

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES*Wednesday, March 02, 2005*

The House met at 1.30 p.m.

PRAYERS[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]**PAPERS LAID**

1. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the financial statements of the Chaguaramas Development Authority for the nine-month period January 01, 1998 to September 30, 1998. [*The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley)*]
2. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the financial statements of the Regulated Industries Commission for the year ended December 31, 2002. [*Hon. K. Valley*]

*Papers 1 and 2 to be referred to the Public Accounts Committee.***JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE REPORT****Parliament****(Public Broadcasting of Debates)**

The Minister of Housing (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): 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 Public Broadcast of Debates and Business of both Houses.

Mr. Speaker, the pleasure was mine to serve on and chair this committee appointed following a sitting at the other place on February 10, 2004, where a resolution was passed on the subject matter, and may I refresh Members' memory with the resolution that was passed in the other place, with respect to this matter. The resolution was:

“Be it Resolved that the Government arrange, with appropriate permission, for full debates and the business of both Houses to be transmitted to the public through the electronic media (television and radio) in an equitable

and discreetly edited form on fixed days of the week and with such transmission to begin before the end of the year 2004.

Be it Further Resolved that a Joint Select Committee of Parliament be appointed to consider and report on this matter so as to facilitate Government action before June 30, 2004”.

That was the resolution that was passed on February 10, 2004 and in March 2004 our House agreed to the same resolution and our six-member committee was appointed. The committee included myself, my colleagues from the Lower House: Arouca South, Tobago East, Tunapuna, Caroni East, and Oropouche and our colleagues from the Upper House.

Mr. Speaker, your Committee held five meetings and we did have quite a bit of assistance from what we call the stakeholder group outside the Parliament. And the third meeting of the Committee which was held on May 04, 2004, following invitations were extended to members of the media. We had representation from the Trinidad Guardian, Radio Toco and NBN, and following those discussions, we had written submissions from MATT, Trinidad Guardian and the Government Information Service. The Clerk of the House and the Clerk of the Senate as well as the Information Systems Specialist of the Parliament, were invited and very graciously attended and were very helpful in our deliberations.

Your Committee reviewed documentation on the precedents set in other Commonwealth Parliaments, where proceedings of Parliament are currently televised. Your Committee also noted the recommendations contained in the Report of the Joint Select Committee of Parliament appointed to consider and report on all aspects relating to the Broadcasting and Televising of the Proceedings of Parliament which was established in 1989.

During our deliberations the following issues formed the basis of much of our discussion. The question of advantages and disadvantages of live broadcast—because if you may recall, the resolution that started this whole process on this occasion did speak about some “discreet broadcasting” and so on. We were mandated to look at live broadcasting and therefore, we looked at the question of advantages and disadvantages. Extensive broadcast of sittings of Parliament would be beneficial to both Members of Parliament and the public. That was one of the early conclusions that we came to. That extensive broadcast of sittings of Parliament would be of benefit to both Members of Parliament who wish to communicate and members of the public who wish to be communicated with on matters dealt

with by the Parliament. We felt that the time had come for live broadcast of parliamentary business. We also came to the conclusion that live broadcast should improve the quality of news reporting on the activities of Parliament and by extension—if we may say so ourselves—the perception of members of the public as to what occurs in Parliament, and maybe I might add, what parliamentarians do.

Editing was another concern of ours and we did have some lively debate on the question on what should be edited and how anything should play a part in this development. Some Parliaments have an in-house production/editing team while others provide for a standing committee on broadcasting with the power to edit speeches for broadcast. That is relevant in the context of part (b) of our work, which looked at preparing some packaged reporting, over and above the live, real time broadcasting. The question on how that would be edited and what would form the content of those debates did engage us for quite some time.

The Committee found merit in the suggestion that a standing committee on broadcasting be established to oversee the development of guidelines with regard to broadcasting and determining what is to be broadcast. One issue that was raised with respect to live broadcast was the question of simultaneous versus delayed broadcasting, and there was a view from some Members that some minimal delay should be instituted in live broadcast to allow for times when the Presiding Officer may wish to intervene. The period of time for that delay—whether it is 30 seconds or two minutes—is to be decided upon. But we felt that, that in itself would not be a live debate from the point of view of the listener on the outside. You are broadcasting live but it is like about a minute delay. So if you need to intervene for whatever reason, you have that little window in a live broadcast.

Our research has shown that with the introduction of live broadcast in other Parliaments, the behaviour of parliamentarians had improved, and maybe that alone should commend that to us. Our guests from the media did indicate to us, it was their word, that absolute live broadcast of Parliament would be more exciting for them as well. We agreed that it would be more exciting for the public, who would get it real, live and direct from the House as matters are dealt with.

With respect to packaged and condensed versions of parliamentary proceedings, the Committee considered that a minimum of two hours per week per House on a designated period should be adequate for the condensed version of weekly broadcast of the sittings of Parliament for that week. We also considered that the

standing committee on broadcasting should determine what is to be the content or the nuances of this packaged broadcasting. Of course, rules and guidelines should be established to govern both the live broadcasting and the packaged programmes. We came to the conclusion that benefits would only accrue to the electronic media since there was not much prospect of Parliament receiving more coverage in the print media, but again that is open for debate. It may be that with a condensed programme, the print media that is not pushed by deadlines in mid-afternoon, may even access that programme to make up their further news.

The question of parliamentary privilege was one of the more interesting discussions that we had. Because as you know, parliamentarians are very jealous regarding this whole question of privilege, because it is the foundation on which the institution is based, that, I believe, we could speak without let or hindrance, while being responsible. We found that in some jurisdictions the provision exists whereby aggrieved members of the public, with the approval of the Presiding Officer, are afforded an opportunity to respond on record. That does not mean respond in person. It means providing to the Speaker a point of view which is different to that which was supposedly, irresponsibly presented in the Parliament, so that that person's position could be known to the public in a similar way as it was presented by the member of the public.

The question of cost, Mr. Speaker. The Committee unanimously and strongly supported the point of view that parliamentary business must be considered a social investment and therefore the cost should be borne by the State.

While our mandate did not specifically direct us to look at the question of the speaking time for Parliament, we did come to the conclusion, having discussed the matter—because in the context of broadcasting being governed by the parameters of time, value for money and quality of what is broadcast and so on—that we should look at the question of how much time is allocated to a speaker in the Parliament *vis-à-vis* this programme of broadcasting live. Most members—in fact the report actually says some Members supported the view and I dare say the majority of Members—supported the view that the reduction of the speaking time to 30 minutes, with a possible extension of 15 minutes, was sufficient time in which to make a meaningful contribution and would facilitate concise broadcasting. So in the context of wanting to broadcast quality presentations concisely, we ventured to deal with the matter of reduction of speaking time.

Mr. Speaker, I must tell you as Chairman of this Committee, I am totally in support of that, and even before this Committee was convened, I advocated that, because I staunchly support the point of view that if you have anything useful to say, 30 minutes is ample time and if you have real useful things to say, on occasions you will be allowed 15 minutes more, and that is my personal view. But the Committee's view is that there is a point of view [*Inaudible*] No, no, as a matter of fact, you may recall that other place, the Senate, in 1987 had reduced its speaking time. I was a Member of that House at the time and I supported that. Our Senate reduced the speaking time from 75 minutes to 30 plus 15 minutes and in fact, the House is lagging behind the Senate in that respect.

In looking at how this would work, we considered that the Standing Orders embodied the rulings, resolutions and practice of the House of Representatives and the Senate over time, and if we are to get into this live broadcast on what we are discussing here, clearly Standing Orders would need to be amended. So the Standing Orders Committee, that body of the House would need to look at what needs to be done to dovetail this. Also, the question of the ownership of parliamentary proceedings. Ownership of audio and video tapes and other materials should remain with the Parliament in the interest of continuity and longevity.

Internet transmission of debates. We assume that if we are going live and we are broadcasting to the country, and in fact we are broadcasting to the world, and in today's world the Internet is an integral part of the communications system, as we say broadcast live, the Internet is on board and an upgrade of IT systems was necessary to facilitate live transmission by Internet.

Responsibility for the broadcast. While we did not identify an agency, because that may have to come later on, and who would be responsible for broadcasting—because in some countries there is a national broadcasting agency or it is the Parliament and so on—we did say that a dedicated channel should be set up solely for the purpose of broadcasting parliamentary affairs. Who will operate that channel, is yet to be determined. But a channel, specifically to broadcast parliamentary proceedings should be considered. Given what is available in the country, a collaborative approach is necessary, initially, between Parliament and the Government Information Service since the Government Information Service has the requisite equipment and experience in broadcasting. We think we could use that experience and what equipment is available and what will become available to them to kick this thing off.

In terms of feedback from the public, the staff of Parliament receives and deals with requests and queries from the public via Webmaster on a daily basis

and we believe that is something good and we can build on that and have the public give feedback to what is broadcast to them from the Parliament, by way of the Parliament staff receiving from the public their comments and their concerns. Therefore the development and expansion of this service would become necessary.

Extensive discussion took place on the issues of parliamentary privilege and legal implications which may originate from abuse thereof. Your Committee is of the view, that notwithstanding these concerns about Parliamentary privilege and possible abuse being broadcast, that this should not be a deterrent to live broadcast, and, therefore, your Committee makes the following specific recommendations to be found in section 7.1 of the published report:

Your Committee recommends:

- (a) that arrangements be made for full debates and the business of both Houses of Parliament to be transmitted live to the public through the electronic media, that is television and radio;
- (b) that an edited/packaged version of the proceedings of both Houses should be provided as a supplementary service;
- (c) that a Standing Committee on Broadcasting be appointed to oversee the establishment of guidelines and other matters relating to live broadcast of proceedings;
- (d) that a dedicated channel be set up solely for the purpose of broadcasting parliamentary affairs. In this respect, a collaborative effort between the Parliament and the Government Information Service is required since that Division has the necessary equipment and expertise for broadcasting;
- (e) that an upgrade of IT systems of the Parliament be undertaken to facilitate live transmission by Internet. The committee agreed that this is an imperative and recommends that this service be made available as soon as possible;
- (f) that as happens in other jurisdictions, in the use of parliamentary privilege, provisions be made whereby aggrieved members of the public, with the approval of the Presiding Officer, be afforded an opportunity to present a written response on record.

The printed text does not have the word “written”, but I recall, Mr. Speaker that was the intention. So to make it abundantly clear, we are not saying that

members of the public could come to Parliament and make an intervention, but they can make an intervention to you, Mr. Speaker, by way of your office and you will determine and examine the situation and you, as Presiding Officer will determine if that should become part of the record or be read into the record by the relevant officer. So the word “written” was probably left out in the text.

Mr. Speaker, your Committee agrees that guidelines be outlined for the broadcast of debates and business of both Houses of Parliament and accordingly recommends some guidelines which are found at the back of this document, which I may just mention for the benefit of completeness. The guidelines are to be found in Appendix III:

“Guidelines Governing Broadcasting”

These guidelines are largely influenced by the guidelines of our sister Parliaments in the UK and elsewhere. Maybe I should say what the basis for the guidelines are, because some people would want to know why we should have guidelines at all, and what we are and who we are. The committee says:

“Because it is necessary to uphold and maintain the dignity of Parliament, the Committee recommends the following guidelines. The guidelines currently in operation are also included.

