*]; read the first time.

PAPERS LAID

1. Annual audited financial statements of Point Lisas Industrial Port Development Corporation Limited for the financial year ended December 31, 2002. [*The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley)*]
2. Annual audited financial statements of Telecommunications Services of Trinidad and Tobago Limited for the financial year ended March 31, 2003. [*Hon. K. Valley*]

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

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley): Mr. Speaker, the Government is asking to defer questions Nos. 1, 8 and 10; however, questions Nos. 3, 4, 5 and 9 will be answered today.

Mr. Singh: Mr. Speaker, may I ask when the Government would be able to answer questions Nos. 1, 8 and 10?

Hon. K. Valley: Mr. Speaker, we are asking for a deferral of two weeks.

Mr. Singh: Mr. Speaker, I am normally very gracious with the hon. Leader of Government Business, but having regard to the fact that he already sought a deferral on question No. 1 last week for one week, one would think that a one-week deferral might be appropriate in the circumstances.

Hon. K. Valley: Mr. Speaker, while I agree with the Member, some research is being done on the questions, hence the reason I am asking for a deferral of two weeks.

Mr. Speaker: All I can say to Members on the Government side and Ministers is, it is the wish of the Chair when questions are posed, that you try your best to answer them when they fall due.

Hon. K. Valley: I can assure you that we do our very best to do that, but at times it is not practical.

Agreement or Memorandum of Understanding (Aluminum Smelter)

3. Mr. Ganga Singh (*Caroni East*) asked the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Industries:

Could the Minister indicate:

- (a) Whether the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has entered into an Agreement or Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to build an Aluminum Smelter in Trinidad and Tobago?
- (b) If the answer to (a) is in the affirmative, could the Minister state:
 - (i) the parties to the Agreement/MOU;
 - (ii) the signatories;
 - (iii) the terms and conditions?

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Hon. Eric Williams): The Government of Trinidad and Tobago does not have any agreement or Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to build an aluminum smelter in Trinidad and Tobago. However, on September 28, 2002 the National Gas Company (NGC), a fully state-owned company, signed an MOU with a party to study the feasibility of an aluminum smelter in Trinidad and Tobago.

It should be noted that the MOU includes a confidentiality agreement which, among other things, states that: “all information with respect to the project shall be treated as confidential by the Parties, and shall not be disclosed to any Third Party without the prior written consent of the Party who has produced or developed same.”

Specifically, the potential aluminum investor has consistently requested that the NGC and the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago refrain from

publicly stating their interest in an aluminum project in Trinidad. Therefore, this request restricts NGC from disclosing the name of the other contracting party until a project agreement is approved.

However, the parties are to work together in developing the project but either party is entitled to carry out discussions, or to negotiate with any other party relating to the preparation of an aluminum project in the republic. In other words, they can talk to anybody as they wish.

Given the answer at (a), it is inappropriate to disclose the names of the party other than the NGC.

(i) The MOU was signed by presidents of both companies.

(ii) It is inappropriate to divulge this information at this time.

In addition to the discussions being held with the above potential aluminum investor, exploratory talks have indeed been held with another aluminum company on a possible Trinidad smelter. However, no MOU has been executed and their last contact with the NGC was in July of this year.

Thank you.

Mr. Singh: Mr. Speaker, a supplemental. Could the Minister indicate to this honourable House whether or not—from this unnamed party to the MOU with NGC for the erection of an aluminum smelter—he sought the consent to place the name of that party in the Parliament?

Hon. E. Williams: In light of the repeated requests of the party to not divulge their name, I think the answer is self-explanatory.

Mr. Singh: Would you say that approach is consistent with transparency and accountability?

Hon. E. Williams: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

Proposed Caribbean Gas Pipeline

4. Mr. Ganga Singh (*Caroni East*) asked the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Industries:

Could the Minister state:

(a) Whether a pre-feasibility survey or a feasibility survey has been conducted or is being conducted on the proposed Caribbean Gas Pipeline?

- (b) If the answer to (a) is in the affirmative, could the Minister indicate:
- (i) the findings of this survey;
 - (ii) the cost of it;
 - (iii) the name of the entity that was awarded this survey contract?

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Hon. Eric Williams): Mr. Speaker, two pre-feasibility studies have been conducted to date. The first study was an internal one, which was conducted by the Intra-Caribbean Gas Pipeline Company (ICGPC) and the second by JP Kenney Group out of Houston, Texas that was funded by EOG resources.

In addition, the National Gas Company of Trinidad and Tobago Limited executed a formal confidentiality agreement with the private company Intra-Caribbean Gas Pipeline Company on June 26, 2003.

The agreement sets out in principle a mechanism to allow the parties to discuss technical, commercial and other related matters on the proposed project. The agreement is effective for a period of three years. All the information contained in the pre-feasibility studies is at this time the property of the ICGPC and, as such, remains under confidential cover except for the few presentations made by the ICGPC at several fora that can be deemed public domain information.

In general, the project under consideration is for the construction of a high-pressure natural gas transmission line with interconnect spur lines to be constructed from the east coast of Trinidad thence along the eastern Caribbean islands chain terminating in the French Dominion territory of Guadeloupe. The network system will transport approximately 100 to 150 million standard cubic feet per day of natural gas that will be used in these islands as fuel for power generation.

With respect to part (b) of the question, summaries of the key findings of the two studies indicate that the project is indeed viable. The first study was funded by the ICGPC and the second by EOG resources, the quanta are not known to us.

It should be noted that the project is still in the early phase of development. The ICGPC continues to meet with potential local and foreign investors with the hope of entering into a formal MOU with interested parties. Additionally, it is proposed that a detailed feasibility study and a limited Front End Engineering Design (FEED) will be conducted on the project. This activity is expected to commence in the first quarter of 2004.

The results from these studies will provide the basis for a decision as to whether or not to proceed with the execution phase of the project. Project participants will be requested to fund this element of development work.

The National Gas Company of Trinidad and Tobago continues to support development work on this project.

Mr. Singh: Will the Government of Trinidad and Tobago be participating in this project?

Hon. E. Williams: At this time, Mr. Speaker, that has not been determined.

**Alleged Fraudulent Transfer of TSTT Funds
(Criminal Investigation of)**

5. Mr. Ganga Singh (*Caroni East*) asked the hon. Minister of Public Utilities and the Environment:

Could the Minister indicate:

- (a) Whether there has been a criminal investigation into the alleged fraudulent transfer of significant sums of money from the Telecommunication Services of Trinidad and Tobago (TSTT)?
- (b) If the answer to (a) is in the affirmative, could the Minister indicate the quantum of TSTT money allegedly transferred?

The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley): Mr. Speaker, first of all, this question is properly directed to the Minister of Public Administration and Information.

With respect to part (a) of the question—yes, there is an ongoing criminal investigation being conducted into the alleged fraudulent transfer of significant sums of money from TSTT. Upon discovery of the fraud, the matter was immediately reported to the police.

With respect to part (b) of the question, the Parliament is advised that the quantum of the money transferred was US \$4,271,272.59. The money was transferred on two separate occasions; the first was transferred on November 12, 2002 in the sum of US \$2,036,528.75. Again, on December 12, 2002 another payment in the sum of US \$2,234,743.84 was made. I am sure the .84 cents is United States also, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Singh: Just for clarification, Mr. Speaker. It is four million—how much United States dollars?

Hon. K. Valley: It is US \$4,271,272.59.

Electronic Debit Cards
(Details of)

9. Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar (*Siparia*) asked the hon. Minister of Education:

Would the Minister state:

- (a) The number of electronic debit cards already issued to parents, and the number still to be issued with respect to school textbooks;
- (b) The total value of these electronic debit cards;
- (c) The total cost to government for the supply of these electronic debit cards;
- (d) The Head and Sub-head and/or Vote within the appropriations for fiscal year 2002/2003 and/or 2003/2004 from which monies have been drawn and/or would be drawn to meet the total value and supply cost of these electronic debit cards;
- (e) The name of the supplier of the electronic debit cards;
- (f) Whether tenders were invited for the supply of these electronic debit cards;
- (g) The procedure and criteria used to select the supplier of the electronic debit cards?

The Minister of Education (Sen. The Hon. Hazel Manning): Mr. Speaker, I rise to reply to the question posed on various aspects of the electronic debit cards as a part of the school textbooks initiative of the Government.

In March 2003, the Ministry of Education, as a continuation of its pledge to assist parents with the provision of textbooks for school children, initiated the process of discussion with the retail banking sector to determine an appropriate mechanism for the delivery of the book grant.

Initial discussions revealed that the direct deposit method into the individual recipients' account was the preferred mechanism. However, when the banking institutions stipulated that recipients had to maintain accounts with them and that the account numbers would have to be divulged, the ministry did not wish to proceed in this way.

A survey carried out by the Ministry of Education also revealed that a significant number of the recipient population did not maintain active bank accounts.

The second mechanism considered was a plastic card. This proposal was suggested to the ministry in April 2003 but was not exhaustively explored because of the preoccupation with the more attractive direct deposit method. Given the emerging constraints, the plastic card proposal provided the ministry with the attractiveness of a wider recipient population as well as no requirement for persons to hold bank accounts. [*Interruption*]

Further, no information that could be regarded as confidential would have been required of the individuals, and so the Member for Siparia has raised the following specific matters—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Sen. The Hon. H. Manning: The number of electronic debit cards already issued to parents is 48,356. These were issued in the value of \$1,000 and were to be used at stores where textbooks or other school supplies were purchased, or to be purchased. The number of cards still to be issued to parents with respect to school textbooks is 4,644. Cards are still outstanding because of queries, differences in signature, and/or changes in family status due to death or parental or guardian relationship making a total of 53,000 cards.

The total value of these electronic debit cards, the total value of the cards issued is \$48,356,000. The total cost to Government for supply of these electronic debit cards, the service fee for the supply of these cards is \$2,520,000.00. The total cost therefore, is the cost of the credit associated with the cards, that is, \$53 million plus the banking service fee.

With respect to part (c) of the question, it is Head 26 Ministry of Education, Sub-head 4 Current Transfers and Subsidies, Item 007 Household, sub-item 13: Book Grant Secondary School Students.

The electronic debit cards were supplied to the Ministry of Education by Republic Bank Limited, and the ministry is advised that the bank obtained the cards from EFT Source Inc. of Nashville, Tennessee in the United States of America on behalf of the bank.

Tenders were invited for the supply of the electronic debit cards in May, 2003. The Ministry of Education approached the Central Tenders Board for permission to retain the service offered at the Republic Bank Credit Card Centre and to source selective tenderers for this activity. The rules, regulations, and the procedures of the Central Tenders Board were rigorously pursued.

As a consequence, the ministry finalized its decision to explore the use of the plastic card solution for the book grant and began work with the Republic Bank

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Credit Card Centre to develop a solution and adapt it for use and accessibility to the recipients and the ministry. A formal contract was signed in September, 2003 between the Ministry of Education and Republic Bank Limited.

The following four retail banks responded to the invitation; Republic Bank Limited, May 28; Republic Bank Limited, May 27; Scotia Bank Trinidad and Tobago Limited, April 17; and the First Citizens Bank Limited, May 26. However, only Republic Bank Credit Card Centre was able to provide a detailed plastic card solution meeting all the criteria, all the specifications and expectations of the ministry.

The Ministry of Education approached the Central Tenders Board for permission to retain the service offered by the Republic Bank Credit Card Centre as the sole selective tenderer for this activity. The rules, regulations and the procedures of the Central Tenders Board were rigorously pursued.

The Ministry of Education, recognizing that it had faced many challenges in the management of the book grant in 2002 set about to alleviate a re-concurrence and proposed that a financial institution, one with which the public was familiar and had had previous experience with electronic card systems and their management should act as the agent of the Ministry of Education for this purpose.

Of the proposals received, it was only the Republic Bank Limited that possessed the required resources, had the experience of putting large volumes of information in electronic format, had an agent who would be able to supply the cards in a relatively short time, and demonstrated to the Ministry of Education that it had all the support systems that would allow for the expeditious handling of the book grant.

In light of this, the Ministry of Education approached the Central Tenders Board, which required the officers responsible to defend its proposal to deal with the Republic Bank Limited as the sole selective tenderer.

Thank you.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: What arrangements, if any, has the ministry put in place to ensure that the 4,644 children for whom books are outstanding are in possession of books for use in schools?