The proposed standing Committee on Broadcasting may review and amend the guidelines from time to time.”

That is our recommendation. Guidelines with respect to the:

“Use of Recordings or Film Footage:

- (i) Reports of proceedings should be such as to provide a balanced presentation of different views. Equivalent treatment should therefore be given to the leading speaker of each of the parties.
- (ii) Parliamentary reports should give a balanced, fair and accurate account of proceedings with the aim of informing viewers about the work of both Houses.
- (iii) No extracts of Parliamentary proceedings may be used in any form of advertising, promotion or other form of publicity.
- (iv) No extracts of Parliamentary proceedings may be used in any light entertainment programme, in a programme of political satire or for ridicule.

Operation of Cameras:

1. Regard should be given to the dignity of the House and to its function as a working body rather than as a place of entertainment.
2. Coverage should give an accurate account of the proceedings of the House, free of subjective commentary and editing techniques designed to produce entertainment rather than information.
3. Individual Members should be broadcast only when they have been recognised by the Presiding Officer or as a group when voting. Shots such as the following, which are likely to embarrass unsuspecting Members should not be broadcast.”

Mr. Speaker, we did suggest that this be done to protect some of our colleagues, this I am sure does not apply to you. [*Cell phone rings*] Would you like to act, Mr. Speaker? May I go back to that?

Shots of the following would not be permitted: “Members yawning, dozing,” fighting with cell phones—that is to be added—

“unless they happen to be in the frame behind or next to the Member of Parliament who is speaking,”

Shall not be broadcast. Certainly, Mr. Speaker, “disorderly scenes” would not be broadcast and instances where disorderly conduct prevails in the Chamber the broadcasters are required to focus on the Chair and its occupant.

- “4. The standard format for depicting the Member who is speaking should be head and shoulder shots.
5. Roving or reaction shots should be allowed only under the following circumstances:
 - when a Member has sought information which is being supplied by the Member speaking, or
 - when the Member is referred to in the debate.
6. Wide-angled shots of the Chamber may be used from time to time.

7. The camera should concentrate on the Presiding Officer whenever he or she rises.
8. During incidents of disorder or altercations between the Chair and other Members, the camera should be focused on the Presiding Officer until order has been restored.
9. Interruptions from and demonstrations in the public gallery should not be televised, as they do not constitute 'parliamentary proceedings'.
10. Proceedings filmed are to be used only for reports of such proceedings and on no other occasion except with the express permission of the Parliamentary Committee on Broadcasting.
11. Shots designed to show the Presiding Officer receiving advice from the Clerk at the table, or speaking with members who are invited to the Dais, should not be used.
12. The press and public galleries and the area behind the Presiding Officer's Chair not directly related to the proceedings, should not be shown, except where unavoidably, as part of wide-angled shots of the Chamber."

Mr. Speaker, the other guidelines I had mentioned are about the right of reply to a member of the public with respect to privilege and of course, sanctions. Sanctions should be imposed for breaking the rules. These should include restriction and access to the Press Gallery and censure.

Mr. Speaker, that basically is our report. Before I take my seat, I want to mention that the report is signed by all the Members except Sen. Mary King. I have not been told by her that her absence of signature meant an objection, because she did take part fully and agreed with these things, but I think there was some contact problem at the time the report came in. But the report is signed by me, as Chairman, MP Edward Hart, Sen. Christine Kangaloo, Sen. Danny Montano, MP Dr. Roodal Moonilal, Sen. Carol Seepersad-Bachan, Sen. Mustapha Abdul-Hamid, MP Eudine Job-Davis, Sen. Robin Montano, MP Camille Robinson-Regis and MP Ganga Singh.

Mr. Speaker, just to put it in perspective what I have just mentioned about the report. One may recall that as far back as December 1984, this Parliament did raise the issue of broadcasting its proceedings and a committee then met in November 1984 and, interestingly enough, that committee contained two

Members who are still Members of this House, MP for Couva North and MP for Couva South and two former speakers, Mathew Ramcharan and Nizam Mohammed. That committee was so disposed to encouraging the broadcast of parliamentary proceedings—while not live as we are talking about now—that it put in a hasty interim report, so as to facilitate the budget presentation of 1985, and I think—unless I am corrected—that was the first time there was any broadcasting out of the Chamber—1985.

Then the matter went dormant for a while and in 1989, another committee was put in place to look at this same subject and I had the privilege as a Member of the Senate to serve on that committee, along with the then Leader of the Opposition, MP for San Fernando East. That committee was chaired by former Speaker Nizam Mohammed, and an interim report from that committee was submitted in August 1989 and soon after that the television cameras were in Parliament. There was one coming from the committee even though it was only an interim report. But it said that the committee wholeheartedly supported telecasting, televising and broadcasting of proceedings of Parliament and saw it as an indispensable ingredient to the dissemination of information.

2.00 p.m.

So, those committees all incipiently supported what we are adopting here today, Mr. Speaker. If we look at the Commonwealth—I would just crave your indulgence to quote for my colleagues what the Secretary General of the CPA, Mr. Dennis Marshall, had to say on this matter. I quote from the CPA records of a conference that was held to deal with this very subject in a very comprehensive way and I quote from the foreword of the document, it says:

“As a former Member of the first Commonwealth Parliament to air its proceedings on radio, the New Zealand House of Representatives, I am keenly aware that broadcasting parliamentary debates makes an enormous contribution to the strengthening of the Commonwealth’s democratic tradition.”

Those are the words of the Secretary General of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, and he went on to point out that:

“...more than a million Canadians a day tune in to cable television networks to watch House of Commons and parliamentary committee meetings.”

To quote further he said:

“The ability to actually watch and listen as laws and policies are made has today been dramatically extended from the relative handful of people who can sit in the Parliament public galleries to virtually the entire nation through the media of radio, television and now the Internet. People today are therefore better able to assess for themselves the performance of their elected Parliaments and governments, and this enhanced access is growing as more Assemblies open their doors to the electronic media.

Greater involvement is essential for the advancement of the democratic process and for the development of a society which both understands and cherishes the rights that democracy preserves.”

Mr. Speaker, he did also say that:

“Guidelines for electronic coverage should ordinarily be put in place in consultation with broadcasters. Terms of availability should not be discriminatory between different media outlets and access to such feeds should not be used for censorship or sanctioning.”

He further said:

“Parliament should be encouraged to provide live coverage for their proceedings on a dedicated channel and/or online.”

Those were the recommendations of the Secretary General of the CPA as he recommends them to the entire Commonwealth.

What exists today, Mr. Speaker? Some 60 countries throughout the world now allow television cameras and radio microphones to record the proceedings of their legislatures, including the great majority of Commonwealth States. In several of them, such as Australia, the UK, Canada, New Zealand and Samoa, the national broadcaster—that is the National Broadcasting Agency—is required by law to carry daily or weekly reports on their country’s parliamentary proceedings.

Mr. Speaker, here in the Caribbean we have both the Bahamas and Bermuda—Bermuda is not Caribbean, but technically speaking for the purpose of this argument, we can leave Bermuda as Commonwealth Caribbean—but they give extensive time to live coverage of the legislatures. The Broadcasting Corporation of the Bahamas told the conference that when Parliament is sitting, an entire day’s proceedings—that is about seven hours—are shown live on the main terrestrial channel. It must also be carried on the country’s cable TV network

and there is a packaged rebroadcast of two hours a night until all parliamentarians are given coverage—that is about 15 to 20 hours per week with two hours a day dedicated to packaged extracts. The broadcast also goes out on AM radio and the national TV.

In Dominica, the state broadcaster, Dominica Broadcasting Service, covers the House live on AM with regular programmes on FM broadcasting. In St. Vincent and the Grenadines, there is also some live broadcasting of Parliament. In Jamaica their population gets live coverage of what they call “big set piece occasions” on both radio and television.

In South Africa, the South African Broadcasting Corporation dedicates eight hours a week to reporting, “live” from the floor of the National Assembly during parliamentary sessions.

In the UK, persons who want more broadcasting will find a special dedicated parliamentary channel and, that is more than the news summaries that are very frequent on the main British channels; they will find this on a special dedicated parliamentary channel, BBC Parliament and this started in 1992. This provides continuous, unedited coverage of proceedings which is available on satellite, cable or digital terrestrial television. The debates are shown “live” and uninterrupted without commentary, but to help viewers understand and follow the proceedings, there are captions at the bottom of the screen, naming the MP speaking and which party he or she belongs to.

There is a daily review, half an hour long, of the work of Parliament for that particular day, and that is shown as the last thing in the evening and repeated early next day and there is a weekly overview. This is what prevails in Britain where Parliament meets for frequent sessions, on a daily basis, more or less.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to rules and the Commonwealth’s appreciation of the need for rules and what the rules are; the delegates who took part in the CPA workshop on this subject, while they welcomed greater public access to their work, the great majority of Parliaments in the Commonwealth are very conscious of their dignity and are keen to uphold it. That is the finding of that session. To this end they have established a series of rules to control the way the broadcasters operate. These do not vary much between the various countries and our recommendation is just to be guided by what prevails in the Commonwealth.

Under rules drawn up by a House of Commons Select Committee on Televising the House of Commons in the UK, for example, filming in the Chamber is very strictly controlled. There are rules on how cameras can operate

and rules on the use of film footage of parliamentary proceedings, as we recommended in our report to you; and of course, the Commonwealth gathering. We came to the same conclusion and supported the findings of this gathering, that coverage should give an unvarnished account of the proceedings of the House, free of subjective commentary and editing techniques designed to distort what actually happened; and of course we are guided by that.

Mr. Speaker, the history of broadcasting Parliaments to the population as we are now talking, first entered debates in the Houses of Parliament way back in the 1920's, and arising out of that kind of interest in the UK, the New Zealand Parliament in 1926 became the first of our Commonwealth Parliaments to broadcast and since then there has been no turning back in parliamentary democracy in respect to broadcasting. Technology is available now and I should tell Members, that is if they do not already know—that our sessions are available in the Parliament; in the office of the staff; the office of the Speaker and elsewhere. So if one is in one of those offices one can see on the computer screen exactly what is going on in the Parliament, and therefore technology is available to us and is being used now. With a little boosters of the human resource; the financial ability; and the equipment we can take that outside the precincts of Parliament to the country.

Mr. Speaker, I want to close by telling you that this committee operated very proudly; you did engage us to report by June 30, and Members were very cooperative and we did make that deadline. However, we are now meeting to adopt the report. The intension then was that we would have had this adopted and steps taken to begin to broadcast before 2005. We are a little late, but given how far we have come from, Mr. Speaker, I think we are ready and your committee asks the House to adopt this report so we can move hastily towards broadcasting “live” for the benefits as described in the reports.