Sen. The Hon. H. Manning: The supervisors in the fields are in touch with the principals. There is a system in place in the schools in making these books available, we have put in each school On-the-Job Training (OJT) staff so there is an administrative staff in place. The principals are involved, the supervisors are involved and the system is continually monitored.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: Do these 4,644 children have textbooks from the ministry?

Sen. The Hon. H. Manning: These children were advised by the press, the teachers, and the ministry to go ahead and get their books. A number of them have, the schools have extra books and the children are allowed to use the books in school.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: Another supplemental. Were the invitations for tenders advertised in the newspapers?

Sen. The Hon. H. Manning: We sent letters out to a number of banks as I have just explained in this document and they responded.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: So it was not advertised. Am I correct to say it was not advertised?

Sen. The Hon. H. Manning: It was not advertised in the newspapers, the banks were told. We wrote the banks telling them and they responded, all the banks, and I have listed them for you.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: In your listing, you listed Republic Bank twice. I do not know if you made a mistake.

Sen. The Hon. H. Manning: No, it is the credit card.

The following questions stood on the Order Paper:

**Agreement or Memorandum of Understanding
GTECH**

1. Would the hon. Minister of Finance indicate:
 - (a) Whether the National Lotteries Control Board (NLCB) and the Betting Levy Board (BLB) entered into an Agreement or Memorandum of Understanding with GTECH for the provision of Video Terminals in Trinidad and Tobago?
 - (b) If the answer to (a) is in the affirmative would the Minister:
 - (i) indicate the terms and conditions of this agreement?
 - (ii) advise whether this agreement was approved by the Minister of Finance? [*Mr. G. Singh*]

**High Court Actions
(Policy Position of)**

8. Would the hon. Attorney General state:
- (a) The exact amount of money owed to the State by Mr. Patrick Manning arising out of his unsuccessful 1997 High Court Actions against the State;
 - (b) What steps has the Attorney General taken to recover these moneys;
 - (c) Does the Government have a policy position with respect to citizens who have lost legal matters against the State and have been ordered to pay costs;
 - (d) If so, can he provide a brief outline of this policy? [*Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar*]

**Regional Judicial and Legal Service Commission
(Privileges and Benefits to Members)**

10. Would the hon. Attorney General state:
- (a) The amount of money spent on the installation ceremony and cocktail reception for the members of the Regional Judicial and Legal Service Commission held on Thursday, August 21st, 2003;
 - (b) What was the source of funding for this expenditure;
 - (c) When and by whom were the members of the Regional Judicial and Legal Service Commission appointed;
 - (d) What remuneration, privileges and benefits, if any, are the members of the Regional Judicial and Legal Service Commission being given by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and the Head and Sub-head and/or vote within the appropriations for fiscal year 2002/2003 and/or 2003/2004 from which monies have been drawn and/or would be drawn to meet these costs? [*Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar*]

ADJOURNMENT MOTION (LEAVE)

**Piarco International Airport
(Danger of partially repaved Runway)**

Mr. Ganga Singh (*Caroni East*): Mr. Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order 12 of the House of Representatives, I hereby seek your leave to move the

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adjournment of the House for the purpose of discussing the following matter of urgent public importance: mainly, the danger that the sub-standard, partially repaved Piarco International Airport runway poses to air travel to and from Trinidad.

The matter is definite since it relates to the specific existence of the following:

1. 600 metres of sub-standard repaved surface on the western approach end.
2. 150 metres of sub-standard repaved surface on the eastern end.
3. A dangerous lip where the newly repaved surface meets the old surface.
4. The non-functioning of the instrument landing system.

The matter is urgent having regard to the following:

1. The statement by the hon. Minister of Works and Transport at page 4 of the *Trinidad Express* of December 04, 2003 that repaving of the runway of the Piarco International Airport has been suspended for the next three months because tests on the specification for the aggregate showed that it did not come up to standard.
2. The non-functioning of the instrument landing system means that aircraft approach the runway with diminished accuracy and this is heightened when visibility is poor as during heavy rainfall.
3. Several aircraft using the runway in its present condition have experienced damage to their landing equipment.
4. The airport was shut down for several hours when a departing aircraft blew away part of the newly repaved area.

The matter is of public importance since the substandard nature of the newly repaved surface and the unavailability of the instrument landing system represents a clear and present danger to the lives of people travelling and working in the aircraft, personnel at the Piarco International Airport and the communities in and around the Piarco International Airport.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the leave for which the hon. Member for Caroni East seeks is denied. Again, may I refer the hon. Member to Standing Order 11 subsections (2) and (3).

**INTEGRITY IN PUBLIC LIFE REGULATIONS
JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE REPORT**

(Adoption)

The Attorney General (Sen. The Hon. John Jeremie): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move the following Motion standing in my name:

Be it resolved that this House adopt the Report of the Joint Select Committee appointed to consider and report on the:

- (i) Integrity in Public Life (Prescribed Forms) Regulations, 2003; and
- (ii) Integrity in Public Life (Furnishing of Information) Regulations, 2003.

Mr. Speaker, hon. Members will recall that on October 06, 2003 regulations made by the Integrity Commission pursuant to section 41(1)(d) and (e) of the Integrity in Public Life Act, 2000 were laid in this House.

The regulations were laid in the other place on October 21, 2003. Hon. Members will recall that the regulations dealt with two matters; the furnishing of information and the prescribed forms in respect of declarance.

2.00 p.m.

Hon. Members will also recall that the House resolved on October 31, 2003 pursuant to Standing Order 79, to appoint a joint select committee to consider the regulations and to report back to the Parliament no later than December 01, 2003. On November 04, in the other place, a similar resolution was passed. The committee, which was subsequently formed, comprised 10 members: five from this House and five from the other place. I had the honour to be asked to serve as Chairman of this committee. The remit of the committee was as I have stated it and the work of the committee is set out in the report of the joint select committee which was laid in this House on the last occasion.

In short, four meetings were held at which several areas of concern were identified, both with the forms and with the Furnishing of Information Regulations. The Integrity Commission was kind enough to respond to an invitation issued by the committee. Certain areas of concern were clarified by the commission, others were not; yet others were agreed to by the commission for subsequent action. At the end of the day the committee felt that the forms should be approved by the Parliament even though, as I have said, several areas of concern were identified with the forms themselves.

The committee's report was unanimous, both in its findings and in its conclusions. I should like to thank, in particular, the Members of the Opposition who participated fully in all of the deliberations of the committee and signed off on the report, in particular.

Mr. Speaker, corruption is too important an issue for us to politicize it. The joint select committee's report is a good start. In the other place the report was laid and the rules affirmed before December 01. The Motion in my name is in the first instance to adopt the report and we have done it together.

Mr. Speaker, I beg to move.

Question proposed.

Mr. Subhas Panday (*Princes Town*): Mr. Speaker, may I take this opportunity to congratulate the hon. Attorney General on his maiden speech in this Parliament. Indeed, he sounded like a maiden, but just to let him know, Sir, that this is a place of rough riders.

The hon. Attorney General thanked Members of the Opposition for their contribution to these regulations. I want to inform him, Sir, that the reason the Members of the Opposition took such a position was because the United National Congress and, we, the Members on this side, also view the issue of corruption and integrity in public life as an important one. [*Interruption*] You could grunt like a pig as much as you want.

However, he has thanked us for participating in the deliberations of the committee but I think this House and this country need to also thank us for the input which we have put into these deliberations, because the PNM had come to that committee without any genuine intention of dealing with integrity in public life. They do not want to deal with corruption. As a matter of fact, we caught the Attorney General in his maiden demeanour and what he wanted was consensus. He wanted all of us to sign that document the same day as we deliberated. When we realized that he wanted consensus, we decided to ensure that the public was not shortchanged.

Mr. Speaker, what this Government asked this committee to recommend to this Parliament, they came first of all and said—and I go to recommendation 20—that these regulations be referred back to the Integrity Commission for further consideration of paragraph 3 with a view to increasing the period of furnishing. It goes on: “to remove instructions at pages 24, 25 and 26 of the regulations.” Also, that the Integrity Commission liaise with relevant departments in the Ministry of

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the Attorney General to determine whether these regulations or the parent Act have to be amended in order to vest the commission with power to extend.

That was to prevaricate. In other words, send it back to the commission and let it hold up there again so that the men who are feeding from the trough, the PNM corruptionists who are feeding, they give them more time to run, because time has already expired. November 30 was the time to fill out these forms. The time was coming but they wanted to send it back to the Integrity Commission so that time would be extended so their boys could feed from the trough for a longer period.

The records will reveal that as we went through number by number, we made a recommendation. As I said, in the proposed recommendation, the United National Congress changed it in the committee and we said that long recommendation 20 which they had given us has been changed and what their position had cause to be included in that regulation—and the records would reveal—that was my contribution.

“Your Committee wishes to report to Parliament that it has completed its deliberations and recommends that the Integrity in Public Life (Furnishing of Information) Regulations, 2003 and the Integrity in Public Life (Prescribed Forms) Regulations, 2003 be approved by Parliament.”

Do not send it back to the commission to play for time. If you are really interested in dealing with corruption, let us deal with it as expeditiously as possible:

“The Commission has requested however...”

And we, of course, as people who are good negotiators—

“to note the detailed concerns ventilated with them as a matter of urgency.”

These recommendations have come as they are today as a result of the insistence of the Members of the Opposition in that committee. [*Desk thumping*]

You see, we have followed the history. This Integrity in Public Life Act, No. 83, as amended, was assented to since October 2000. Those regulations only came before us recently. They may want to argue that during the first year there was no Parliament so therefore we could not have brought it. But if the Government was really interested in dealing with corruption, it could have requested the Integrity Commission to have the regulations prepared so that at the first sitting of this Parliament they could have been introduced. But, no, they had not been introduced. It is almost 18 months now and it is only now that they have been

introduced. And they were introduced only at a time when the Member for Fyzabad had gone to court. It is when there were many requests from the public and the Members of the Opposition to have these forms that they were forced to bring them to the Parliament.

We ask the question: Why did the Government fail to bring these regulations before to the Parliament? The answer is simple. They are so corrupted! They have institutionalized corruption! They have come so boldfaced in their activities that they did not care to bring the regulations, because they do not want their boys to be caught. [*Interruption*] Imagine you are talking about integrity and you do not want to call the name of the company!

Mr. Speaker, one must read the law and put the law into the record so that the public will know exactly what this PNM is about. Clause 11 of the Integrity in Public Life Act No. 83 of 2000 says:

“A person shall, within three months of becoming a person in public life, complete and file with the Commission in the prescribed form, a declaration of his income, assets and liabilities in respect of the previous year...”

What is the intent of the legislation? What is the intent of the law? The intent of the law is, if you have millions of dollars, as the Member for Ortoire/Mayaro said that he had before, let us know how much you had; tell the commission within three months of coming to office what were your assets and liabilities so that there would be a starting point from where the Commission can follow. Because you cannot come after a year or so in office to say: “I had money before I came in there.”

So this says that after the three months when you have declared your income, assets and liabilities, thereafter, on May 31 every year, you must then fill those forms. That is the law. The aim was to see the status of your income as time progresses, so that the Integrity Commission could really have good insight as to what is taking place. But what has happened is, because there were no regulations, there were no disclosures for the year 2000 when the PNM took office; no disclosures in 2001 and there would be no disclosures for 2002 and up to May 31, 2003.

Section 11(2) of the Act says:

“Notwithstanding the provisions of subsection (1) the Commission may, in any particular case, for good cause, extend the time for the furnishing of a declaration for a period not exceeding six months.”

So if May had passed and these forms were presented and approved as has been done today, the commission then could have extended the time to give us until October 30 so that we would fall in line with the law. But the PNM deliberately frustrated the law; they deliberately undermined the law, in that, as indicated by the hon. Attorney General, it was laid on October 06, knowing full well that November 30 was the last date; knowing full well that the exercise could not have been completed. That is why we say that this PNM Government is not really interested in corruption. They only want to take a brush and paint UNC by commissions of enquiry.

For example, the moment they went into office, they wanted to play corruption busters. They set up a commission of enquiry into the Biche High School. What has happened to that commission of enquiry? At one time you heard, that documents were lost; another time, they have found the documents, but up to now they have found no corruption with that school. But this is the way of the PNM: Dig corruption! Pelt mud at people! So that when they pelt mud at people, they could run the real corruption, as they have been doing.