I want to thank all Members who served on this Committee and, Mr. Speaker, it was a pleasure to have served on this matter. [*Desk thumping*]

Question put and agreed to.

Dr. Roodal Moonilal (Oropouche): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The matter before us involves the issue of broadcasting and televising proceedings of Parliament “live” to our national audience. This is a matter that is certainly not new to the Parliament. This matter has engaged the attention of the Parliament for over two decades now, and several Members, past and present, have found

themselves on different committees discussing this matter and debating pertinent issues since 1984. There is agreement across the board that it is in the public interest to broadcast and televise the proceedings of the Parliament “live,” and it constitutes a public good.

Mr. Speaker, times have also changed since 1984, and there are a range of issues to discuss in the context of this matter which are pertinent and related to broadcasting the business of Parliament, which may not have engaged the attention of Members in 1984 and 1989. It is a very old issue and the Chairman, and Member for Diego Martin West, outlined a bit of the history surrounding attempts to broadcast parliamentary proceedings in particular, in the Commonwealth. An attempt to broadcast the proceedings of Parliament in the United Kingdom was made since 1920, but it has never been driven in the United Kingdom, initially, as much as it was driven in other parts of the Commonwealth, particularly, New Zealand and Australia, where by 1945, in Australia, they embarked upon a policy of broadcasting the parliamentary proceedings.

This issue came to Trinidad and Tobago by 1984, a bit before, and a committee was established. It reared its head again in 1989 when another committee was established and again resolved to broadcast. Then, Mr. Speaker, in 2003 the matter was raised in the other place and a joint committee established and the Minister outlined what took place.

Mr. Speaker, broadcasting the proceedings of Parliament which we are in agreement with, constitutes another important stepping stone towards full transparency, openness as it relates to the business of the Government and the business of the Parliament, and that is why we are in support of this Motion. The issue of broadcasting must be seen in the context of transparency, of openness, of bringing the public closer to the work of the Parliament, and for public understanding and public education. That is why we support and we have always supported, many of us on this side, since 1984.

Mr. Speaker, there is another issue relating to transparency and openness, that issue is that historically the views of the public may not be the views of the public today as it relates to Parliament and parliamentarians and indeed to public officials. There was a time when Members of the national community would be in awe and would have great respect for the dignity of Ministers of Government and parliamentarians. Their words were words expressed—one would not easily question their words and their thoughts on certain matters.

Today, Mr. Speaker, with the advent of globalization and information technology and our access to information to issues, to debates, we question public officials. We cannot accept a government minister explaining any issue without questioning, without debating and that may not have been so—well, certainly not the 1920. In 1984 we were not exposed to the amount of information that we are today, and this is why I want to make the point that the public today is a different public. And while we agree with the report, and we are in agreement with the report, we have signed on, there are certain issues that we need to clear, as well, in the debate and this is a good opportunity to air some of these matters in the Parliament and within the public, because, of course, the proceedings of the Committee would not have been in the public in that sense, with the public invited and in attendance.

Mr. Speaker, persons today in the national community may not have the level of trust in the Government on specific matters and so on, and we have to be cautious when we talk about broadcasting and televising Parliament and we throw into that a lot of warnings; a lot of guidelines; a lot of sanctions and so on. Now, this is the approach for the last 20 years. In fact, when you read the report; the report lays out the recommendations, but when you look at the guidelines, the guidelines have a certain awe about them. They are driven by sanctions and by what not to do. It is really a list of what you should not do, whether you are in the public gallery or the press gallery and, one has to be cautious of this approach. Now, we have recommended that a Committee be established to look into this matter; to guide the matter along, to make recommendations; to oversee the process and so on. We have recommended that.

At this stage we can debate and discuss some of the issues that that Committee may have to confront and we need to be careful when we put all these guidelines. And as the Member for Diego Martin West indicated, we did disagree at the level of the Committee on a couple matters involving whether to have “live” debate or edit out certain matters or something called “delayed transmission”, where you transmit the business of the Parliament but you delay by a few seconds to edit out certain matters and so on. Members felt that this was probably in the best interest because Members may raise an issue, they may speak of persons in the national community in a particular way and you may not want that to go to the population immediately. So, we spoke about delayed, but we were of the view, the general opinion expressed was that we should go live, because this is not new. Whether we have been involved in budget debates or recently the Police Reform Bills, we have gone “live” to the national population, and we did not incur any great

problems with Members speaking in any way to bring members of the national community into disrepute.

The public, I believe, will not trust anything once you call it “delayed” and “edited” and “packaged”. People out there want to know that this is “live” and it is happening “live”. It is a world like that today—live and direct. You can see in the United States, if the police is chasing a felon on the highway they will show that “live” on television and you are actually looking at a “live” chase. You can see those things across the world, whether it is a court case involving prominent sports stars and pop entertainers and so on, you see it “live”. So that in Trinidad and Tobago we cannot give a population that is exposed to that level of information anything delayed. They will not trust “delayed” and “edited”. Certainly, the Member for Oropouche did not support “delayed broadcast”. I support “live” broadcast.

I also support the view that the population should decide on politicians. We are in the marketplace; there is a marketplace and let the market, let the population decide on the speech, the presentation of a politician. Not any particular person whether it be a Leader of Government Business; Chief Whip; Speaker or Committee. Let the marketplace decide. If persons want to stand up and speak and whatever they say, let the population decide and pass judgment and eventually at an election time, they will pass the ultimate decision on politicians and on political parties. But certainly, it is not the role and responsibility of any Member, we are all equal in that sense, to determine what should go to the public and what should not.

Mr. Speaker, we have different views on what is important; what is not important; we sometimes get into conflict on issues of relevancy as well. So that it is not really the responsibility on any one Member to be deciding on what is important. Discrimination is clearly a big issue and important to many of us; it may not be important to other people, but it is important to us. So the “live” telecast we support.

Mr. Speaker, we also support this measure, because many persons in public life have complained, and sometimes with very good reason, as to the reporting, the editing and the perception and presentation made to the national audience. After all, we depend on members in the press gallery to take our message to the national population. We depend on reporters to report. When we speak on Friday or Wednesday or whenever, we are not speaking to the national community, we have at anytime a handful of persons in the public gallery, so we depend on reporters to take our message. There have been numerous complaints by Members

on all sides as to reporting, as to what is reported and what is not. Reporters of course and the media owners and editors would have their own agenda; either driven by political or non-political considerations, by commercial considerations.

A newspaper, for example, would be conscious that they have to sell; they have to market their newspapers and a particular line in a speech, a particular issue would be more marketable to the audience that they think they are selling their newspapers to, and they would decide on headlines and on issues. Politicians do not have much opportunity for that as far as the print media is concerned. Those in government spend millions of dollars with their press statements and press ads and colour photos, trying to undo the damage by reporters and by the media. Those of us on this side do not have that level of resources. We do not have the spin doctors and the millions of dollars that they waste on propaganda and so on, so, we depend on reporting. With the advent of broadcasting and televising our debates, we believe that the population will decide for themselves on major issues of national importance. Do they support the views expressed by Members of this side of the House or by Members in Government? The population will decide.

Now clearly, not every debate the entire country will be interested in; you will not have nationwide interest in every single thing we do—the budget of course—a major event for the year, a major debate; a matter like the police bills; a matter like the anti terrorism bill, and so on, those would engage a wide cross section of the national community. But there are other matters of course, Mr. Speaker, including this for example, that may not really be of interest to a wide audience, but still, you have specific groups within the national community that would be interested. I imagine media practitioners and the publishing houses would be interested in this development as well. So, there is a lot to be gained, I believe, by this measure.

Mr. Speaker, while we support this, I want to go to another point related to this issue, that is the work to broadcast and televise would be driven by a sub committee and requires resources. Whether it is to carry the broadcast “live” on the internet or “live” on television and radio, it requires resources.

The Parliament does not raise money from donations. The Parliament will not receive donations from KFC; Angostura and Carib, it gets money from the Government. The Cabinet will approve the vote and the Government has to provide resources to the Parliament—as the Government provides resources to the Judiciary. So, there is a challenge for the Government of the day, to provide resources for the Parliament to give effect to this Motion. While I was very eager

to sit in this committee and participated fully, I am not optimistic that parliamentary broadcast will be taking place any time in the near future.

Mr. Speaker, the last time we agreed with this Government to pass any measure it was the Occupational Health and Safety Act. On February 22, 2005, Shivam Harrylal was blown to bits and we do not have any health and safety legislation in place. That was the last time we supported them.

Mr. S. Panday: We supported that but nothing else.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Yes, we have the legislation in place, but the institutions are not in place. It is not effected at the level of the workplace where we have to protect persons; no health and safety implemented yet. So we are again supporting the Government to broadcast and televise debates, but I am not optimistic that this will ever see the light of day—that is how it is because this Government has a priority and broadcasting may not be the priority. I am not sure that this Government is really excited to put some of their speakers on the airwaves. I am not sure they would be too thrilled to have Members on the other side in the national community speaking—

Mr. S. Panday: Or reading notes.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Reading notes or being seen, I am not sure about that. So that one has to wait and look on and see whether or not the Government would be interested in providing resources to the Parliament to effect this Motion.

Mr. Speaker, sometime ago the Opposition raised the matter of providing an office for the Leader of the Opposition in Tobago. The Leader of the Opposition is a constitutional office. It is Opposition Leader of Trinidad and Tobago. The Government refused flatly—to provide resources for the Opposition to represent the good people of Tobago. They do not want us there. The Judiciary has been crying out for years now for facilities and so on. Police: just a couple of days ago, policemen spoke about the dilapidated conditions of the police stations; no resources for that. One wonders when we would finally get the resources to give effect to this Motion. This involves purchasing technical equipment; hiring more persons; technical people; it may also involve investing in IT equipment. One is not sure at all of the Government's commitment on that matter, as much as we are eager to sign and support our report which we stand by.

Mr. Speaker, I am not clear about the Government's position on information technology—in the Parliament, for example. A few weeks ago I stood on this very spot and used a palm pilot to speak. Instead of being applauded by the Member for Diego Martin Central, he rose to find out if it was part of the Standing Orders.

[*Interruption*] I am not sure whether the Government has embraced technology. The Government promotes a policy of e-government—incidentally broadcasting Parliament “live” and televising in Australia, is part of their overall e-government programme; to provide facilities for persons to go on the Internet, get forms to apply for services and so on.

Mr. Speaker, this is a country where if you need to get forms to fill out for self-help you need to go to San Fernando or Port of Spain and get the form to fill out—

2.30 p.m.

In another country, serious about Vision 2020, you can go on the computer to download and print a form to fill out for self-help, NIS benefits or pension. The problem is not getting the form; the problem is when you fill out the form, it has to be vetted, monitored and policed. I am questioning the Government’s commitment on taking this matter forward. I am also questioning whether the Government is very serious at all, as it relates to reforms in the Parliament; particularly, the use of technology in the Parliament. There are other Parliaments across the Commonwealth where Members are already using their laptops and that information technology (IT) equipment during debates, to speak.

Mr. Ramnath: You cannot use a laptop here?

Dr. R. Moonilal: No; I do not want to get into it, but I had to cease using my laptop in the Parliament, because it may not be consistent with the Standing Orders established in 1922.

Mr. B. Panday: You cannot use a laptop here?

Mr. Ramnath: Valley, what you have against laptops?

Mr. Valley: Me?

Dr. R. Moonilal: When you seek to use the palm pilot, it is the same problem. Broadcasting Parliament has to do with these issues: providing adequate funding; getting the technical people in place and buying the equipment. We are talking about broadcasting and televising to Trinidad and Tobago, but if the Prime Minister has his way, we may be broadcasting the Parliament live to St. Vincent and Grenada, because that is, of course, his historical project, to get that political union going. We have some doubts about this matter.

Another issue that comes to the fore in this matter of broadcasting of parliamentary proceedings has to do with persons who are not protected by

privilege. The Chairman of the committee, the Member for Diego Martin West, raised that issue—at times, Members may go off on a tangent and call names in a certain negative context—and whether or not persons would have recourse to write to make submissions to the Parliament. This matter is serious, because if we decide that for persons in the national community, if you call their names, particularly where they are holders of public office—but we should separate citizens who are not in the public domain and those who are in the public domain; for example, the chairman of a board of a State enterprise, as opposed to a private citizen.

If you wish to raise a matter involving board members of Petrotrin or Trinmar, the question is whether they should be permitted to come to the Parliament and make submissions to the Speaker to vet to go on public record. That is a matter we have to consider, as opposed to private citizens, because they, themselves, would be involved in public office. While they are not Members of Parliament, they are in public office. Our job is to scrutinize the work of persons in public office who spend public money. We may have a situation where every Monday morning the Speaker's office may receive two or three volumes of letters and supporting documents and people may tell the Speaker, "Go and put these documents and board minutes in the *Hansard* to correct a representation made by Members in the House." One has to be very cautious how one treats that particular issue.

It is clear today that we do not have the level of public confidence that office holders in the past may have enjoyed and any attempt to safeguard and place stringent guidelines will be deemed as suspicious. I will give an example; the matter was also raised before. While we hear a lot about attempts to guide the television cameras as to what you can and cannot see: if persons are on the platform behind the Speaker, you should not focus on them; focus on people at a particular angle shot, on their shoulders and head and so on. While that was fine 25 years ago, the people who are in the public gallery can look at everything. Persons who come to the public gallery, as members of the public, can look at everybody: their foot, their dress, their pants. They can look at your guests who you invite; that is why they are there in the public gallery.

Imagine the paradox of telling the person who will be making the video footage that he cannot focus on persons in the public domain and not to look at the dress of a minister or the particular tie of a minister or not to focus on the Member for San Fernando—well, I do not want to point out the Member for San Fernando East—but do not focus on Members if they are sleeping or yawning.

Members in the public gallery can look at everything; there is clearly a paradox there, because the camera is meant to take the public gallery to the national gallery; that is the purpose of the camera. The purpose of broadcasting is that instead of 10 people in the public gallery benefiting from our deliberations, the entire national population can. Members would learn to conduct themselves.

You cannot tell the cameraman who to show and who not to show; once you are on the stage, the national audience should see you. In fact, Members on the other side may have to reconsider their wardrobe, whether they will come with this tie every week.

Mr. Valley: Yes.

Dr. R. Moonilal: They may want to change to a red tie with a black flower. They will have to consider whether they should continue looking like attendants from Dass Funeral Home.

Mr. Manning: Forty nine years now we are wearing this tie.

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Dr. R. Moonilal: They may want to respond to the time. I am often very scared when I see them, because when you go down to Mosquito Creek, that is how the attendants at Dass Funeral Home look. It relates to a point raised by the Member for Diego Martin West that we also need to get the Parliament in sync with the demands of broadcasting and televising: the look, the talk, et cetera. That led to another very interesting discussion and the Member for Diego Martin West raised the issue, so I also want to raise this matter.

Mr. Speaker, while there are good reasons and there are good explanations to argue that the speaking time of Members should be reduced—and I have heard these arguments—I, for one, am never eager to reduce the rights of anybody. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Ramnath: What about if they criticize your wife on television?

Dr. R. Moonilal: Let me stay away from that, in particular.

I am never one to be too eager to touch the rights of citizens, regardless of what right it might be. At times, when I get fed up with the Member for Diego Martin East, I leave the Chamber—which could be any time he speaks. I am not too hurry to reduce the speaking time of Members. While I concede on arguments raised that we need to package ourselves for the national community, let the national community judge our speech, whether it is for 75 or 10 minutes.

While I understand the need for modernity and efficiency and that a certain level of corporate efficiency comes into government: that you conduct a board meeting and you speak only on a few matters and the most productive board meeting should finish in one hour—that is fine for the corporate world, but not for an institution like the Parliament; where many people today in the national community are saying that we are losing some of the techniques of debating, oration, arguing and engaging each other on issues. We should seek to return to a time when, every now and then, we would get a glimpse of oration and parliamentary debate at its finest, when the eloquent, knowledgeable Member for Couva South blesses us with his presentations.

Mr. Ramnath: There is a right to physically fight in some Parliaments.

Mr. B. Panday: With the mace. [*Laughter*]

Dr. R. Moonilal: When we should be looking to encourage those of our colleagues on both sides of the House—and, certainly, those of our colleagues on the other side, who, sadly, we hear once a year for the budget debate—when we should be encouraging people to speak and develop debating skills and arguing on their points, we are thinking about cutting down the speaking time. I think Members get fed up of other Members speaking and thinking they have nothing to say.

Mr. Valley: Like you are now saying nothing.

Dr. R. Moonilal: I am coming to you in a few minutes; you hold on.

We should reduce the time it takes for Ministers to answer questions; that is the time we should be looking at. One should not be too eager to interfere with the time Members are allowed to speak and, certainly, not on the guise of broadcasting, because the audience out there would have their remote control. If you are speaking and they do not agree and think you are going on, they could switch to Fox Sports or something else; so we should not be too eager to look at that.

Mr. Speaker, another pertinent matter here, that I want to raise, and I am moving by the issues now, concerns monitoring parliamentary broadcast. Who is going to monitor parliamentary broadcasting? We have something of a crisis now taking place in the telecommunications sector, where the Chairman and the Telecommunications Authority are issuing press ads defending themselves against charges that they are acting outside of the law and are taking instructions from Cabinet Ministers. If we broadcast the parliamentary proceedings, I wonder if the

Chairman of Telecommunications Authority may write to the Parliament and seek to bring the Speaker and the Clerk of the House to book for violating any licence agreement.

We are saying in our report that we should dedicate a frequency to broadcast the proceedings of the Parliament; so we will need, of course, to get access to a frequency. They are all taken up now, I think, with the National Carnival Commission (NCC). As you know, the former UNC government, in its vision and wisdom to create a total quality nation, had earmarked Channel 4 to become a station for information and education, for public knowledge creation. That was part of our vision of a total quality nation. Today what do we see? The Government haphazardly closed down the National Broadcasting Network (NBN); sent the workers home; commandeered the station under NCC; entered into a memorandum of understanding between two ministers: the Minister with responsibility for telecom and the Minister with responsibility for culture, and we wake up one morning and they are broadcasting Carnival activities, cultural shows and so on.

Mr. Speaker, they told us that it would be for Carnival; Carnival come and gone and they continue to broadcast. It was the most haphazard arrangement that they put into place. One morning we heard our friend, Ruskin Mark, describing an exquisite cover drive, the next day he was describing an armband, feathers, beads, silk and mas in the Savannah. That was their approach to broadcasting the Carnival activities; lacking the level of organization and professionalism. If you look at Channel 4 now you will see the pan finals from 1988 and Ricki Jai singing from 1992. That reminds me of something. The last time I saw that encouragement to local, indigenous culture and classical expressions of our culture was July 27, 1990. In that short period, when a particular group thought they had control of the State, they started to broadcast classical Indian music. So persons turned on their televisions and when they heard that, they said, "This must be a good thing; look at what they are showing."

Mr. Speaker, they say that the devil plays the best tunes. When you break the law, then you try to appease the population by putting on culture, sports and so on; so NCC Channel 4 will show cricket live; notwithstanding they could be operating illegally; notwithstanding that they are not accounting for what they do. The National Broadcasting Network collected revenue from advertising for Carnival. Where is the accountability for that? Who collected? How much did they collect? Who is accounting for that? Is it the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs, NCC or the Telecommunications

Authority? What is the next plan for Channel 4? The UNC plan was to create the station for education and information. We were about allowing the social actors to promote public education; that is our vision.

I had the opportunity to attend and speak at a conference on industrial relations yesterday. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Valley: You are moonlighting

Dr. R. Moonilal: My speech was delayed by an hour and a half, because the Prime Minister arrived late in the morning.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: They should have cancelled it.

Dr. R. Moonilal: A point was made by our social sector partners that we have labour laws in place; persons have certain rights in the domain of labour and industrial relations. Why are we not using Channel 4 to promote public education, so workers could learn of their rights, whether minimum wage or maternity protection. I think both minimum wage and maternity protection legislation was passed under the visionary government of the UNC. We had to wait for a UNC government to get this legislation. We may have to wait for the next UNC government to implement the health and safety legislation. [*Desk thumping*] The social sector partners are asking, "Why do you not use Channel 4 to educate persons as to their rights?" By now we should have had a package of programmes on Channel 4, TV6 or wherever, educating workers as to their rights under the health and safety legislation. It is not enough to come to the House and pass the Bill. We need to tell workers what are their rights. If they are at a workplace and cranes or heavy equipment are not tested, they can object to working, for example.

Recently, there was another case in Tobago where a driver was using heavy equipment and it capsized and the person was killed. This came after Shivam Harrylal was killed at Industrial Gases Limited, Point Lisas, in an explosion. While all this is happening, we are hearing nothing about the Occupational Safety and Health Act. It is this level of incompetence that we are looking on at, that is why we are not optimistic that this Motion will ever be implemented. Mr. Speaker, when we blame the Government, they say that we do not love Trinidad and Tobago. How many times have the Member for Siparia and the Member for Tabaquite come to this House and outlined the level of incompetence at the Ministry of Education? Finally, the Prime Minister recognized that there was incompetence at that ministry, that all their plans are not being implemented.

Mr. Singh: Burgess!

Dr. R. Moonilal: The Minister of Education's reply to that statement, in the aftermath of the Monday morning retreat—very interesting, retreat on a Monday. To see members of the Cabinet in their dashiki and “watchicong” on Monday, the beginning of the business week; you would think that a retreat would take place on Saturday or Sunday, not bright and early on a Monday.

Mr. B. Panday: When you are on retreat, you have got to move very fast. [Laughter]

Dr. R. Moonilal: I think their entire term is a retreat. They have done nothing.

Mr. Speaker, when the Prime Minister comments on the Ministry of Education, the Minister said, “I do not think that he was referring to me.” Who was the Prime Minister referring to, the tea lady; the janitor in the Ministry of Education not implementing their education policy?