Then they had a commission of enquiry into Piarco airport and they put one of the biggest clowns to chair that enquiry. That was a circus. It was so biased, so designed to pelt mud and to defame and denigrate the UNC that the man who they put there to do the hatchet job turned out to be a complete clown. Everyday when you went home they said it was like one of those soap operas. All of a sudden they had to stop it. How much did they pay for it? They used these commissions of enquiry to give jobs to the boys. They paid Guerra, for example, millions of dollars! They say “We are dealing with corruption” when they themselves perpetuate corruption.

When they got the report on the commission of enquiry into the airport, they had to sanitize it. What do you want to do? Sanitize it on your own behalf? Have your own men from Trintoplan and other firms been implicated? Have Ministers of this Government been implicated? But you are sanitizing; you are “pappy-showing”; you are “mamaguying”; you are using corruption as a political tool. That is all you are doing. But to deal with real corruption, to give the commission the power to deal with you, to investigate you, to analyze the data from you, you have failed to do it.

The PNM intends to frustrate this legislation. [*Interruption*] He smiles and he grins like a Cheshire cat, because he knows what he is doing. They know full well that the time has elapsed for filling these forms for this year. So all the boys in the

state corporations who are getting free dialysis and hiding it and making deals, they let them go. The Prime Minister said the net is too wide, but the net should be widened. The reason he is saying so is that the PNM wants to protect their boys in the state enterprises who are making deals.

So they are given a three-year period to empty the trough; to eat everything from this trough, and then they would say, "You see this nonsense about signing these declarations, I going home; I leaving." That is why they have held back these regulations, to give them time to run. But as the Member for Diego Martin Central says, "They could run but they cannot hide." We would find them. So this PNM has no intention whatsoever of dealing with it.

If one looks at the law, one would see that one has to declare the assets of a dependent child. So what is happening is, it gives them time also to put moneys on those children's names and by the time these regulations are completed, they would have come out of the net. So while the PNM is asking to close the net, the United National Congress is asking for the net to be widened. We are asking to be included in this net, not only the persons mentioned there, but any officer in any state enterprise or in the public service who has the capacity and who, in fact, gives out contracts. Those people must also be brought within the net.

As a matter of fact, we request also that certain police officers be brought into the net. The officers we suspect are, for example, those officers who deal with the investigations in the issuance of a firearms users' licence. Everybody knows the price that you have to pay. Bring them into the net too. If you have public consultation on this, you will see that people would ask you to bring some of the licensing officers in the net also.

We are saying that the PNM has no intention, really, to deal with corruption, but we inform them that as we have done in this committee, we shall also carry out our functions here. In the *Newsday* of December 04, 2003 the hon. Attorney General is quoted as saying: "Integrity is my Priority." We say to him, he does not know the company he is in. They would frustrate him.

That is why up to today he has not brought legislation to amend the Integrity Act to compel forms to be filled retroactively. But when you attack him, he says: "Do not attack my people in the ministry." So what the United National Congress has done in its interest to assist is draft a bill which we shall circulate to the Members. It is a bill to amend the Integrity in Public Life Act to allow the

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Integrity Commission to extend the time for persons in public life to furnish declarations for the years 2001 and 2002. It says:

“Section 11 of the Act is amended by deleting subsection (2) and substituting the following subsection:

(2) Notwithstanding the provisions of subsection (1), the Commission may, in any particular case, for good cause:

- (a) extend the time for the furnishing of a declaration in respect of the years 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002 respectively for a period not exceeding six months from January 01, 2004; and
- (b) extend the time for the furnishing of a declaration in respect of any other year or other year for a period not exceeding six months.”

So, Mr. Speaker, we have drafted the bill. Where in history have you found the Opposition drafting a bill? I have made copies for all Members on the opposite side, and we give the hon. Attorney General the undertaking today, if he brings that bill in Parliament on Monday, we shall support it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

The Attorney General (Sen. The Hon. John Jeremie): Mr. Speaker, there is very little in substance for me to reply to. The hon. Member for Princes Town gave a colourful, if somewhat highly strung, response to what was really a simple matter. The regulations, as the hon. Member well knows, are subsidiary regulations. This Parliament has delegated authority to the Integrity Commission to make regulations. This they have done. The joint select committee was comprised of Opposition Members, Government Members and an Independent Senator from the other place. They all made valuable contributions. I am delighted to hear today of the Member’s concerns with respect to integrity legislation in particular and I shall be bringing the necessary amendments to the Act as a matter of real urgency and I trust that the Members on the other side would support those amendments.

I beg to move. [*Desk thumping*]

Question put and agreed to.

Report adopted.

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie: Hon. Members, pursuant to the decision of the House just recorded, I beg to move that this House approve the Integrity in Public

life (Prescribed Forms) Regulations, 2003 and the Integrity in Public Life (Furnishing of Information) Regulations, 2003.

Question put and agreed to.

OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH (NO. 2) BILL

Order for second reading read.

The Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development (Hon. Lawrence Achong): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move,

That the Bill respecting the safety, health and welfare of persons at work, be now read a second time.

I think it was President Reagan who said “So much more could be accomplished if it matters not who gets the credit.” I am about to pilot a Bill here, credit for which must be given entirely to the United National Congress Government. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker, for the past 25 years, successive governments of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago have been making efforts to modernize the safety and health system. This call for modernization stems from the fact that under the existing law only factories are really singled out for attention in respect of inspection and investigation. As a result, there is a high degree of under-reporting of work-related accidents, injuries and diseases. For example, there is no duty for a company to report to the Industrial Safety Inspectorate an accident in which a worker fell from a lamppost, since under the law the lamppost is not a factory.

Notwithstanding the under-reporting, the industrial inspectorate has determined that there is a continuing and high rate of work-related fatal and non-fatal injury and disease. It is reported that there is an average of 600 reports from factories alone each year. No one would disagree that every year significant numbers of people die and many more are severely affected by work-related injuries and accidents. This situation poses a great challenge to safety and health in Trinidad and Tobago.

An examination of claims made of the NIS annually may prove to be very revealing. The statistics reveal that approximately 3,000 claims for insurance compensation arising from work-related injuries and diseases are made each year. The \$10 million paid out for these claims represents a very small amount when one considers other indirect costs associated with such events. It is argued that such other indirect costs may be as much as four times the direct costs. This untenable situation, if allowed to persist, can have a disastrous effect on the

country's economy. Work-related injury and disease impact on the ability of enterprises to have available the full potential of its work force. Consequently, there is a loss of man-days, not only in a simple sense, but a loss of man-days sometimes of its most skilful and competent employees.

Trinidad and Tobago's vision is to arrive at First World status by the year 2020. One of the critical measurements is the nature of standards of industry. Safety and health standards form part of the assessment of an enterprise's performance. Internationally, First World countries place a high degree on the treatment of safety and health as an integral part of business operations. This policy and the resulting occupational safety and health legislation is but the beginning of change in the safety and health environment to foster improved conditions of safety and health at the workplace and, by extension, improve the capacity of enterprises in Trinidad and Tobago to match paces with enterprises in the global economy.

Investment in safety and health is equivalent to good investment in the business itself. The law itself would emphasize transparency. It would clearly identify rights, obligations, responsibilities, duties, enforcement and compliance mechanisms which one would find difficulty in concluding under the present legal framework for health and safety.

The main theme that would be promoted is that work-related fatalities, accidents, injuries and diseases, are avoidable. Thus the vision is a Trinidad and Tobago free of accidents, injuries, diseases and death.

We in the Government see the Occupational Safety and Health Authority (OSHA) as the cornerstone for the development, in Trinidad and Tobago, of a modern framework for the operation of decent standards of safety and health and the protection of the working population from injury and disease. Our human capital must be protected. The enactment of this safety and health law would ensure that all persons who are employees at work or who are exposed to situations arising out of or in connection with work in an industrial establishment, would enjoy adequate safety, health, protection and welfare amenities.

2.30 p.m.

Additionally, Mr. Speaker, the proposed law is quite transparent, and it clearly identifies the rights, obligations, responsibilities, duties, enforcement and compliance mechanisms. These mechanisms ensure that the law and safety and

health institutions remain relevant to the changing world of work. It also provides a dynamic system of monitoring of the safety and health system to ensure that emphasis is placed on prevention.

Mr. Speaker, hon. Members on both sides of the House would have seen that the Occupational Safety and Health Authority (OSHA) promotes voluntary compliance, but is strong on enforcement to deter behaviours that are contrary to the promotion of a high standard of health, safety and welfare. I sincerely hope that the major stakeholders, who are the employers, unions, NGOs and Government, collaborate among themselves for the creation of an action plan to ensure that they, the stakeholders, believe and know that health and safe systems of work mean benefits to the industry and the national economy.

Mr. Speaker, to achieve the objectives which we have set for ourselves, some of which I have mentioned, the following strategies are required. Some of the strategies are in the Act itself. The first step is for this honourable House to pass this Bill today.

Secondly, the development of the safety and health authority with a wide range of functions, such as the continuous monitoring of policy, safety and health standards, and advice on safety and health, including any relevant regulations or laws.

Thirdly, the institutional strengthening of the Occupational Safety and Health Division of the Ministry of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development, through the creation of a modern health safety agency with responsibility for research, training, prevention, investigation and enforcement. The agency would serve as the implementation arm of the authority provided for under this proposed new law.

We have to widen the scope of categories of protected workers in factories and other industrial establishments. We must establish clear duties and responsibilities for workers' protection and employers, occupiers, designers, manufacturers and installers. Protection of pregnant women and other vulnerable workers would be dealt with in this proposed legislation.

Mr. Speaker, if one incident over the last decade showed us that there is need for such legislation, it is what occurred at Carlisle Tire in Point Fortin some two or three months ago. The workers of Carlisle Tire were subjected to the most inhumane, unsafe, unhealthy working conditions that I have seen in Trinidad and Tobago. This has resulted in the Government having to intervene for the protection of the workers. This piece of legislation, as I said, has been hung in

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fire for 25 years. The bulk of the work was done during the 1995 or 1966 to 2001 period and my former colleague must take full credit for that. [*Desk thumping*] But it does not matter who did the work, the end result is that the people of Trinidad and Tobago are going to benefit from this piece of legislation. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, if we could go into the Bill itself, we would see some of the things that the various sections deal with. Part III of the Bill provides for the right of an employee, with certain exceptions, to refuse to work or to do particular work where he has reason to believe that in so doing he is likely to endanger himself or another employee. It sets out a procedure for the reporting, investigation and resolution of the matter. There was a big hue and cry from employers that this particular section would have a negative effect on their operations. May I remind Members that such a provision already exists in the Industrial Relations Act? In the 37 years of that Act there have only been two instances where workers made use of that provision to stop working. So people need not be alarmed or fearful of this particular aspect of the Bill.

Part IV of the Bill provides for additional safety requirements in respect of the employment of young persons on dangerous machines, protective clothing and devices, dangerous fumes, and lack of oxygen.

Part V of the Bill makes provisions in relation to means for fire-fighting, and escaping in cases of fire. All these are contained in the Explanatory Note. I do not think this Bill should detain us too much this afternoon. It has been the subject of several committees—all sorts of committees. We started off with the employers being totally against the Bill. I am happy to announce that the Employers Consultative Association (ECA) told me today that they are supporting the Bill. [*Desk thumping*] They have come around 100 per cent in the last two years.

This Bill, as far as we are concerned, and I am sure I can speak, maybe on behalf of them, is Parliament's gift to the workers of Trinidad and Tobago for Christmas.

I beg to move.

Question proposed.

Mr. Basdeo Panday (*Couva North*): Mr. Speaker, this Bill is arguably the most contentious piece of legislation in this country's history. Few would disagree that we ought to send the particulars of this Bill to the Guinness Book of

World Records. To say that this legislation is overdue is an understatement of massive proportions. Today when I heard my friend from Point Fortin I was surprised, to say the least. I thought; do I sense a sort of crocodile tears? Oh hypocrisy, how shameless thou art.

The long wait for this Bill to be passed in this country, the most industrialized country in the Caribbean, has caused us to lag behind international standards in occupational safety and health. The irony of this piece of legislation is that, while the Members on the Government Benches opposed it over the years for their own narrow selfish interest, it has always had widespread support from the business community. As a matter of fact, you cannot now come to say that the business community now agrees with this Bill. This Bill is a product of the tripartite system introduced by the UNC in which this Bill went to the Ministry of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development, and was agreed to by the company. [*Desk thumping*] In fact, many of the multinational companies operating in this sector approved of this Bill. They have already implemented such safety standards as required by ISO 1910 and 1400 series.