Mr. Ramnath: She will deal with him!

Dr. R. Moonilal: The level of incompetence has now reached a final stage, where they could not blame the UNC or the population and they are starting now to look at each other. I was stunned when the President of the Downtown Merchant Association said that the Government is guilty of the blame game. I asked, “Where did he come from?” Which airport did he arrive at? He has now discovered that the Government is playing a blame game and is passing the buck, when they “shoot” somebody outside “de” jail? This is a country where people are safer in jail. [Desk thumping] [Crosstalk] That “fella” came out the jail and was shot dead; you are safer in jail. If you are in jail stay there.

Mr. Ramnath: That was Rahael's man of business.

Dr. R. Moonilal: So the Archbishop could have been shot on the street walking to White Hall. [Interruption]

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, I thank the Member for Oropouche for giving way. Under normal circumstances, the Cabinet would do a retreat on a Saturday, but we had difficulty finding an appropriate Saturday where Ministers were not engaged and last Saturday was a case in point. In fact, the Minister of Finance, on that day, together with some of the Ministers in the Ministry of Finance and officials, met with the Ministry of Education to go through, in detail, its development programme. We have been having a number of these meetings,

which precluded us holding the retreat on Saturday; hence we had to do it on Monday. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Singh: Time management is bad!

Dr. R. Moonilal: I will not go further with that.

Mr. Ramnath: You cannot attack the Minister of Education on a weekend!

Dr. R. Moonilal: I am speaking about the incompetence of the Government and the final realization by the Prime Minister that he has an incompetent Minister of Education. [*Desk thumping*] The Member for San Fernando East will defend that in due course. Let me get back to the Motion before us.

I am making the point here that the Telecommunications Authority appears in the press to tell the national population, in a release, that it is independent of the Minister and that its latest ad hoc intervention, where it is threatening talk show hosts, radio and television people and a television network, is not being driven by political considerations; it is independent of the Minister. The authority said that it does not take instructions from the Minister. As you know, Mr. Speaker, there are several talk shows and the Government is now receiving an enormous amount of condemnation from nationals throughout the political divide. Whether they are persons calling in from South, Central, North or Tobago, the Government is receiving enormous condemnation for its lack of delivery. The Telecommunications Authority wants to bully the operator and tell us that it is not being driven by the politicians and that it does not take instructions from Government Ministers and operates independently of the Minister.

Interestingly, in their release, at no time they quoted the relevant Telecommunications Act. They are just writing because they have money to spend. In the Telecommunications Act, itself, Part II, section 19, it states:

“Subject to the provisions of this Act or any other written law, the Minister may give written directions to the Authority on matters of general public policy and the Authority shall give effect to that policy.”

So how can the Telecommunications Authority tell us, at taxpayers' expense, that it is not subject to any directions from the Minister? They said that in their press release. The law states that the Minister will give written directions on any matter of general public policy; so if the Minister with responsibility for telecom decides that the Government “getting hit on de talk shows”, that people are calling in and, rightfully, condemning the Ministers for their incompetence and discrimination, the telecom Minister could say, “In the public interest,” general public policy.

Mr. Valley: But it is subject to the Act.

Dr. R. Moonilal: You will deal with it later. The telecom Minister can say, “Cabinet considered and approved a policy that broadcasters should resist condemning Government on its policy,” this is in the law. But they waste taxpayers’ money to deny that they take instructions from the Government of the day. The question raises its head: Will the Telecom Authority also write the Parliament and tell the Parliament we are under guidelines, because we are using a frequency? Do not forget that to broadcast you have to use a frequency band, [Crosstalk] whether it is Channel 4, 16 or 20 in Tobago, and there are regulations guiding that.

It may well be, at the end of the day, that we need to get a new piece of legislation in place, as they did in Dominica, incidentally. In Dominica, a small Caribbean island, they have their own legislation that governs broadcasting. It is called the Parliamentary Proceedings Broadcasting Act of Dominica, 1974, which gives legal authority to the Parliament to broadcast its proceedings and outlines the protection for parliamentary broadcasting, regulations and so on. So this has the force of law as opposed to policy adopted by a particular agency. Given where the Telecommunications Authority is going, we may well have to consider a bill to give effect to this Motion before us.

Mr. Speaker, as I said before, this Government can do what it wants. When they closed down Caroni (1975) Limited, they called it a hard decision; we call it a malicious decision. They had the political will to close down Caroni (1975) Limited and the National Broadcasting Network. They have the political will to spend on the Community-based Environmental Protection and Enhancement Programme (CEPEP), but they do not have the political will to implement the Equal Opportunity Commission. [Crosstalk]

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Dr. R. Moonilal: They do not have the political will to implement legislation as it relates to DNA.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the Member has expired.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and Members.

Those on the other side have the political will to do what they want, whether it is to close down Caroni (1975) Limited, NBN or CEPEP and they have shown political will to broadcast live already. Broadcasting live is, certainly, not new. I think Members would recall 170 delays live broadcast of the commission of enquiry into the airport. It competed at lunch time with *The Young and The Restless*; it was live. So they have the will and have found the resources, when it was convenient to them, to broadcast live. So when they had the judge there and were destroying the lives of innocent citizens and they were carrying out a political propaganda campaign, aimed at the UNC, they found the money—I think it was about \$10 million—to spend on the commission of enquiry into the airport and they broadcasted that live to the national community; that was in their interest.

In fact, the Chairman of that commission had the audacity to adjourn the proceedings when the television crew did not show up for one day. Imagine that; so they have the will. It is left to be seen whether they will have the will to broadcast the proceedings of this Chamber live outside of the budget and to give effect to this Motion. I, for one, will not be inclined to sit on any further parliamentary subcommittee, special committee or joint committee to deal with broadcasting again, because we have already had three or four committees. It is now left to the Government to give expression to this.

Mr. Speaker, there are others on this side who are interested in speaking on this Motion. I want to sum up my contribution by saying that we support the Motion; we see it as very positive, not only for the work of those of us in the Opposition, but also for Members on the other side who believe they are pursuing laudable objectives and creative policy measures to address their departments' work. Without necessarily bringing you into the debate, Mr. Speaker, it will also give the national population an opportunity to see the Parliament at work, to see whether this Parliament is relevant or irrelevant to their needs. They will see whether the Standing Orders and all our procedures are archaic, old-fashioned and anachronistic.

In fact, I recall that during the debate on the Police Bills the national population saw us live and those of us on this side received enormous commendations for our contributions, when we stood on behalf of the citizens against that Government's attempt to take over the police force. I also recall members of the national community praising the Deputy Speaker for how well he handled the proceedings, for his dignity and fairness. Live broadcasting will allow the population to judge us to see whether we are fair, transparent and

pursuing our mandate of representing the people. There is a lot to be gained. Regrettably, I do not have much optimism that this Government will ever release the necessary resources to give effect to this Motion, which I support, and the business of this committee to which I duly signed and supported.

Thank you.

The Minister of Housing (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Mr. Speaker, given the nature of the matter before us, I will refrain from joining some of the contentious issues raised by my colleague and member of the committee for another occasion; there will be lots of time for that. I think the work of the committee is such that we can get by without invitations to some of the issues.

I do not want to speak in my capacity as the Member for Diego Martin West, to join issues like who should have an office in Tobago and so on; we do not have time for that. I simply want to say that the Government with its majority in this House, used that majority and supported the resolution. On the basis of that support, the resolution was accepted and we served as Members on this side as the majority on that committee. In treating with this matter and in preparing this report, one of the first things I did, as Chairman, and I did get the fullest support from my colleagues, I said to them that we are not here as members of political parties; we are here as Members of the House, doing the duty of the House.

Since my colleague has raised the question of the Government's commitment, in the context of some concern that the Government may not be serious, I just want to tell him that our support for the resolution that came to us from the Senate indicated our seriousness on this matter. Our service on the committee indicates that seriousness as well and bringing the report here to have it adopted, signals our intention to do the wishes of the House.

On that score, Mr. Speaker, I beg to move.

Question put and agreed to.

Report adopted.

Mr. B. Panday: What is your next move?

Mr. Imbert: To bring the cameras. [*Laughter*]

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE REPORT

Mr. Gerald Yetming (St. Joseph): Mr. Speaker, I beg to present the following Motion:

Be it resolved that this House adopt the Report of the Public Accounts Committee of the Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

This is first report of the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) of the Eighth Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. Your committee was appointed on November 15, 2002 and the first session ended on September 17, 2003. This report, therefore, covers that period.

The committee which I chaired is made up of the following Members: Mr. Winston Dookeran; Sen. Carolyn Seepersad-Bachan; former Independent Senator, Christopher Thomas, who resigned from the committee on December 31 and was replaced by Sen. Basharat Ali; on the Government side we have Minister Fitzgerald Hinds; Ministers Christine Kangaloo; D. Montano; Satish Ramroop, Diane Seukeran and Eric Williams.

I take the opportunity, at this time, to thank all members of the committee for contributing to the work of the committee. I think that Members of the committee would not object if I singled out Sen. Seepersad-Bachan, former Independent Senator, Christopher Thomas and, subsequent to him, Independent Sen. Dr. Basharat Ali and Hon. Diane Seukeran for their consistent attendance at our meetings, without which we would hardly have had a quorum. I also take this opportunity to thank the parliamentary staff who facilitated the meetings and also provided the secretariat to the committee; members of the Auditor General's Department and the Treasury, Ministry of Finance for contributing to the work of the committee.

The PAC is a creature of the Constitution. The mandate of the PAC, by virtue of section 119(4) of the Constitution, provides:

“The Public Accounts Committee shall consider and report to the House of Representatives on—

- (a) appropriation accounts of moneys expended out of sums granted by Parliament to meet the public expenditure of Trinidad and Tobago;
- (b) such other accounts as may be referred to the Committee by the House of Representatives or as are authorized or required to be considered by the committee under any other enactment; and
- (c) the report of the Auditor General on any such accounts.”

The PAC, therefore, is mandated by the Constitution to consider appropriation accounts and Auditor General's reports, as well as any other report referred to it by the House of Representatives. Therefore, the committee acts on behalf of the entire Parliament.

When reports are referred to the Parliament, we all get copies. I do not know how many of us read the reports submitted to us, but for those of you who do not, we may take comfort in the fact that reports are referred to a committee made up of our peers, mandated constitutionally to review those reports. So if we do not read the reports, at least, we should have the comfort of knowing that there is a committee of us who will look at the reports on our behalf. Then, of course, we are mandated to submit a report to the House on what we do, which is, in fact, this first report that is before us now.

A critical element in the discharge of our responsibilities is the Auditor General. The position of Auditor General is also a creature of the Constitution; an independent body, not accountable to the Executive, appointed by the President after consultation with the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition. I quote section 116(6) of the Constitution which says:

“...the Auditor General shall not be subject to the direction or control or any other person or authority.”

The Auditor General's Department submits their reports to Parliament and I think we can take it that the Auditor General is, therefore, an officer of the Parliament. The PAC is, therefore, the mechanism through which there is collaboration between this office of the Parliament and the Auditor General.

This collaboration between the PAC, representing the Parliament, and the Auditor General, is what facilitates the holding of Government to account for the use of public funds and resources.

In the year of the report that we have before us, the Public Accounts Committee identified a host of problems that we have experienced. The first major problem had to do with the large backlog of accounts referred to the PACs of the past, that had not yet been examined. That list appears in Appendix II of the report. That list was prepared for us by the staff of the Parliament. It identified reports of 104 entities with 840 years of accounts and 16 special reports that had been referred by the Parliament to PACs, that had not been examined by PACs. I should mention that in considering how different Parliaments of the Commonwealth would deal with these reports, there is no consistency. In some

Parliaments, I believe in Australia, it is mandatory for reports referred to PACs to be examined by PACs, regardless of which session of Parliament.

I believe in South Africa, whether by statutory requirement or practice, they must examine all accounts. Faced with 840 years of accounts of 104 entities and some years of accounts dating back to 1981 that had been referred to PACs and not examined, one of the first questions we tried to address was: Was there an obligation, was it mandatory for this Public Accounts Committee of the Eighth Parliament to consider the reports referred by previous Parliaments? I have already referred to the Australian practice, which is a statutory requirement, to the South Africa practice and some other countries of the Commonwealth; they do not do it that way. They treat with the accounts as they see fit and there is no requirement to go back. Until we are guided otherwise, the committee believes that reports referred to a PAC must be examined by that PAC whenever they were appointed. So that would tell you the extent of the backlog of stuff that we have to deal with.

The second problem had to do with delinquent entities that had not submitted their annual accounts to the Auditor General. We identified from a report from the Auditor General which we requested that 33 entities, up to the time of the preparation of this report, had not submitted their accounts to the Auditor General for auditing. Those 33 entities' accounts represented 90 years of accounts; so several of the entities had several years of their accounts not submitted to the Auditor General. Your committee took the decision, in the absence of any other mechanism that we were aware of, to direct the Auditor General's Department to submit a non-submission report to Parliament, which it did. That report was tabled sometime last year. On the basis of that non-submission report, the PAC took the decision to invite all 33 entities to appear before us to tell us why their accounts had not been submitted for the number of years and what were the deadline dates by which their accounts would be submitted. That meeting took place on November 24 of last year.

I would only record a little disappointment in the fact that after that meeting, the Member for Diego Martin East sought to criticize me for chastising entities for their non-submission of accounts. I want to make the point and I think the Member for Diego Martin West explained it today in that other Motion: When we sit as a PAC, we represent the entire Parliament. [*Desk thumping*] There is no question of attacking, abusing or criticizing any entity for their accounts, whether the accounts took place in the year of a particular administration, the accounts predated that or came subsequent to that; that is not the interest of the PAC, as we

have it at the moment. We deal with what is before us; it has nothing to do with under whose administration it took place. If the accounts had not been submitted, the entity was called to account; that is our job.

I want to also make the point that accountability is not simply about waste, corruption, inefficiency and what have you. Accountability is also about encouraging and reinforcing a culture of legal compliance and prudent practices; that is what that meeting on November 17 was also about. I think, hopefully, that arising out of that meeting, all the entities that appeared before us have recognized that this particular Parliament and this particular PAC is extremely serious about ensuring accountability and that if there is a legal requirement that you must submit your accounts, you must do so.

Mr. Imbert: When he was Minister, was he not serious?

Mr. G. Yetming: The third problematic area the PAC encountered was with accounts that had been submitted to the Auditor General and for which the Auditor General had not as yet done its work. Those accounts appear in Appendix III of the report. There were 44 entities with 150 years of accounts sitting in the office, at the time of the report, in the Auditor General's Department, where they have been unable to complete their work to submit their reports to the Parliament. The PAC took the opportunity, as a result of that, to invite the Auditor General to appear before it, which she did on May 14, 2003 and she gave some reasons why her department had been unable to complete, in a timely manner, the work that had been submitted to her.

In section 37 of her report, we provided reasons that the Auditor General provided to us. She said that over 20 positions, many of which were professional positions, had been long vacant and were yet to be filled; long vacant, meaning years. Under 117(5) of the Constitution it says:

“The Auditor General shall be provided with a staff adequate for the efficient discharge of his functions.”

That is in the Constitution; “shall be provided”; clearly, there is a breach of the Constitution if the Auditor General either asks for staff and is not given it or there are vacant positions taking years to be filled. At the time she spoke about 20 positions, many of which were professional positions. That is a justifiable reason, one might quite argue, why for 44 entities, 150 years of accounts could not be completed. In fact, if the other 33 entities that appeared before us, with the 90 years of accounts not yet submitted to the Auditor General, were to meet the submission deadlines they give to us in November, that would have further

compounded the accumulation of work at the Auditor General's Department. That does not include the fact that the Auditor General is being called upon to do special audits, as a result of suspicions of mismanagement in various departments of the Government. We cannot be serious in this country about accountability, if this state of affairs continues to exist.

I would also say that even without further reports being referred to us from the PAC, taking the first point I made about the 104 entities and the 840 years of accounts outstanding, to be done by the PAC, bearing in mind the limited opportunities for the PAC to meet, we would never complete these outstanding things in our lifetime. We had a PAC meeting scheduled for last Wednesday. It had to be cancelled because of a sitting of Parliament. We scheduled a meeting today, but we had to reschedule it because of another sitting of Parliament. We are now examining what other days we could meet. We cannot meet on a Friday because Parliaments sits on that day; on Thursdays the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee (PAEC) meets and we cannot sit on a Tuesday. If I were to suggest that we sit on a morning, we would have difficulty getting Members to agree.

We already have a problem getting a quorum of four out of 10, because the majority of the Members are Government members who have ministerial portfolios. I could understand that; it is not a criticism, it is a constraint that I would expect all of us to collectively address, if we all wish to be serious about this constitutional requirement that we have. We cannot say that we are serious about that constitutional requirement and then not get Members to attend because of pressures at work or we cannot find a date to meet because of conflict. We have to find the solutions.

The other problem we have, apart from the considerable amount of work, and I just touched on the problem of attendance at meetings and the days available for us meet, is the fact that we have no support staff. We depend on a seriously depleted Auditor General's Department to advise us, to help us; we depend on the parliamentary staff to help us, but there are serious limitations there.

The report covers some of the entities we examined, but before I touch on the recommendations which have emerged from your committee, I want to touch on one entity that is of note: the accounts of the Port of Spain City Corporation for the years 1983 to 1998, which we examined. That 16-year period of accounts that we dealt with, in all cases, were the accounts qualified by the Auditor General. The main reason for which is the fact that in 1984 somebody levied on the corporation and they dumped all the records on the floor, as a result of which,

there was considerable difficulty reconstructing records and what have you. That problem of the levying took place in 1984, but the accounts from 1983 to 1998, 14 years after the levy and 14 years after the old records fell on the ground, the accounts were qualified by the Auditor General.

The other reason advanced was the shortage of qualified staff, due to uncompetitive compensation. In almost every entity that we have seen, from then till now, the shortage of qualified staff has been advanced for the poor state of accounts, for the delinquency in reporting or for their inability to do the corrective work that the Auditor General may recommend—inadequate staff, poor compensation. Clearly, if that is affecting a lot of the entities of the Government, something needs to be done in order to attract and retain staff. As it happens, in the case of the Port of Spain City Corporation, with 16 years of qualified accounts, part of the reason advanced was the shortage of staff; that, of course, would lead to the accumulation of accounts to the Auditor General. So by the time the Auditor General gets around to doing the accounts, many years have elapsed. Therefore, the errors and weaknesses just repeat themselves through the years; whereas if there had been timely submission of accounts, timely audit by the Auditor General and timely review by the Public Accounts Committee, then we would not have that kind of carry-over year after year of the same abuse, really, to the point where, in this particularly glaring case, you have qualified accounts for 16 years.

3.30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I want to take a few minutes to go through the recommendations which the committee wishes to submit to Parliament.

1. Mechanisms should be put in place to compel delinquent entities to submit their financial reports on time and in accordance with statutory requirements.

We have taken the steps of directing the Auditor General to provide Parliament with the non-submission reports and then we can act. In fact, at that meeting, whereas normally, the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) will meet in private for that particular meeting, the committee agreed by resolution to have it in public so the public can become aware of the entities and the years of non-submission of accounts.

If you wish to not just alert the public to the fact that these entities are not submitting, but also to have the entities account to the PAC publicly for their

promises on submission of accounts, it should not be left to simply public shame or embarrassment, there must be other mechanisms put in place to ensure that this legal requirement is met.

2. Increased and enhanced staffing for the Auditor General's Department is an absolute necessity to enable it to carry out its mandate in a timely fashion.

It is unacceptable for a department like the Auditor General's Department not to have the required number of professional staff to do its work. We are not only concerned about the number of positions to be filled, but we also have to be concerned about the Auditor General making requests for increased staffing in light of the increased demand being called on that department to have its complement appropriately set.

3. Parliament's support staff including dedicated professional support staff should be made available to the Public Accounts Committee.

I think the time has come when the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) and the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee (PA(E)C), because of the volume of work that is being referred to them by Parliament, should be provided with its own staff, and if we wish to complete the work referred to us, it would clearly be facilitated considerably by that professional staff.

4. The Chairman and Members of the committee should be remunerated for attendance at meetings. We have been called before the Salaries Review Commission and we would expect that they will soon report.

It is unfair for Members of the committee who are professionals in their own right, or maybe Backbenchers as was the case of the Member for Laventille East/Morvant at one time when he served on the committee, to have to come to meetings and give up private professional time.

Mr. Ramnath: They say the Prime Minister blocking them. That is what your Members say [*Inaudible*]

Mr. G. Yetming: The Auditor General should be mandated to report to Parliament annually on bodies that—[*Interruption*] fail to submit reports on time in accordance with the Exchequer and Audit Act which we have encouraged.

Mr. Ramnath: "I resigning from all dem committees."

Mr. G. Yetming: This is really an internal recommendation, but all efforts should be made by the Public Accounts Committee to at least consider the reports referred to it during its current term.

We are trying to do that, but we are not going to succeed unless we can get concurrence of all the Members to meet when we can and not until we get the professional staff to do it.

We are also recommending that all examinations be conducted in public, not just by resolution of the committee, but that should be a requirement which should be done in public, if only to enable public awareness.

Mr. Speaker, we have a host of other recommendations which are covered in the report, but I do not think it is necessary to go through them individually here, except that I wish to—in requesting the adoption of this report—ask that the Parliament follow through on the implementation of the recommendations we have made.

There is now greater public sensitivity and a heightened expectation of transparency and accountability and this Parliament must demonstrate that it is serious about facilitating the work of its key committees, and in particular, the Public Accounts Committee.

I beg to move.

Seconded by Ms. Diane Seukeran.

Question proposed.