A strong occupational safety and health culture is essential to good corporate governance. In the long run it is in the best interest of all the stakeholders that an aggressive and comprehensive regime of health and safety be adopted. It has been proven that in the long run the benefits of occupational safety and health practices to the employers far outweigh the costs incurred by introducing those health and safety measures.

Today, it is no coincidence that many of the best-run companies in the world are the best places to work. Through a comprehensive policy of occupational safety and health such companies have fewer accidents. They have less down time, fewer liabilities, they do not have to spend money and time in the court settling claims for compensation by employees. This is how the 21st Century corporate governance incorporates the practices in occupational safety and health to improve competitiveness and to make their businesses more efficient.

The underpinning philosophy of this Bill is that workers are capital assets to organizations. Gone are the days when they were viewed as being expendable. Today the most successful organizations in the world are the ones that cherish and value their workers. Such organizations know that the human resource is more valuable than the financial resources. That, however, is or was, I do not know, sadly, not the thinking of the PNM whose approach to corporate governance is somewhere in the 1970s. I think that their version for the country, as is their

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economic strategy, is all knocked up somewhere in the 1970s. It is called intellectual paralysis, I think. The PNM's idea of corporate governance is epitomized by the massive corruption and mismanagement at National Entrepreneurial Development Company (NEDCO), Community-based Environmental Protection and Enhancement Programme (CEPEP), Unemployment Relief Programme (URP) and National Housing Authority (NHA) refurbishment programmes. That is their idea of corporate governance. Their idea of tripartism is community leaders, gang members and terrorists, working together to drive the crime rate higher and higher at record levels. The philosophy of tripartism is nothing new. It has been long accepted that business, labour and government have skills and resources that are vital to helping build a more robust, competitive, international and regional global economy.

When the UNC came to office in 1995, we made several attempts to have the Occupational Safety and Health Bill passed. We adopted a tripartite approach to developing this legislation. We included public servants, trade unionists, employers and parliamentarians in the process. In all, thousands of man-hours were invested in this piece of legislation under the UNC. When we left office in 2001, after three attempts, and despite all our best efforts, we simply could not pass the Occupational Safety and Health legislation. Mr. Speaker, what has come over them all of a sudden?

We were able to build a new airport and 30 new high schools, to pave thousands of kilometres of roads, to raise teachers' salaries, to build a desalination plant—that incidentally produces the cheapest desalinated water in the world—and we were able to establish electricity generating capacity, but we could not pass the Bill. Why could we not pass this Bill before? The answer, Mr. Speaker, is the PNM. That is why we could not pass the Bill. Sadly, this Bill requires a special majority to be passed and so we needed the support of the PNM to pass it. They refused to give that support for purely selfish reasons. They were prepared to hurt the workers rather than do something that may make the UNC look good. No one called them obstructionist then. Each time we brought this Bill to Parliament we met with obstructionism, and objection after objection by the PNM. That obstructionism culminated in November 1999, when on the eve of the millennium, in full glare of the entire trade union fraternity, the PNM defeated this legislation, and in the process kicked up thousands of workers who were depending on this Bill to protect and enhance their rights.

What has happened? What has overcome you? Whilst the UNC felt that workers and employers should not enter the 21st Century without proper

legislative framework for occupational safety and health, the PNM felt otherwise. Trinidad and Tobago was allowed to enter the 21st Century without a modern piece of legislation. A modern legislative regime to protect workers was a crime; a crime that was successfully calculated and maliciously carried out by the PNM. You have not explained to this House, Mr. Minister, why you did not support this Bill. Why did you delay it? The Bill is the same Bill!

Mr. Speaker, if people are to enjoy the highest standard of living, they must be assured of safe working conditions. One cannot speak of Vision 2020, on the one hand, while on the other hand legislative mechanism for occupational safety and health remains prehistoric, to say the least. This Bill and its history, more than any other, point to the fundamental ideological demarcation that separates the UNC from the PNM. This ideological demarcation is anchored in the will of the UNC to at all times seek the interest of all the people of Trinidad and Tobago, as opposed to the will of the PNM, which is always geared to serving the interest of their financiers, Ministers and party hacks. That, Mr. Speaker, is the line in the sand, so to speak, that separates the UNC from the PNM.

Therein lies the reason for the PNM's refusal to support this legislation over the years. It is no secret that the PNM is anti-worker in its very nature. It is they who are also anti-people, incidentally. It is also no secret that the PNM has a long and well-documented history of being the traditional foe of the labour movement.

My own entry into national politics in 1965 was a result of the anti-worker, anti-democratic and anti-people Industrialization Stabilization Act of 1965. When one examines the PNM's history with the labour movement, and their utter contempt for the working class, one can understand how the present Minister of Health could have, with effortless ease, fired 9,000 workers, and in the process economically displaced an entire community. Mr. Speaker, back then he was Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, with special responsibility for destroying Caroni (1975) Limited. Today, he is the Minister of Health, and one wonders if this horseman of the apocalypse, having rained death and destruction on Caroni (1975) Limited, would now turn his gaze upon the doctors and nurses at the hospitals, who have already been labelled by his predecessor as UNC only because they look like Indians.

Mr. Speaker, the genesis of my struggle, and indeed, any party's struggle, to change this country into the paradise that I know God intended that it should be, lies in the bowels of the trade union movement. When I stand here today, I stand as a Member of Parliament who has had a long relationship with the trade union

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movement and that is a relationship of which I am proud. That relationship predates my becoming a Member of this House. It is a relationship that has been cemented with the blood, sweat and tears of thousands of citizens of this country. It is a relationship that has spanned four decades and one that has been defined locally, regionally and internationally. In all those years of struggle, the labour movement has never lost sight of what was its vision, to ensure that workers' rights are protected. That is why this Bill is so important.

We, on this side, stand firmly with the people of Trinidad and Tobago, whether they are from the business community, the labour movement the non-governmental organizations, whether they come from Caroni or from Laventille. Our record in Government is a testimony to this. The UNC has passed the Minimum Wages Order, the Maternity Protection Act to protect the rights of women in the workplace. We would have passed the Occupational Safety and Health Bill had it not been for the PNM's obstruction and destruction of this Bill. I suspect their disgust for workers' rights stems from the fact that there are several businessmen posing as Cabinet Ministers in the PNM.

Incidentally, Mr. Speaker, you know international drug dealers also claim that they are in business. Maybe they are afraid that they might, for example, have a bolt of cloth fall and injure one of their employees. Or, maybe one of them has a construction company, and is afraid that he may build a wall that could fall and damage the workers. Those are some of the reasons why they resisted this Bill for so long. There are anti-working moles inside the PNM. Whatever the reasons, the PNM seemed hell-bent on not passing this legislation. That is why at a recent consultation with the trade union movement I stated, unequivocally, that the UNC opposition would give support to this Bill whenever it was brought to Parliament. Mr. Speaker, they thought because of a certain stance that we adopted that they would trap us. They would bring the Bill here, and in accordance with this stance we would take a position against the Bill. But you will never determine the arena on which we fight! Never! [*Desk thumping*] We will determine the battleground! I believe that they are here today to, again, scam the labour movement.

I had first thought that what they were going to do is exactly what they did on the last occasion when this Bill was put before the House, that is to ask that it be referred to a joint select committee. They knew that we were going to take the stand we are taking now and they knew that would embarrass them. They had intended that they would send the Bill to a joint select committee and kill it once and for all again. But information has come to us that you are now in that

ineluctable position from which you cannot extricate yourself, and that you know that you cannot get away without passing the Bill today. Mr. Speaker, the strategy is to pass the Bill here today and when it goes to the Senate, to use the Independent Senators and so on to have the Bill sent to a Joint Select Committee and to kill it once again. [*Interruption*] We shall see. I hope I am wrong. I pray to God that I am wrong. But we shall see.

Mr. Speaker, I say this because I feel certain this is their intention. They may not get away with it, but it is surely their intention. Therefore, I think this country should know about the history of this Bill, so that perchance they should go to the Senate and try to scam the workers up there, people would know what they are doing.

The Occupational Safety and Health legislation made its appearance in the Caribbean in the early 1940s on the basis of a recommendation; I think it was, of the Moyne Commission, which followed the disturbances in the second half in the 1930s. That was done in order to investigate the working conditions of the people and so on. The recommendations of that Moyne Commission were embodied in the Factories Ordinance of 1948. That is the law that has been governing workers safety in this country. And that law itself, which is more than 50 years old, was based upon the old British Factories Act of 1891.

Trinidad and Tobago, in the late 1940s, was a vastly different place from what it is today. The accelerated process, the industrialized process based on oil and gas had not yet begun. Back then there was no Point Lisas Industrial Estate; there was no Atlantic LNG 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 and so on. I understand all those are coming. There were no offshore oil and gas platforms of the southern and eastern coastlines. The Factories Ordinance was, therefore, a reflection of the times. It was drafted and enacted in those times, but those times have changed.

As far back as 1973, because of the pressure from the labour movement, an expert from the United Nations Development Programme arrived in Trinidad and Tobago and began work aimed in part at making recommendations for the upgrading of existing Occupational Safety and Health legislation for this country. Two years later, in 1975, the first draft Bill on Occupational Safety and Health was prepared but no action was taken on it. That first draft Bill was taken to Parliament in 1975, however, it lapsed. It was further amended in 1979, but no action was taken on it. In 1979, it was again amended to become the 1984 draft, but that, too, never reached the Parliament. The PNM was in power at the time. Again in 1991, another version was produced. This draft was introduced in

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Parliament by the National Alliance for Reconstruction government, but again that, too, lapsed when the government demitted office in 1991.

Mr. Speaker, it took another three years for the then PNM administration to even look at the Occupational Safety and Health Bill. In 1994, a fifth version was produced and sent to the Legislative Review Committee and remained there until the PNM left office in 1995. In 1995, the UNC in its general election manifesto promised that legislation protecting the health and safety of workers in the workplace would be enacted during its term of office. In 1996, a version of the Bill was subjected to intense scrutiny at four public consultations, one technical symposium and several bilateral meetings of interest groups, including the Employers Consultative Association, the Trinidad and Tobago Chamber of Commerce and the National Trade Union Centre. In August 1997, after exhaustive consultation, this Bill was taken to Parliament and during that parliamentary discussion a call was made by the PNM, in opposition, for the Bill to be referred to a joint select committee for consideration. We have defeated them on repeating that strategy here today.

3.00 p.m.

Since the UNC needed the support, we agreed and sent the Bill to a joint select committee. The joint select committee made several changes, which gave rise to a new version of the Bill. The Bill was again introduced in the Parliament in November 1999, and to the great shock of the nation and the trade union fraternity it failed to get the support of the People's National Movement in Opposition. Since the Bill required the special majority, it could not be passed into law and the law also said it could not be brought back before six months.

Mr. Speaker, not undaunted by this, the UNC brought back the Bill in the Parliament in 2001. Once again, the People's National Movement had problems with it for a second time. It was referred to a joint select committee, for a second time. In October 2001, the Parliament was dissolved and the Bill was lost in December 2001. The then President, A.N.R. Robinson, installed the PNM into power and the rest is history.

When one examines the *Hansard* record, which I propose to do today incidentally, of the debates on this Bill in the honourable House, one begins to get an appreciation of exactly how the PNM thinks, and how they perceive the labour movement and how they perceive workers' rights.

Mr. Speaker, by and large, the points raised by the PNM—and that is why I am saying this is an act of hypocrisy today, or they are trapped by the UNC, and they

have no choice but to do what they are doing here today. As I said, this Bill had three incarnations under the UNC—1997, 1998 and 2001. The PNM's main points of argument against the Bill were the right of the worker to refuse to work when conditions endanger his safety and health. They see this as creating hardships for the employers.

The definition of what is an industrial estate, they saw as being too vague and leading to complications for the small business. All that has remained the same! The Bill would lead to business having higher operating costs and as such they would have to close down, especially small businesses. These were their objections. Another objection was a lack of personnel at the Ministry of Labour to implement the provisions of the Bill. They also argued that the Bill conferred too much power on the inspectors who could use that power to victimize employers. The Bill may be used by trade unionists to unjustly shut down companies. This was their perception of the trade union movement. Oh, how times change, and the more things change the more they seem the same.

When this Occupational Safety and Health Bill, 1997 was brought to this honourable House on August 15, 1997—Mr. Colm Imbert, the hon. Member for Diego Martin East, on August 15, 1997, and I want to read from *Hansard* what he said. The Bill creates:

“a bureaucracy which will have the effect of shutting down a large number of businesses in Trinidad and Tobago and make it extremely difficult for employers to operate economically. It will increase the cost of labour, production and the cost of goods and services, and I agree that if we do not amend this Bill appropriately, it will have the effect of closing down a number of small and medium-sized businesses in Trinidad and Tobago.”

I shall show you how because I have all the *Hansard* today.

Part III of the Bill: Rights of Employees to Refuse Work Where Safety or Health in Danger. Listen to what the hon. Member said:

“...employees can refuse to work and an elaborate procedure follows where a second party is called in, an investigator and an inspector have to come in, and while all this is going on, no employee works in the industrial establishment. The current industrial relations practice is that one first complies, and then complains, but it appears here that one complains first and then does not comply.”

Imbert saw that as having the potential to unjustifiably shut down plants.

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The Bill has been amended. Then let me quote from the Bill that is before the honourable House. What I have just read is embodied in clause 15 in identical terms.

“An employee may refuse to work or do particular work where he has reason to believe that—

- (a) there is serious and imminent danger to himself or others or unusual circumstances have arisen...”

You have “arised” here. That one is a typographical error, not the other one.

“which are hazardous or injurious to health or life;

- 16. (1) Upon refusing to work or do particular work the employee shall promptly report the circumstances of the intended refusal to the employer or his ...
- (2) The employer shall cause the Safety and Health Committee to forthwith investigate...”

You do not force the worker to work when he says there is a danger. If you do that, then you are saying: “go kill yourself. Complain but go and still work, kill yourself and after that we would take up your case.” That is what this Minister said. And there has been no change. It is here—the hon. Member for Diego Martin East. Brutus says he is an honourable man, and Brutus is honourable. The hon. Member for Diego Martin East saw a problem with clause 43 which said:

“In every industrial establishment where ...two hundred and fifty persons employed, there shall be provided and maintained an ambulance...”

And he kicked up a stinking discourse for that. The Bill is before the honourable House and they say they have brought back the Bill with changes. Let me read the clause that is in this Bill. Clause 43(4):

“In every factory or industrial estate where more than two hundred and fifty persons are employed, there shall be provided and maintained an ambulance and a first-aid room of a prescribed size...”

The same clause is there. Where is the change? Is the hon. Member supporting it now or not? Shameless, hypocrisy! The Hon. Member for Diego Martin East also complained about clause 37 of the Bill that was before the honourable House.

“(1) Where, after the commencement of this Act, a person seeks employment in an industrial establishment, he shall be required by the employer to undergo medical examination...except in such shops or places of work as the Minister may, by Order, exempt.”

The hon. Member took exception to that. He was angry about that clause.

Let me come to the clause of the Bill before the honourable House. Clause 37(1):

“Where, after the commencement of this Act, a person seeks employment in an industrial establishment, he shall be required by the employer to undergo medical examination as a pre-condition of permanent employment...”

Where is the change? Does the hon. Member support the Bill now or not? If he does, what has happened between then and now? The wall gone back up! The same hon. Member saw this provision as placing a great deal of work on the Ministry of Labour and as overall increase in the amount of Government bureaucracy.

But in that debate there was a certain gentleman by the name of Mr. Boynes. I think he is still in this honourable House. I do not hear much—the hon. Member for Toco/Manzanilla—August 15, 1997 submitted that the Bill be referred to committee because there was still much work to be done. He asked that the definition of “industrial establishment” be revisited and I will tell you that in the definition clause, I think it is clause 4(1), the definition of industrial establishment remains the same.

He said clause 65 of the Bill provided for the setting up of an agency. Actually it is an authority. He said that for the Bill to function properly that agency needed to be properly staffed. Great point! It is a fundamental statement that required a rocket scientist—[*Laughter*] Such brilliance! Mr. Boynes had a problem with clause 37 of the Bill that allows the Minister to say which businesses are exempt from having to pay for medical expenses on behalf of their employees. Clause 37 in the new Bill states:

“Where, after the commencement of this Act, a person seeks employment in an industrial establishment, he shall be required by the employer to undergo medical examination as a pre-condition of permanent employment, except in such shops or places of work as the Minister may, by Order, exempt.”

Identical. No, he does not support that. We are going to see today.

The hon. Member for Toco/Manzanilla had problems with clauses 15, 16 and 17 of the Bill that dealt with the rights of employees to refuse to work in circumstances where the plant and equipment are not up to certain standards and which may be hazardous to health in instances where the place would be generally unsafe. He made noise about that like his colleague before him. As I have shown today, that clause has remained the same.

The honourable gentleman said that the Bill gave no time frame for investigation of a complaint by the worker. This could lead to the business being shut down indefinitely. That is not true. There is a clause 16(2) that repeats the clause to the previous Bill that says:

“The employer shall cause the Safety and Health Committee to forthwith investigate the report in the presence of the employee and in the presence of” —

other persons who are qualified and so forth. So that really is incorrect.

Mr. Speaker, it is not only history that repeats itself but the foolishness of the PNM as well. That too, repeats itself. So that when the amended Bill came before the Parliament on November 18, 1999, the horseman of the apocalypse—a little horse though—the hon. Member for Diego Martin East, he seems to have an infinite capacity to make—I will read again what he said. Oh, incidentally, I have the number of the pages of the *Hansard* in case he wants references. He said that the Bill interfered with the fundamental rights of the Constitution and as such concerns of the PNM need to be addressed. The Government the UNC brought back the same Bill with some cosmetic changes.

I have just shown you here today, reading from the Bill that is before the honourable House, that they brought this same Bill back to this Parliament. The hon. Member said that the Bill sought to bring everybody under the same umbrella. He noted that some of the requirements of the proposals of the clauses were clearly designed to deal with industrial establishments employing large numbers of workers. It is clear. It says that. What happens to companies with large numbers of workers? What happens to companies with five workers and so on? It speaks of all that but his suggestion at the time was—I love this one—Mr. Imbert said, why not upgrade the Factories Ordinance? That was the Ordinance that is over 50 years old and based on an 1891 English Ordinance. Why not upgrade the Factories Ordinance to deal with factories and bring another Bill to deal with specific high-risk areas and look at other legislation to deal with the areas like offices and so forth, places like Parliament? Is that what this Bill has

done? Why must we have legislation that is clearly designed to deal with industrial heavy manufacturing and so forth being applied to offices and secretarial function? Why? It does not make sense. That was the hon. Member for Diego Martin East speaking.

He further went on to say that the Bill was conferring virtual police powers on inspectors. We were making policemen of inspectors, he said, since it gave inspectors the power to enter a place at any time. He said that clause 72 stated that:

“Every inspector shall, for the purposes of enforcement of this Act, have power to do all or any of the following: to (a) enter, inspect, take photographs...examine at any time...”

Let us look at the Bill before the honourable House. Clause 72(1):

“Every inspector shall, for the purposes of the enforcement of this Act, have power to do all or any of the following:

(a) enter, inspect, take photographs of and examine, all reasonable times, either alone or together with such other persons possessing technical or special knowledge as the Chief Inspector may authorise in writing, any premises which he has reasonable cause to believe are premises to which this Act applies;”

No change! He vociferously said that we were creating a new breed of policemen. Oh hypocrisy, how fickle thou art.

The hon. Member also raised the question about divulging information and had a problem with clauses 76(1) and 77(2). Clause 76(1) which he quoted at the time reads:

“No employer shall dismiss, suspend or otherwise adversely affect the employment of an employee or alter his position to his prejudice, by reason only that an inspector in exercise of his powers under this Act, sought or obtained from the employee information pertaining to the operation of the industrial establishment.”

According to him this means one cannot dismiss, suspend or otherwise adversely affect an employee who gives information to the inspector.

Mr. Speaker, that is what he objected to. Let us see what the present Bill says:

“76. (1) No employer shall dismiss, suspend or otherwise adversely affect the employment of an employee or alter his position to his prejudice, by

reason only that an inspector in exercise of his powers under this Act, sought or obtained from the employee information pertaining to the operation of the industrial establishment.”

Identical! Same thing! And he comes here today and smiles like a Cheshire cat.

Mr. Ramnath: What is a Cheshire cat?

Mr. B. Panday: It is one from Cheshire—and pretends that he never said those things. That is the hypocrisy. Why do you think people are saying we are "kicksin" in this Parliament? Do you know why? It is because of behaviour like that. It is almost impossible to conduct in this honourable House a sensible argument, almost impossible because nobody would deal with the issues.

I did not come today to cuss out anybody or to criticize anybody and so forth. Everything I speak of is written but I want to show the enormous hypocrisy, the depth of the hypocrisy on that side and that is why nothing they do succeeds. You know, you can do the good thing but with a bad motive and it fails. Sometimes you do something bad with a good motive and it has beneficial effects. Motive is important my friend. The hon. Member for Diego Martin East went on to say—he was very angry about clause 77 which said:

“No inspector shall divulge to the occupier or any person employed in the industrial establishment, the source of any information or complaint which reaches him...”

He said this was in breach of his rights.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Member for Couva North has expired.

Motion made, That the hon. Member’s speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. [*Mr. G. Singh*]

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. B. Panday: Thank you colleagues. I read for you his objection. I will now read for you the Bill that he is going to support in the honourable House today.—

Clause 77:

“No inspector shall divulge to the occupier or any person employed in the industrial establishment, the source of any information or complaint which reaches him concerning an alleged contravention of the provisions of this Act...”

Identical. No a single word changed!

Mr. Imbert noted under this legislation no employee could be subject to disciplinary action. He was angry. He said no employee could be subject to disciplinary action because he brings a complaint whether that complaint is totally false or not. This is a serious matter. His idea was, if you said that this machine is dangerous and I cannot work here, and it is found that the machine is not dangerous, fire the worker. That is his recommendation. Fire the worker! The hon. Member questioned whether Government could generate the number of inspectors that would be required once the legislation came into force. I can answer that question right away. Yes, you can generate the number of inspectors, provided that you select people on the basis of merit. [*Desk thumping*] There are hundreds of thousands of people in this country qualified to provide the goods and services that the people need but you have to put the best people in the job. [*Desk thumping*] That is all. Regardless of race, colour, creed and height.

There is a gentleman here today, the hon. Member for Arouca North, November 18, 1999, this is what he had to say. A former trade unionist!

“...small business people...will have to go out of existence because of the stipulations of the Bill that they will have to adhere to from time to time.”

You know that was the same argument that was used by slave masters to resist the abolition of slaves, that if we improve the conditions our business would burst. And it is the same argument that was used by people who ran sweatshops, that if we removed the sweatshops, if we improved the conditions, the business would burst. It is the same argument that was used to justify child labour; if we do not employ children what would they eat, the business would burst. But that is the mentality. It indicates what goes on inside the head. What comes from the mouth is an indication of what is inside the head. In this case it happens to be nothing. He said that the inspectorate would have power to victimize a person who owns a small business at their whim and fancy.

What is the difference in this Bill? There is no difference in the Bill before us. The hon. Member for Arouca North had a problem with the fact that the Bill makes an inspector a law unto himself. He can shut you down; he can start you back up again. He is like a “police.” That point was made before and I referred to that section already.

He said the legislation gave power to trade union bosses. Union leaders could use it to expand their membership in their unions.

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That is on page 881 in case hon. Members want to look for it. He was saying that this Bill would be used by trade unionists to expand their membership. How? By protecting workers! By saying that you should have decent conditions to work, that would increase their membership? So they must not do that. That is the function of the trade union. The very function of the trade union is to look after the rights of people and when you look after the rights of people, if you get more membership, what is wrong with that? I cannot understand that.

Mr. Speaker, he said “this was another attempt by this Government” (meaning us) “to hurry through legislation without proper thought in the hope of serving another public relation situation.”

The hon. Member must tell this country why he is supporting this now, and not before.

Mr. Bureaux, oh, oh, I had hoped not to say anything that would make you take off your jacket, but it is in my notes. The hon. Member cited: “... the availability of inspectors, and I am suggesting that there needs to be a cadre of independent persons, qualified and capable to make determinations under the Bill.”