The Minister in the Ministry of Trade and Industry (Hon. Diane Seukeran): Mr. Speaker, I have had the pleasure of sitting with the hon. Member for St. Joseph in a committee. That was an eye-opener, and I particularly compliment him on the very bipartisan approach that he had taken throughout every sitting of the session of the PAC. That is unusual in a bicameral legislature in an environment of the Westminster system that creates antagonism in a two-party House. I think that he ought to be complimented for going above and beyond, and for seeing the PAC for what it is in the very first instance.

Sir, I commend every recommendation that has been made to the House because of the very essential nature of what you need. When you consider how—and I have not done this before in terms of supporting something like this, you wonder how to approach this matter. For instance, I listened to the Member for

Oropouche who used the opportunity—as the Member for Couva North would say—to use lies, half lies, half truths, and innuendoes to talk of so many things that have no merit, and caused to go out into the public domain what he feeds upon—

Mr. Ramnath: You all leak things to the public domain.

Hon. D. Seukeran:—what is wrong. It divides the society and so I determined that, given the leadership of the Chair particularly, one could not do that, and particularly given the merit of the entire recommendations, one certainly could not do that.

Having examined this dry document, and it is a dry document because when you sit at the PAC and you hear the Auditor General's Department—that crucially important institution and its shortages listed here—and when you look at the appendices, exactly what the hon. Member for St. Joseph has gone through, the weight and volume of reports of audit year after audit year that have been qualified or not done one sees that no real scrutiny was applied, so that we do not recall know how many years of public funds have been spent by successive governments by successive personnel, with different persons coming in and out. Therefore, the report points to a systemic breakdown in the institutions under which we operate, those that are charged with the safeguarding of public money—[*Interruption*]

Then when you look at Issue 4 of *The Parliamentarian* and you read for instance, Mr. Seaga's complaints—a litany of woes—and his suggestions contained in here, you then ask yourself if that is the way to go if you are acknowledging the problems. Or you read, for instance, *The Overseers Public Accounts Committees and Public Spending*. I recommend it highly to every Member of the House. Having read it, and having heard its own litany of woes, having seen the loopholes and gaps that appear in the institutions creating the environment for what has happened in our country, then you can only approach the entire question not simply saying yes we support the thing, but by going into the details of why we need to look at the PAC as seriously as we need to in the country that is called Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, you look at the recommendations and you say to yourself, they are not new. You look at the problems facing the Auditor General's Department, the PAC, and every body who came before us and you say, those problems are not new. And, it is acknowledged that none of these things happened overnight. What you are listening to, according to the Chair, and what is in the report—and you are talking from 1981 and beyond.

Mr. Ramnath: You all were in office all that time and did nothing.

Hon. D. Seukeran: Mr. Speaker, we come to the same nonsense of division instead of looking at the issues seriously. I intend to look at them seriously. We are a responsible Government and we do not intend to be detracted in this instance. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, you recognize there was a time when the regulatory framework was sufficient; and that was a time when the pace of life was slower, when the world was smaller, when the country was more insular; when the quality of man and the character of the citizen was such that that regulatory environment would be sufficient. But that time has changed. It has changed drastically. Man is different. He is made so by the quicker pace of life, that demand more of him, the greater pressures placed upon systems and institutions, on the human resource base that powers these institutions. All these things are obvious in the report.

Mr. Ramnath: Pay the MPs for the work they are doing. Stupid talk!

Hon. D. Seukeran: Mr. Speaker, it happens that every five years Members of Parliament, whether it is this side or that side, and particularly a government's performance can be reviewed by the population. And it is, that very often you see Members of Parliament and governments come and go over the silliest of things.

So often you see governments create institutions and place persons in them, persons whom they subsequently find they have no control over, and I believe it is that—and the Members opposite should agree with me totally—kind of thing that brings down government after government, Member of Parliament after Member of Parliament. These are the issues that face you in the PAC. Those are the issues that we as politicians face; they are the issues that the country faces.

Mr. Speaker, when you look at that bureaucracy in those institutions, that human resource base that is the public service—a public service that is designed to protect civil society from the abuse of executive power—you see that bulwark of the people's welfare is no longer functioning effectively, it is creating the environment in what I just described happens. So that the Executive no longer has power to control what is going on and cannot deliver the goods and services that are required of good governance.

The environment exists in which everything that is corrupt can happen. You look at that and know the politicians are taking the licks for all of this. It is the politicians' heads that roll. Who then stands between the politician, the Executive, the Member of Parliament, the person sitting on this side of the House,

and what is going on outside? And you recognize more and more that it is the institution that is this PAC which is the protector of the government of the day and also the people of the country.

Mr. Ramnath: What are you talking about?

Hon. D. Seukeran: You recognize that the bureaucracy is what is actually in charge, you know. It is not the politician, it is not the Member of Parliament, it is not the Minister of Government—was the Minister of yesterday or today who handles the public's purse physically—who spends the people's money. It is not the Government, or the Member of Parliament, or the politician, or the Minister who actually delivers the service—whether it is good policing, a functional public service committee that appoints the human resource base that is required. *[Interruption]*

Mr. B. Panday: *[Inaudible]*

Mr. Ramnath: Your Prime Minister does not want that system.

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Hon. D. Seukeran: None of these things are handled by the politicians; they are handled by a public service—

Mr. Ramnath: You come here talking stupidity.

Dr. Moonilal: Give her some work to do; she has no work to do.

Mr. Speaker: Order please!

Hon. D. Seukeran: —that can no longer be controlled.

Mr. Speaker, I particularly wanted to urge this House, including the hon. Member for Couva South—who is sitting in the seat of the Member for San Juan/Barataria and behaving somewhat erratically, but that is normal—to support what is before this House, because both sides of the PAC are in agreement with what is in it.

Mr. Ramnath: Pay MPs their proper money and provide them with services.

Hon. D. Seukeran: I submit that there are very sound reasons why the recommendations as put forward in the report have been made and must be empowered. I gave you the assurance that the government will do everything that it can.

In listening to the Member for St. Joseph talking about it, you understand too that even while we talk about empowering the PAC, we must look at the functioning of the committees, the institutions designed to protect the people and

the Parliament, the institutions of the PA(E)C and the others—there are five committees of the House. You wonder what to do in a small Parliament like this, numerically that is, and given the time constraints that were just described. The thought occurred to me that perhaps we ought to be looking at how we streamline the functioning of the committees.

How in God's name can we find the time to do all the things necessary unless we restructure the work of the committees? Perhaps that is another consideration that we as the PAC may want to consider and bring the recommendations to this House, Member for St. Joseph. I believe that the paucity of numbers, the lack of quorum, the time constraints, all these things are faced by every committee of the House, therefore, in the interest of good governance we must now come together to look at how we streamline and structure these committees to render the service to the population and the House that they must do. That was something that occurred to me as you were speaking just now and on which the Leader of Government Business and I have already had a conversation and we will be looking at this. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker, the importance of the PAC cannot be overstated. It is the only believable mechanism that can engender confidence in the political system because it is instituted by Parliament, and because it has no partisan loyalties, or should not. An effective one should not. This is the institution that works in a symbiotic relationship with the Auditor General's Department, and that too, Sir, is the other important institution. I think these two institutions; the Auditor General's Department and the PAC are the only real bulwark of the issues of good governance in Trinidad and Tobago in our Constitution.

Mr. Ramnath: You think anybody listening to you, they kidnapped a dog today. [*Laughter*]

Hon. D. Seukeran: Mr. Speaker, perhaps the Member for Couva South might be so blessed and we might be so blessed by his removal but—

Mr. Ramnath: They stole a dog and kidnapped the vet.

Hon. D. Seukeran: Mr. Speaker, why is the PAC so important today? We must consider that apart from governments finding themselves in law courts as often as we do because of the bungling ineptitude of a bureaucracy gone mad, causing politicians to find themselves so often in law courts, put their by the very people we appointed to help us to deliver services, finding the mechanism around that bureaucracy also lands us in trouble. Then you understand the value of this PAC and you understand that we must stay within the system. [*Interruption*]

I want to point out that the world has changed, not only in terms of the pace of life and the quality of man, but in the very way we function. There is greater interdependency of nations. There is the movement of people, the global liberalized world, an environment in which we operate and all of which is empowered by a technology of the speed of light. We operate in an informed environment, our population is informed, and the world has become borderless. No longer can we be insular.

Mr. Ramnath: How enlightening.

Hon. D. Seukeran: And we cannot be insular in trade, in human resource, or in any of these things because we live in a competitive environment. Most of all in this competitive environment is the need, in an interdependent world, more and more to have the competitive edge to attract capital into the country.

This is a serious problem facing most of the developing world because more and more as the world has changed, so too have the criteria for lending changed. It does not look at the project but at the credit worthiness of a country and that is judged by the quality of the institutions that ensures what is termed good governance, all the issues of good governance, and the mechanisms that ensure its delivery. That is what powers trade and development, that is how, as a country, we can achieve the vision 2020 and the status of developed nation which is an enhanced quality of life for every citizen in our country. It is through that ability to attract investment, to be able to borrow—

Mr. Ramnath: “All yuh give her a little clap nah man.”

Hon. D. Seukeran:—whether it is for budgetary concerns, adjustment purposes or investments to go downstream. They all hinge upon our reputation and credit worthiness and when you look at what was happening in the PAC at the institutions—

Mr. Ramnath: Nobody is listening to you.

Hon. D. Seukeran:—the people who actually deliver the services and handle the people's money, then you understand that we are in serious problems and more and more you see the need for an effective PAC—

Mr. Ramnath: Your colleagues are not listening to you.

Hon. D. Seukeran:—and a truly independent, well-tooled and fully equipped Auditor General's Department that can say to the rest of the world that it is an independent institution which has the confidence of the people of the country and

can assure you that the institutions of governance within Trinidad and Tobago are in good hands... [*Interruption*] regardless of who is sitting on this side even if it meant the Member for Couva South.

Mr. Speaker, that is a particularly important reason for us to be looking at the Public Accounts Committee because it is one of two that are well constituted. Only the Public Accounts Committee and the Auditor General have that synergy, that interactivity, that independence enshrined—

Mr. Ramnath: Ask Kayoum Mohammed.

Hon. D. Seukeran:—and mandated to be the protector of the public purse. None of the others has that say, so the other committees may or may not have the benefit of the services of the Auditor General's Department. This is why I come back again to the critical essential nature and being of why we must accept—we do accept these recommendations and will work with them. But I want every Member of the House to look at them very seriously, because it is a serious issue.

Too often are we lost in the morass that divides us, too often do we play to the camera, too often is the society split down the line by innuendo after innuendo, half truths after half truths and all the while out there is a population askew, askance, at risk—

Mr. Ramnath: You preaching a sermon here. You think it is a church?

Hon. D. Seukeran: Mr. Speaker, I will not be detracted by the Member for Couva South who actually does need a bush bath. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Ramnath: Not by you.

Hon. D. Seukeran: Even I may be better than another.

Mr. Speaker, in the face of that global competition—

Mr. Ramnath: I prefer younger clients, you pass the age.

Hon. D. Seukeran:—if you recognize the challenges that face the Government of the day, you understand the whole portfolio of lending and that whole financial market, that the transfer of money into our country is dependent on trust and confidence in the fiduciary framework of the country then, you will recognize that the country has to have confidence in itself.

Mr. Speaker, in fact, let us look at the institution, at what other mechanisms the Minister of Finance has—[*Interruption*] What other can you really point out?

If I, in the Government, say that I am credit worthy, I practise good governance and I am as clean as an angel, who believes me?

Mr. Ramnath: Nobody.

Hon. D. Seukeran: Nobody believes me. In today's day and age no politician has any respect. The population out there is very fond of saying that is the quick path to ready money. That is the image. It is a cynical image. Again, you come back to what is between the politician and that image and it is this. How do you convince the population out there that I am not corrupt, or the Member for Couva South is not corrupt? It would be impossible. His side would believe him; my side might believe me, but will they both believe me? Will a creditor, a lender, or a banker believe either of us? No, no. So again you come back to the value of the institutions of the PAC and Auditor General.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Not about Couva South.

Mr. Ramnath: I am wealthy.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: I know.

Hon. D. Seukeran: Mr. Speaker, you add to the problems when you look at "How Governments Function", and at the quote within this report. I compliment the Chair, he was quoting James Madison who said:

"In framing a government which is to be administered by men over men,
the great difficulty lies in this:
you must first enable the government to control the governed;
and then oblige it to control itself."

Mr. Speaker, when you speak of the public service, when you speak of every institution that delivers service, when you speak of the Members of this House, you talk about government. It is not the politician, it is all the institutions. That is the challenge, Mr. Speaker. As you look today again in the newspapers, what is the politician facing? What are you, who are supposed to ensure delivery of service, facing?

I want us to look at page 7 of the *Daily Express* and you will see that in San Fernando, the pharmacies have been closed for two days; sick people are being sent home without any medicines because Filipino pharmacists are coming to Trinidad and Tobago. Why are they coming, not to deliver service? In the *Newsday*, you see that the doctors are ready to strike again and every time they

do, what happens to the population? Then you examine the accounts of the Regional Health Authorities that manage health. It is not just a question of the dollars and cents. As the Member for St. Joseph was saying, accountability and good governance are not only the dollars and cents issues, but the systems and processes that are wrong in all these institutions that create an inability of the institution or the government to deliver to the people—*[Interruption]*—and at the same time create an environment in which there are so many opportunities for inefficiency, if not corrupt practices.

So you look at these things and you know to yourself that these are all challenges facing both the government in terms of the delivery of service, and the people.

4.00 p.m.

I made the point that it is not the Government Ministers that actually handle the dollars. With pen and paper, the Minister of Finance will transfer to the Ministry of Health, “Y” dollars for the purpose of doing “X”—all with pen and paper, or as the Member for Oropouche would say, with a computerized tap of the button it is done. At no point in time is he in physical control of these dollars. There is a public sector that is supposed—a bureaucracy—to help you. What has happened? As government grew, as the country grew—

Hon. Member: And they are supposed to be independent and impartial too?

Hon. D. Seukeran: I am sorry the Member for Caroni East has interrupted me, because he could best understand what I am saying here, and why governments go that way in order to deliver and then find themselves in problems.

As you do that, you recognize the bureaucracy that exists is far from delivering service to the people, of ensuring efficiency of spending; ensuring timely delivery of service. What happens is, as governments grew, the bureaucracy that has to service the government and the people also grew, and as it grew, controls were lost. So when you look at that and you look at the opaqueness, the almost death-like quality of the steely face of what has become the most unwieldy bureaucracy—the public service—and you recognize it when you sit in the PAC and you see all the holes. In today’s day and age, the CEO of Northwest, or the chairman, cannot answer the questions of what happened before he had come; papers are conveniently lost; systems of accountability are simply not there. All you see is this steely face before you as a Government, as a citizen, as an Opposition, you understand that it is in that, that the opportunity to defeat good government happens; that an anonymity that was once to the benefit of the

people in having the public service there, is lost. That anonymity now allows the lack of effective governance; people not doing their jobs. People do not see corruption as people not doing their jobs. Again, the Member for St. Joseph was trying to explain what corruption is. It is just a man not doing his job.

I am a public officer charged with giving the people who come to the hospital the drugs that they need. I do not do the job. It is a corrupt practice. We have to begin to widen the definition of what is corrupt and what is not corrupt. If we do that, we understand that all of these things impact upon our credit worthiness in the final analysis, apart from stifling the public outside there, denying them. No matter how much money you, as a government, transfer to sector after sector, it does not reach the population in active support of the measures that it is intended to deliver.

When you deal with that bureaucracy and you see that individual responsibility can be abandoned; that you can escape that responsibility, then you understand the import of the PAC. You must understand that no Minister, whether it was the Member for Couva North yesterday or the Member for San Fernando East today, who was Minister of Finance, no Minister himself—no one person—can actively oversee all that is encompassed in the art and in the business of governance. But what a government does see is the direct link between accountability and sustainable national development, and every government finds itself faced with public institutions failing to deliver service to our people. What you recognize is that there is no performance orientation—absolutely none at all. It is hard to find, and even when you do find it, there is a difficulty in even measuring output.

All these things are the challenges that you face. Remember that I am not attacking the public service. What I am pointing out is that, it is not the Members of Government, that is, the Ministers who deliversence; it is the public service that is intended to do that, to be the buffer between the people and the abuse of Executive; it is the public service that is intended to deliver the services and goods to the people. That is the only reason I am speaking about the public service in the manner that I am doing. What happens is that the public sector operates in an opaque, obtuse, cloudy world without any direct pressure to account; or who should account; or when they should account. Exactly what the report states, they refuse to account.

Then you have the problem of both the Auditor General and the Public Accounts Committee being limited in their ability to enforce it. Certainly the Ministers cannot do it. No matter what the population says—and they say that the

voice of the people is the voice of God—even they cannot force the issue of performance from the public service, or examine the width of that public service and every good that it is supposed to deliver. You look at the problem then that every government, no matter whether it is that side or this side, faces, and understand that this small developing island simply cannot afford this anymore.

Why should we be putting up with it as a country—you see the risks outside there; you see what is happening in your own country; you look at the rate of crime; the lack of implementation of law. The Minister does not implement the law!

Mr. Ramnath: What happen to the rate of crime?

Hon. D. Seukeran: Mr. Speaker, none of us can afford that. We are facing greater challenges outside there and, therefore, we come to the point of acknowledging that that whole attitude, culture, that is in the public service, thwarts the very legitimate ambition and aspiration of every citizen to upward mobility. That is what every man seeks: the right to grow, the right to have employment, the right to earn a living, same as the Member for Couva South so often boasts. All of these things are the rights of every citizen, and yet that very institution that is supposed to safeguard that, is thwarting those aspirations. That is what the politician faces.

They say that bureaucracy, over-centralization of decision-making and poverty are the most serious causes of corruption. And like terrorism, wherever corruption exists, it must be rooted out; it must be exterminated, if necessary, to use their language, because any kind of corruption is the very polar antithesis of good governance and the good governance issues are the most important ones.

More than that, corruption, they say, operates in a cultural and social environment of its own. When we look at our country today, when we look at the quality of parliamentarians, when we look at the quality of the services delivered and the people who render those services, when we look at the levels of crime, we have to ask ourselves: What kind of a culture nurtured this?

Mr. Ramnath: PNM culture.

Hon. D. Seukeran: What kind of culture do we operate in? Then you look at the blank faces of an unmoving, non-responsive public service, that will not move—refuses to move—and our own inability, whether on that side yesterday or on this side today, to move on these issues.

Mr. Ramnath: We have public servants in here, you know.

Hon. D. Seukeran: You ask yourself: Is it that we have a social environment that breeds this kind of thing? Because, you know, Mr. Speaker, I find that difficult. I do not believe I have that culture. I know that the Member for Couva South does not have that culture, really, as disruptive as he is. He has great work ethic. It is just when he gets to this House that something happens. Perhaps it is the television camera. Perhaps it is exactly what the Member for Oropouche was advocating: the right to “ramajay; get on and mash up de place”, regardless of the consequences. But you can afford to do that in Opposition.

Mr. Speaker, I want to commend you for stating that we ought to limit the speaking time of every Member of this House so as to force good government practice from both sides of the House.

Mr. Ramnath: That is why you should sit down!

Hon. D. Seukeran: I will, very shortly. There is a danger that the culture of corruption will overwhelm respect for all our democratic institutions, including this Parliament, that we should respect as the bulwark; the safeguard between us and anarchy.

You ask the question: Should we continue to tolerate this lack of accountability, whether it is of performance—

Mr. Ramnath: “She in Government or in Opposition?”

Hon. D. Seukeran: I am supporting the Member for St. Joseph and this report, 100 per cent. Might I inform the Member for Oropouche, that is what responsible government is about; that is what responsible membership to this House, whether on that side or this side, is about—putting your country first.

There is a corrupt practice too often in this House, and particularly from that side, of Members failing to see the issue of the needs of the population and putting very narrow partisan interest first, to the detriment of the safety of people. That is a very corrupt practice and one that we must stop. I want to commend the Member for St. Joseph again, as the Chairman of the PAC, for his very laudable handling of the entire issue today. [*Desk thumping*]

Not only have I risen to say that we commend the recommendations, and I was delighted to be a Member of the group that brought these recommendations— as a Government, I have the assurance of the Leader of Government Business already that we will be accepting fully and trying to implement these recommendations as quickly as we can, because this is a critical component of the

financial reform that this Government seeks to bring to the House, therefore I believe that it will happen—but to point out very clearly, I hope, to the public out there, to the Members opposite who seem to have forgotten what happened to them yesterday, whose memories are fleeting, perhaps it is amnesia they suffer—a momentary, wilful, deliberate; timely amnesia is what besets them—to say that it is crucial that we, as a country, recognize where the problem lies, in the first instance—

Mr. Ramnath: You have made tedious repetition. You are repeating the same thing over and over again.

Hon. D. Seukeran: Without Members, such as the Member for Couva South, that kind of behaviour—negative; behaviour that is abrasive. I do not expect the Member to respect me, but I certainly do not expect him to disrespect me either—in what happens in all the institutions charged to protect the people by delivering, efficiently, the use of public funds and delivering service in an effective and efficient manner to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. I want, particularly, to say to the Members opposite, that if they aspire to this side of the House tomorrow, perhaps it would be well for each one of them to emulate the behaviour of true leadership, of true nationhood, as displayed by the Member for St. Joseph. I commend the report to you.

Thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Gerard Yetming (*St. Joseph*): Mr. Speaker, we are heartened by the assurances given by the Government side with respect to the recommendations.

I beg to move.

Question put and agreed to.

Report adopted.

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that this House be now adjourned to Friday, March 04, 2005, at 1.30 p.m.

On that day, I wish to inform my colleagues opposite that the Government plans to debate Motion No. 2 on today's Order Paper, as well as Bills Nos. 1 and 2, for second reading.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 4.15 p.m.