I agree with the hon. Member, absolutely, that they should be chosen on merit. Thank you very much. The hon. Member would have to leave that side sooner or later if that is the case because they do not believe in merit. They believe in lowering standards, not raising standards. [*Desk thumping*]

Oh, my dear friend, the new Minister of National Security, Mr. Martin Joseph on November 18, 1999 said:

“To put all establishments under this Bill creates unnecessary problems.”

Well, the establishments are still there.

“...implementation of...this Bill will cause undue problems as it relates to the operation.”

Of companies. All that is still there.

“Part III (of the Bill) which is the right of employees to refuse work where safety or health is in danger...” could be the subject of abuse.

That is still there. He said that inspectors under the Bill had too much power. The other hon. Member said making them “police.”

We gave them—that is, the inspectors—they should not have any right to visit the workplace at any hour of the day or night. He suggested that the Bill be sent back to committee.

3.30 p.m.

I could go on and on. I do not think it is necessary for me to do that because I think I have dealt by and large with the hypocrisy that emanated from this House and the debt it owes to workers who have been killed since the time the Bill was introduced by the UNC and today. All those workers would not have been so injured or killed if this Bill were law.

For the six years we were in government, the PNM came to this Parliament with the most outlandish reasons for not supporting the Bill and at the forefront of their quixotic misadventure—well, of course, the Member for Diego Martin East, Don Quixote himself, a businessman of great impropriety and notoriety when it comes to building collapsible walls—

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, Standing Order 36(5).

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member for Couva North, I think that the hon. Member for Diego Martin East is objecting to your referring to him as a businessman of great impropriety.

Mr. B. Panday: I apologize to all people who have been guilty of impropriety, Don Quixote. Not only building walls, when it comes to building stadia and outsmarting business partners. I have a copy of the court records of a certain case in the local High Court to which there is attached an affidavit—

Mr. Imbert: Standing Order 36(5).

Mr. Speaker: On this occasion, I think, hon. Member for Couva North, you are imputing improper motives to him when you alluded to the fact that he has outsmarted business partners. I ask you to withdraw that statement, please.

Mr. B. Panday: "Outsmart" is an offensive word now. If it is, then every word they have said from the time they came here must be expunged. Just to say someone outsmarted someone! Mr. Speaker, do you want me to bring the case here? I will bring the case in court.

Mr. Speaker: When you indicate to the hon. Member that he has outsmarted his business partners, you are impugning his character and it is an improper motive you are attributing to the Member, so I am asking you please to withdraw it.

Mr. B. Panday: Mr. Speaker, as you wish, but it is not imputing improper motives. It is stating facts; but that is beside the point. In any case, I was saying that I have an affidavit attached to a certain court record—a very interesting affidavit. One day I will read it in this court.

They told us that the provisions of the Bill would lead to closure of business. They said that the UNC would use the Bill to victimize people. They said that the Bill would give too much power to the inspectors. They said that the Bill would be used by trade unionists to recruit new members. They had a problem with the definition of the industrial establishment. They argued that the Ministry of Labour could not implement the Bill. Their main concern was the fact that the Bill conferred upon workers the right to refuse to work where the conditions are dangerous and where life and limb were threatened.

On all these matters the Member for Diego Martin East, the former and failed Minister of Health, was the most vocal. He is the one that is most insolent in this House and I would ask you to pay special attention when he is speaking in future so that there would be a balance in your ruling. He cited some of the most ridiculous examples to make his argument against this Bill. He said that it would lead to closure of business. They pulled out every stop, every logical explanation to stall this Bill. We, in opposition now, after introducing the Bill when in government, after they objected to it for six years, must point out to them what ought to be on their own conscience.

In those six years, many lives could have been spared and many industrial accidents could have been avoided. Even so, they refused to support the Bill. Over the last six years, due to the PNM's vindictiveness, lives could have been saved. The records show that between 1979 and 2002, there has been a total of 22 fatal industrial accidents and 2,694 non-fatal accidents, during those same six years when they refused to support the Bill. Their blood has got to be on the consciences of those who did not support the Bill. The Bill has taken 30 years from conceptualization to where it is today.

Mr. Speaker, we are not only going to support this Bill today, we are going to resist any attempt to send it to any joint select committee. We ask only one thing—and I intend to do that in closing—that the Bill be passed today. That does not mean—[*Interruption*] there are certain clauses in the Bill; we know that. We have spoken to the trade union movement; they have pointed out certain things to us, but first let us get this Bill on the law books, test it and after that we will see about changing it.

I want to go further. I ask that this Bill be passed today; that it goes to the Senate next Tuesday and that by Friday it be assented to by the President and proclaimed on the same day. We hope that there will not be an attempt in the Senate to send the bill to committee. We shall wait and see.

To ensure that no time is wasted, we on this side have decided that no one else will speak on this Bill today. We have said all that there is to be said.

The Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development (Hon. Lawrence Achong): Mr. Speaker, I give the assurance that this Bill will go to the Senate on Tuesday. We had the opportunity of going down memory lane with the Member for Couva North when he dealt with matters that were here before some of us were born.

For the sake of completeness, I must point out that a number of changes were made to the Bill at the last sitting of the select committee, which comprised members of the UNC and People's National Movement (PNM). It was chaired by the then Minister of Labour, Mr. Harry Partap, Member for Nariva. Therefore, I think the record ought to be corrected to show that the Bill in its present form is a bit different from the one the hon. Member for Couva North spoke about.

We can start, for example, in Part I of the Bill where certain definitions were changed almost totally; for example, the definition for "critical injury". We can go on to Part II, which deals with the general duties and responsibilities of employers to employees. Part II, clause 6, subclauses (3), (4) (5), (6)(a), (b) and (c) were all rewritten by that select committee.

Subclause (7)(a), subclause (8)—[*Interruption*—it would mean reading into the record a substantial amount—on page 12, subclauses (11), (12) and (13) have all been changed.

On page 14, subclauses (9)(1)(a) and (b), (9)(2)(a) and (b). These are not typographical errors but changes to the definitions and changes to certain criteria. [*Crosstalk*] I do not think we need to go through all that. It is sufficient to say that there were changes made by members of that select committee.

I would have to deal with the question of the PNM being anti-worker. That is far from the truth. Our track record shows differently. It is the PNM that encouraged and built the trade union movement in Trinidad and Tobago and will continue to do so. We will continue to support that movement.

I agree that enough has been said on the Bill. It is a landmark; it is a watershed period for the trade union movement. They have waited long enough for this. We

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are not going to ask that it go to any select committee; as I said, we are going straight to the Senate on Tuesday.

So, with that very short intervention, I beg to move.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a second time.

Bill committed to a committee of the whole House.

House in committee.

Clauses 1 to 5 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 6.

Question proposed, That clause 6 stand part of the Bill.

Mr. Ramnath: Mr. Chairman, I have just noticed subclause 6(3). I think there is a "typo" here. It says "an employee shall" instead of "an employer shall". Is that the duty of an employee? An employee cannot ensure that hazardous chemicals are labelled. That is the duty of an employer.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 6, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 13 to 100 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Schedules I and II ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Preamble ordered to stand part of the Bill.

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

House resumed.

Bill reported, with amendment.

Question put, That the Bill be now read a third time.

The House voted: Ayes 32

AYES

Valley, Hon. K.

Imbert, Hon. C.

Khan, Hon. F.

Rowley, Hon. Dr. K.
Narine, Hon. J.
Boynes, Hon. R.
Bereaux, H.
Achong, Hon. L.
James, Hon. E.
Hart, Hon. E.
Calender, Hon. S.
Seukeran, Hon. D.
Roberts, Hon. A.
Job-Davis, Mrs. E.
Hinds, F.
Singh, G.
Panday, B.
Dookeran, W.
Yetming, G.
Persad-Bissessar, Mrs. K.
Ramnath, K.
Khan, Dr. F.
Rafeeq, Dr. H.
Sharma, C.
Partap, H.
Lucky, Miss G.
Nanan, Dr. A.
Panday, S.
Baksh, N.
Moonilal, R.

Beckles, Hon. P.

Williams, Hon. E.

Question agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the third time and passed.

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley): Mr. Speaker, as I rise to move the adjournment, I have to recognize that this is a historic day in the life of Parliament. I do hope that this indicates a change in the camaraderie in the Parliament and that we can now expect support for the package of legislation. I assure this House that it is the Government's intention to debate that legislation very, very early.

I now move that the House be adjourned to Friday, December 12, 2003 at 1.30 p.m. I wish to inform Members of the House that on that day we would debate, first of all, the Vesting of certain State Lands in the National Housing Authority for a term of 999 years Bill. Bill No. 2 would be the Sentencing Commission Bill and the third matter would be the Family Proceedings (No. 2) Bill. The fourth matter on the agenda would be the Extradition (Commonwealth and Foreign Territories) Bill.

We expect that the next sitting would be the last before we take our Christmas recess, so Members would understand why the agenda is a bit crowded.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, before I put the question for the adjournment, there are two matters to be discussed on the adjournment: one matter by the Member for Caroni Central and the other by the Member for Tabaquite. I now call on the Member for Caroni Central.

Mr. Singh: There was a matter on the last occasion—

Mr. Speaker: Yes, there was a matter from the Member for Caroni East also.

Mr. Singh: They were not prepared on the last occasion.

Mr. Valley: Mr. Speaker, there are three matters on the adjournment for today: one relates to health. As you have noticed, the Minister of Health is not here. He is ill. [*Crosstalk*] The matter that was deferred from last week—the WASA matter—would be done first, then there is the issue with respect to education.

Polluted Tap Water

Mr. Ganga Singh (*Caroni East*): Mr. Speaker, it is said that water is life. This simple and profound statement has eluded many of us for a long time. In the Holy Qur'an it is said: "And from water we created every living thing."

Mr. Speaker, you can understand the revulsion and the disgust and the message we sent to the population of Trinidad and Tobago when a cocktail of raw sewage and water came from the taps of the Water and Sewerage Authority to over 400,000 residents of Trinidad and Tobago. That was total condemnation of the quality of life in this country. It was a sewage and water cocktail colouring the taps in some areas.

I would read from an article in the *Guardian* newspaper of November 08, 2003, entitled: "'Dirty' water shuts down Caroni plant". The writer was Asha Williams. These were the areas affected: south—Kelly, Cunupia, Longdenville, Caroni, Couva, Claxton Bay, San Fernando, La Romain, Debe, Avocat, Siparia, Quarry, Santa Flora, Erin, La Brea, Carapichaima and South Oropouche; North, Port of Spain, Barataria, Westmoorings, Curepe, Mount Lambert, St. James, Cascade, St. Ann's, Valsayn, Santa Cruz, Woodbrook, Mount Hope and San Juan. Do you understand the predicament of people on Friday, November 07, 2003, who got this toxic cocktail of sewage and water in their taps?

4.00 p.m.

So whilst we were here in this Parliament, Mr. Speaker, and the hon. Member for San Fernando East was transferring portfolios, reshuffling portfolios, and my colleague from Arima was removed from the Ministry of Culture and placed in the Ministry of Public Utilities, at that very time WASA was sending down a cocktail of sewage and water through the taps of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, from 3.00 a.m. to 9.00 p.m. on Friday 07, November, 2003, for six long hours sewage flowed through the taps. It was stink, it was repulsive and it was repulsive. It was life threatening. Who can forget the bright little schoolboy on television talking to the nation through the television screen, that no matter how hard he tried to wash his hands, they still smelled stink? How can we forget the little schoolgirl who spoke so innocently about her attempts to eat the porridge her mother had prepared for her using that cocktail of sewage and water flowing from the WASA taps?

Mr. Speaker, can you imagine an innocent little child eating the meal her mother had prepared for her in the comfort of her own home and in the

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knowledge of the love and affection her mother has for her? This little girl and boy, like the thousands of other little girls and boys, felt a great sense of revulsion and betrayal that day.

How did this take place? Who was responsible? Why was the public not informed? Why did they take so long to shut down the system? When one reads the newspapers of that day, look at the *Express*, Saturday November 08, 2003:

“Turn off the water
Foul smelling problem for WASA”

It is written by Roxanne Stapleton.

“WASA consumers in a number of areas turned off their water supply, people fell ill and children were sent home from school as a result of sewage leaking into a tributary of the Caroni River from the La Horquetta sewage plant.

Residents complained of feeling ill and described water flowing through their pipes as far back as Thursday as black. One El Carmen resident said she turned off her supply quite early in the morning on recognizing the stench. Her pet dog seemed to be out of breath and weak. She said the animal has consumed water during the course of yesterday.”

Water not appropriate for the dogs in this country!

Mr. Speaker, the children also indicated that for the entire day they were unable to deal with the stench. The *Guardian* headline: “Dirty water shuts down Caroni plant”. *The Probe*: “WASA waited for six hours. Caroni still to shut down system. Water still unsafe.”

Who is responsible? No one. Now, I can understand the predicament of my honourable friend, the Minister of Public Utilities and the Environment. This occurred in the period of transition, so she cannot be regarded as being ministerially responsible. If anybody is responsible, it is the honourable Prime Minister, because at that time he had all portfolios within his bosom. That is why I place no blame at the feet of the hon. Member for Arima.

In fact, the responsibility for the current stench at WASA started with Sen. the Hon. Martin Joseph. You see, when he fired all the competent managers at WASA and placed at the helm of WASA a man who came last in the managerial evaluation—so Grimes is at the helm and what do we have? Grime flowing through the taps of the Water and Sewerage Authority! [*Desk thumping*] It was

said by Thomas Fuller in 1725, “A danger foreseen is half avoided.” It is recognized that the stench that flowed through the taps of the Water and Sewerage Authority emanated not from the Caroni Water Treatment Plant, but rather from the managerial incompetence in the boardroom and in the executive offices of the Water and Sewerage Authority.

Mr. Grimes claimed no responsibility. In the newspaper reports he said “I heard about it. I think it is coming from somewhere.” No corporate responsibility! The Chairman of WASA, my good friend’s campaign manager, Mr. Hart, Member for Tunapuna—Mr. Baptiste was his campaign manager, so he understands. He is a lecturer at university. He understands the necessity for good corporate governance. Not a word! Not a word from Mr. Baptiste as Chairman of the Water and Sewerage Authority. No one is taking responsibility. Where is the accountability? Where is the responsibility? We have already exonerated the Minister.

Mr. Speaker, potable water. It is the failure to provide potable water. Potable water must meet certain World Health Organization standards, and when we have that kind of water flowing through our tap system, it tells us something about the lack of standards. The Regulated Industries Commission (RIC) which, like the OSHA legislation, was another piece of innovative and creative legislation, got into the act when they saw total denial and an attempt to cover up this really blatant act—foul stench, stinking water served to the people of this country. The RIC got into the act and they told WASA to present a report. The Environmental Management Authority got into the act and told WASA to present a report. We want to know what was said in those reports.

In the press release that the RIC provided, they pointed out the polluted water and the foul odour emanating, but what about the colour of the water? Mr. Speaker, the RIC got into the picture late. So, who is the keeper of the standards of the water supply in this country?

I saw in a newspaper report that they said we ought to put probes upriver. Probes were installed in Caroni, because this is not a problem that occurs, but the problem is, how can they have sewage entering into their main water treatment plant being treated and leaving the system and entering into the water supply throughout this country? How can they have that? There was a total breakdown of management at the Caroni treatment plant.

Mr. Speaker, I have been advised that it is the chemist that took the decision to shut down the plant, so as not to perpetuate this repulsive act committed by a

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statutory authority. It is the chemist! Where was Mr. Grimes? Where was Mr. Wayne Joseph, Director of Operations? They went into hiding.

Mr. Speaker, they are being paid salaries that have no relation to their competence. Exorbitant salaries! They have cellular phones being paid for by WASA; pagers being paid for by WASA; vehicles being paid for by WASA, yet they could not be reached, they could not be found in order to make a decision as to what to do with the millions of gallons of water coming through the Caroni treatment plant.

This is what we have. Managerial incompetence! A revulsion! Whatever little they had, the country has absolutely no confidence in WASA. No public message of boiling one's water before drinking. None whatsoever! But Grimes remained driving his Audi A8, the most technologically advanced car in the world, as it is advertized, overseeing a water supply system that today is totally breaking down, and we have sewage flowing through the taps. It is time that somebody is held culpable for this matter. It is time that somebody is held responsible for this matter.

Mr. Speaker, when you look at the answer you will see. The board and the executives of WASA are travelling all over the world, giving speeches at conferences all over the world, running into hundreds of thousands and millions of dollars travelled. They are going to Anaheim, California—the whole board and executives—to look at water meters. They went to the Bahamas, Paradise Island, in which the cheapest hotel room is US \$600 a night. And what are they doing? They cannot supply a proper water supply system. Total breakdown of corporate governance in an area as essential as the water supply.

Hon. Minister, I have great respect for you because, as you know, you and I fought an election together in law school and we were on the same slate and we won. I know that you will be willing to take strong action and, it is therefore necessary that strong action and a clear message be sent that in no society that is articulating a 2020 Vision, you are going to find sewage going to almost three quarters of the population and no one held accountable. No society, no self-respecting society dealing with the quality of life issues will allow that to happen and no one held culpable. I say that Errol Grimes must be made to pay and, by pay I mean he must be asked to resign or be fired from WASA for this act against the people of this country.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you.

The Minister of Public Utilities and the Environment (Hon. Penelope Beckles): Mr. Speaker, let me first of all thank my colleague for Caroni East for bringing this Motion. I start, particularly because of the point he raised about WASA not having really publicly made certain comments as they relate to this incident, to really apologize to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago who would have suffered inconvenience and ill health as a result of the period referred to by the Member for Caroni East.

As we know, Mr. Speaker, the Water and Sewerage Authority has a statutory responsibility for the production and delivery of potable water to the national community. In the discharge of this responsibility, WASA adheres to specific standards prescribed by the World Health Organization as it relates to bacteriological quality. I have been advised by the relevant authorities that the potable water quality was marginally below the benchmark standards in 1998, but the situation has improved and, in fact, the standard for potable water quality is at the highest in 2003, notwithstanding the incident which we are not going to dispute.

A cause for concern among citizens has been on that occasion, in certain sections of the distribution network, the water reaching customers appears to be discoloured. I am reliably advised that this discoloration derives from encrustation in the inner surfaces of pipes, given the age of the network, which we know, Mr. Speaker, is over 50 years old.

The installation of additional booster pumps in the network to enhance distribution to communities on the extremities of the network has aggravated this problem. The technical information I have is that given compliance with the prescribed bacteriological standards, such discoloration does not compromise the potability of the water. I therefore want to assure—

Mr. Singh: Minister, would you give way? Are you saying that the discoloured water is acceptable?

Hon. P. Beckles: What I am saying, I am dealing strictly with the issue of potability and if I could just finish, I think it would answer the question here now. I want to assure the national community that the water produced and distributed by WASA is safe for human consumption and meets prescribed bacteriological World Health Organization standards for potable water.

A number of initiatives have been, and are being taken by this administration with a view to improving the supply and enhancing the quality of the water provided to the citizens of the country. Amongst them are the ongoing

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programme of network replacement; the ongoing programme for refurbishment and upgrade of all water treatment plants; the introduction of the Water Pollution Rules and the formulation of a water resource management policy. All of this would impact positively on the supply and quality of water produced and delivered to the national community in keeping with Vision 2020 aspirations.

There will be situations where the watercourses, which are the main intakes into treatment plants, become contaminated intentionally or unintentionally, and this was so, as referred to by the incident raised by the hon. Member for Caroni East, which is on November 07, where there was a rapid deterioration of raw water abstracted from the Caroni river for the treatment at the Caroni treatment plant.

Although the water coming out of the plant was bacteriologically safe, and we are talking about the plant itself, it possessed an odour which made it aesthetically unacceptable. As the Member for Caroni East said, the plant was shut down, corrective measures were undertaken and this included increasing, temporarily, the chlorine dosage of the water. I wish to emphasize that the information in my possession is that at no time was the population exposed to any serious health risk as a result of this incident. We are not saying that people did not get ill.

WASA has advised that the retention of odour in the water resulted from the absence of activated carbon in the filters at this treatment plant. It is to be noted in this regard that the carbon was removed from the filters in 2000 as part of the redesign of the plant under another management and administration.

A number of initiatives are being pursued with a view to avoiding a recurrence of such an event, and these are: identification of all potential point sources of pollution to watercourses from which water is abstracted for treatment. This is to be undertaken jointly by WASA and the Environmental Management Authority.

Enhanced monitoring of discharges into intake watercourses, as well as more rigid enforcement of discharge standards, this is to be undertaken by the EMA and the Regulated Industries Commission. The RIC has already produced overall quality of service standards which have been put out for public comment, and those standards are to be finalized in 2004. The installation of pollution monitoring devices into intake watercourses, and this is to be done by WASA. Finally, the refurbishment and upgrading of filtration systems in all water treatment plants.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to end by making a special plea to the national community to work with us for the provision of a safe and reliable water supply for all citizens of this country. To this end, we must make every effort to ensure that the sources of our water supply and, in particular, our watercourses, which feed into our treatment plants, are kept free from contamination. In this endeavour, every citizen has a role to play. Let us work together to ensure the integrity of the nation's water supply and the sustainable development of our country.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we have one more Motion on the Adjournment; that is by the hon. Member for Tabaquite. The hon. Minister of Education is not here and she has indicated that she will be here after the tea break, so perhaps we can have an early tea break and we can return to the House and resume the sitting at five after five. It is up to the Member.

4.21 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.06 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Violence and Indiscipline in Schools (Failure of Government)

Dr. Adesh Nanan (*Tabaquite*): Mr. Speaker, the matter standing in my name reads as follows:

“The failure by the Government to deal with the unprecedented high levels of indiscipline and violence in the nation's schools.”

Mr. Speaker, by all reports emanating from the nation's schools of indiscipline and violence, the education system is in shambles and the prognosis for recovery is hopeless under Education Minister, Hazel Manning. The present swell of violence, indiscipline and disrespect for law and order just cannot continue. There is a flash flood of evidence showing her failure to effectively stem growing outbreaks of indiscipline and violence, and, Mr. Speaker, there is no denying the evidence.

One will recall the incident where students of Tranquility Government Secondary attacked students of St. Mary's College. What did the Education Minister do? The Education Minister closed Tranquility Government Secondary. Mr. Speaker, schools should be institutes of learning, but under this wicked PNM administration, students are deprived of their constitutional right to go to school. This is a dark day in the education of the nation's children.

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Mr. Speaker, let us examine the present conditions of Tranquility Government Secondary School. There are pieces of the ceiling falling in that school. The students have to withstand the smell of pigeon droppings, and in the Form V classrooms there are no windows and the classrooms are rain soaked. I also want to point out that in Tranquility Secondary, the Form V students have not had classes in Additional Mathematics or English for the entire term, and they are writing CXC in May/June of 2004.

Mr. Speaker, at Fyzabad Composite, students enter with cutlasses, cigarettes, lighters and gasoline. At Cedros Composite there is gang rivalry. At Mucurapo Senior Secondary there are narcotics and ammunition. At Barataria Junior Secondary, a student attacked a security guard, while another was found with ammunition. Not only in the secondary schools. In the Valencia Government Primary School, a nine-year-old student stabbed his classmate during a fight in the classroom.

The UNC government recognized that indiscipline and violence in schools had to be tackled head-on and not with kid's gloves, as Minister Hazel Manning is doing, hence the genesis of the Schools Intervention Programme. What is very interesting here is the PNM endorsed this approach, but as has been revealed, only gave lip service to the programme.

In the *Newsday*, Saturday, October 25, 2003:

“Oliver blames Ministry for school problems.

TTUTA President, Trevor Oliver, is calling on the Ministry of Education to immediately implement the Schools Intervention Strategy and blamed the spiraling rate of indiscipline in the nation's secondary schools on the absence of the programme.

Oliver chastised the education ministry for not taking the high levels of violence in the education system seriously.”

Saturday, November 01, 2003, *Newsday*:

“TTUTA fed up with Ministry.

Accusing the Ministry of Education of dragging its feet with regard to implementing the Schools Intervention Strategy Programme, President of the Unified Teacher's Association, Trevor Oliver, yesterday expressed concern that too many students were losing valuable education hours.”

Mr. Speaker, what we are seeing is the PNM now reaping the whirlwind. I ask here this evening, is it because it was a UNC plan that the Schools Intervention Strategies Programme was never implemented?

The rapid escalation of violence and indiscipline has put the education system on the defensive, with crackdowns on students and police patrols being the norm. Skirmishes in schools have been elevated to gang rivalry with weapons such as knives, cutlasses, scissors and even guns being used. A teacher of Siparia Senior Comprehensive, two months pregnant, was knocked unconscious by a student because that teacher intervened in a fight. Teachers, instead of imparting knowledge, have to part fights, under the PNM! [*Desk thumping*] Under the PNM, the teaching profession has become a high-risk profession. It may be necessary to have martial arts training as a prerequisite for teaching. [*Desk thumping*]

Imagine students being arrested for assault, possession of weapons and marijuana trafficking. What is the Minister of Education doing? Well really, nothing. It is her public relations department that has spin doctoring. A joint press release with coloured photographs and grammatical errors was supposed to have a calming influence! [*Laughter*] They do not care. It is all a smokescreen to cover up the total incompetence of the Minister of Education. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Education does not realize that she is accountable for the quality of education of the children and what does or does not take place in the classroom. There has been a deafening silence from the Minister of Education with respect to the accusation level by Professor Cudjoe against Indo-Trinidadian teachers. It is his belief that these teachers are not teaching Afro-Trinidadians with the same veracity as Indo-Trinidadian students. One may conclude that this is the belief of the Government as a whole.

The latest addition to the Minister's repertoire is the blame game. First she blames teachers, then later on she blames principals, and the newest on the block is the UNC policy of secondary education for all that caused the indiscipline and violence in the nation's schools. She has adopted the same whimsical approach of her husband, the Prime Minister, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] Blaming the UNC for the recent bomb threats!

Today, we see an Education Minister who is caught in a time warp and is looking for any excuse to revert to the policy of the past PNM regime, but we want to warn, the PNM must never be allowed to return to their old system of neglecting 10,000 students every year to the streets, deprived of any educational opportunities. It is neither the teachers nor the principals to blame, Minister

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Hazel Manning. It is the PNM policy of exclusion that is responsible for the mayhem taking place in society.

Every year under the PNM, before the UNC came into government, 10,000 students were rejected and cast aside. This was a breeding ground for criminals and bandits who stalk the land now. The UNC recognized this problem, and thus, from 1996 increased the number of places available for students at secondary schools. Still there was the need, Mr. Speaker, for all students to have access to secondary education.

There was a two-pronged approach, where more places were purchased in private secondary institutions and the UNC Government also approached the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) for a loan to facilitate the transition to universal secondary education. When the arithmetic was completed, the number of new schools to be constructed was determined, taking into consideration the removal of the shift system, making all schools either five-year or seven-year schools. The IDB loan allowed for a curriculum review exercise that was never done by the PNM to be undertaken to deal with differing abilities of students. This was the thinking for the policy of universal secondary education under the UNC government.

Mr. Speaker, the new secondary schools will allow a smaller intake of students, not like the unmanageable monstrosities built by the PNM! I want to warn the Education Minister this evening that by increasing the blocks in existing secondary schools, you have created a recipe for disaster. These will require more security personnel to patrol the classrooms effectively.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Education has demonstrated total incompetence in her handling of this vexing problem of indiscipline and violence in the nation's schools. Could you imagine, not a single class in Add Maths and English for Form V students of Tranquility Government Secondary for the term? And these students are writing the exam next year?

The classroom conditions—and, Mr. Speaker, no repairs on Tranquility Government Secondary were undertaken during the vacation. There are many schools without English and Mathematics teachers. I asked the question here for months, but apparently this is of no concern to the Minister of Education, although she pointed to a 50 per cent failure rate last in Mathematics and English at CXC. I call upon the Minister of Education, as I close, to do the honourable thing and resign. [*Desk thumping*] Failing this, I then call upon the Prime Minister to put the country first, save the nation's children and remove the Education Minister forthwith.

The Minister of Education (Sen. The Hon. Hazel Manning): Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would like to let you know that this Government is deeply concerned with the current levels of violence and indiscipline in the schools of the nation, and has been dealing with it in a variety of ways.

It should be understood that the violence and crime that we are seeing today in Trinidad and Tobago are not confined to this country alone. There is a worldwide trend. *[Interruption]* The flames of violence and crime are sweeping over the world fanned by the process of globalization. Small and vulnerable societies like ours are inevitably caught up in this setting. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Hon. H. Manning: We in the Ministry of Education are fully aware of this world phenomenon, but the grim reality was formally brought home to us by an internationally acclaimed expert on violence in schools in a recent presentation to the Ministry.

With respect to the violence and indiscipline in our schools, we should all understand that the school is a small part of the society. What we see in our schools is a reflection of what is going on in the society at large. The total mobilization of the nation's resources is required to deal with the present situation of violence and indiscipline in our schools.

I want to repeat, Mr. Speaker, that we are deeply concerned with the present violence and indiscipline in our schools, but we must not overestimate the problem. When I remarked that there was less than 1 per cent violence and indiscipline in our secondary schools, I wanted to counteract the exaggerated picture that was being painted of the situation by the press. The figure of 1 per cent is meant to illustrate the extent of violence and indiscipline among students in our secondary schools so as to clear up the misconceptions that the sensational, exaggerated and even at times inaccurate presentations of incidents by the newspapers' reporters would have generated in the minds of the public.

This low percentage is substantiated by a conclusion of Prof. Deosaran in his report that only a relatively small proportion of students really occupied the extreme points on the high deviance spectrum. For example, involvement with violence, drugs, stealing, and so forth. This comes from Prof. Deosaran's report of March 2003. This illustrative figure of 1 per cent is based on the total number of students in public secondary schools as over 111,000 students, and the number of suspensions in all these schools as about approximately 266 per month. So, the 266 out of a total of 111,000 is definitely less than 1 per cent. Suspensions

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remain the universally utilized measure of violence and indiscipline in schools. The Ministry is making efforts to improve the procedures and the systems of recording suspensions.

The sensational report of negative behaviour among students compared with the limited exposure of their positive achievements is a gross injustice to these students and to their schools. The Ministry of Education, on the basis of its own observations and analysis, and a study by Prof. Deosaran, has identified significant factors contributing to the violence and indiscipline in schools. They are as follows:

1. The rush to provide secondary school places for all in the year 2000, resulting in a large number of our students entering the secondary school system inadequately prepared. Teachers not trained to attend to their needs. School curriculum not relevant to their interest and insufficient support systems for those new students.
2. Poor leadership in the management of schools.
3. Teacher absenteeism along with poor regularity and punctuality, resulting in large numbers of unsupervised students during long periods in schools.
4. Social and domestic issues overflowing from the homes and the communities onto the schools.
5. Poor physical environment along with the lack of equipment and supplies.
6. Inadequate school security.
7. A large number of teachers, though academically qualified, yet not trained to deal with students in bio, psycho, social problems.

The Ministry of Education has been addressing these factors over the last two years through the overall reform of the education system and special programmes aimed directly at reduced violence and indiscipline in schools, as through Project Peace and specific initiatives of the Guidance Unit.

The Ministry's response to these factors in the overall reform of the system include the following:

1. Increasing the provision of high quality secondary education.
2. Special training courses for teachers.

3. Orientation courses for new teachers.
4. Curriculum reform and diversification, including making subjects like physical education, visual and performing arts and technology education compulsory and examinable at CXC level.
5. Remedial teachers in classrooms. Management training for principals and heads of departments. Closer monitoring and assistance by school supervisors. Promoting accountability of principals for the management of their schools. Enlisting the support of TTUTA and the National Parent Teachers Association (NPTA) and developing a system of substitute teachers. Accelerating the process of filling vacancies in schools.

Also, the expanded student support services, including the provision of school meals, bus tickets for transportation, book grants, book rentals, diagnostic and prescriptive services and school social workers. We have also got involved in the construction and refurbishment and technical upgrade of schools through the system, including the provision of computers, mobile labs and other specialized equipment.

About three weeks ago, the Ministry signed a letter of intent with Nipdec to repair over 100 secondary schools. The completion of phase five and phase six in the schools' physical security programme, including walls, fencing, security guards and lighting. While these programmes will continue in the year 2003 to 2004, the Ministry is giving highest priority to the following immediate concerns:

1. Approximately 4,000 students presently in secondary schools have not qualified to write the 2004 Cambridge Examinations Council examinations, nor have they qualified to write the National Examination Council examinations.
2. Teacher absenteeism.

With respect to the students, the Ministry is planning to conduct a special programme from January to May 2004 to ensure that these non-qualifying students are engaged in productive learning activities. With respect to teacher absenteeism, the Ministry intends to put into operation a substitute teacher system and, along with this, the Ministry is planning to provide a fund from which principals could recruit instructors in urgently needed areas. A school inspectorate programme is being designed to monitor and support, where necessary, teachers who are challenged and burnt out.

The most recent initiative by the Ministry of Education to deal with violence and indiscipline in schools is the enlistment of the support of the Police Service.

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This is intended to be a short-term initiative directed to the high-risk schools. To this end, I have held discussions with the Minister of National Security with the result that a task force combining officers of both Ministries has been set up to draw up and implement a special programme to increase safety and security in our schools, to effect a policy of zero tolerance with respect to criminal activity among students, and to provide in our schools an environment more conducive to teaching and learning. In the very near future, I will be presenting a note for Cabinet based on the recommendations of the task force, which includes a strategic and operational committee.

The main thrust of the Government's effort to reduce indiscipline and violence in schools is Project Peace. This was launched in March 2003. This programme has adopted a proactive preventative approach, and is aimed at the holistic development of the individual child. Its long-term goal is to create a culture of peace initially in the individual, but holistically to the school, the family, the community and the nation at large. The activities of Project Peace are aimed at the all round development of the individual child, not only in the cognitive development, but also towards attitude change, behaviour modification, as in initiatives like peer mediation and Together we Light the Way, the pre-carnival presentation, and in and out of school suspensions and mock trials.

In its effort to reduce violence and indiscipline in schools, the Ministry has continued to carry out interventions in schools, but Project Peace was constructed and launched to ensure more effective coordination of these interventions. Project Peace also established a long-term goal and mission, a culture of peace, which hitherto was missing.

In its short-term phase, Project Peace continues to address the immediate manifestations of violence and indiscipline. In its new focus, interventions are being organized to target the four main stakeholder groups: The students, teachers, the family and the community. With respect to the students, the Ministry of Education is expanding its student support services to reinforce its effort to address violence and indiscipline in the schools.

Based on the conviction that greater preparation by students in the side base management of schools would lead to a reduction in violence and indiscipline, one of the activities of Project Peace is the promotion of student councils in all our schools. In order to stimulate and encourage growth of student councils, funds are to be made available to schools to carry out projects proposed by students like environmental beautification, painting of walls or student newsletters.

The view is firmly held that a major root cause of the violence and indiscipline in schools is the low level of spirituality among the children and the youth of this nation. To remedy this critical deficiency, one of the options being considered is religious education, which we offered as a CXC subject in secondary schools. A special syllabus for Forms I to III is to be developed in comparative religion with a collaboration of the IRO and using a model from the United Kingdom where the subject is compulsory.

In order to help teachers better cope with the violence and indiscipline in schools, the special courses within Project Peace aimed at anger and stress management, understanding, conflict resolution and disciplining without the use of corporal punishment will be made available to all practising teachers and be included in the curricula of teachers' training colleges. Consideration is being given to holding these special courses on Saturdays, so as not to exacerbate the current teacher absenteeism problem in schools.

In the 2003 to 2004 programme for Project Peace, greater emphasis is being placed on the school-by-school approach as a follow up to the research by Prof. Deosaran in 10 schools, and through the Crisis Reduction Intervention Strategy Programme in 14 high-risk schools. Consideration is being given to the contracting of private non-governmental organizations with relevant expertise and experience to work with a school under stress over a protracted period of time until the school recovers from its ill health and attains satisfactory levels of functionality. A list of these NGOs and their capabilities is being drawn up.

It is very evident that a major reason for the present violence and indiscipline in schools is the unplanned rush to secondary school places for all in the year 2000. To meet the needs of the large percentage of children entering secondary schools with an incomplete primary education, the Ministry's efforts are being intensified to meet the needs of the Form I Special students, and those who are now entering Form IV, along with the provision of remedial teachers and the implementation of a special reading syllabus.

The Ministry is adopting measures to meet the needs of these students with specific learning challenges who have been entering the secondary school system since the year 2000.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 5.35 p.m.